Interview with Lilian Swann Saarinen
Conducted by Robert Brown
In Cambridge, Massachusettes
February 2, 1981, February 15, 1979 and November 13, 1980

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Lilian Saarinen on February 15, 1979, Fenruary 2, 1981, and November 13, 1980. The interview took place in Cambridge, MA, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[Note: This interview was conducted in 1975, 1976, 1979, 1980, and 1981. The 1975-76 portions were lost. In 1981, Robert Brown reinterviewed Lilian Saarinen about the early part of her life in an attempt to recreate the earlier interview sessions. The 1981 session therefore has been transcribed first so that the discussion will be in chronological order.]

FEBRUARY 2, 1981
Tape 1, side A

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Lilian Saarinen in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This is Robert Brown the interviewer, February 2, 1981. Today we're going back to your earliest--. In fact, I'd like you, if you would, to perhaps discuss a bit your childhood. You were from a New York family. Were you raised in New York?

LILIAN SAARINEN: Yes. In the winter we were in New York and, because my father was a doctor and he was practicing in New York in our bathroom. We had a red stone house and he took that and made an office out of the bathroom. They were nice tile floors, and my mother was a society girl, but very interested in all kinds of things, and we weren't all that wealthy. But she belonged to Heywood Broun's circle and to all sorts of reading things that--with very interesting friends like Dorothy Elmhurst who was Dorothy Whitney, and they were--I was always having fun through my mother's friends because they were all so wealthy and they had roofs we could go on and we could play together.

MR. BROWN: You were with them quite a bit as a small child?

MS. SAARINEN: No, my father died when I was two.

MR. BROWN: Yes, but you were with your mother's friends?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, my mother used to be invited everywhere because she was so charming, and she was all alone and of course she had to then to bring us along. She just had to do it and we loved it.

MR. BROWN: Your memories of your father are necessarily very few, I guess. He died when you were only two.

MS. SAARINEN: My only memory of that is--. Yes, that was the dangerous thing. It's the worst thing, I suppose, that's ever happened to me while I was young. I mean, way back. And I can understand it now. But all of a sudden, my attentive mother and father, as they could be, suddenly my father wasn't there and my mother was always dressed in black whenever I saw her. And then she was gone several days, and that's after he died. And then she was gone a month to California because kind friends and relatives wanted her to have some happiness and some healthy exercise to forget all that had happened. So we were left behind with somebody. I don't know who, but I guess it was the nurse we had all the rest of--up until we were teenagers.

MR. BROWN: Was this nurse a good person?

MS. SAARINEN: She was an English person. She was quite ignorant, but she was very kindly. She was very permissive, if anything over-permissive, but I think that was better than if she'd been strict.

MR. BROWN: But that was a horrifying time for you, was it, when your mother went away?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, it was. And my mother had many beaus, boyfriends. She was very, very ladylike about everything, but I was quite aware of everything that was going on. And she used to give parties. It got to be prohibition days when we were teenagers in that same house. We used to watch the dumbwaiter--. I mean, fill up martinis and put them on the dumbwaiter for her parties upstairs, which were very genteel but nevertheless they were for--there were well-known men there, friends of my mother's and women and they had their martinis and then talked about literature. So we had quite an interesting time about that, but when we tasted the martinis we threw it down in disgust and said we would never do it again, you see. Tasted so awful. Then my mother finally gave up drinking anything. She never drank to speak of. And then she became--she was for prohibition in the typical oh, how do you call it? free, white, and twenty-one way.
She was a staunch Republican. And while Eleanor Roosevelt was against prohibition, because she felt that to deny somebody what they wanted was just a come-on to do it. So Eleanor Roosevelt was much more sensible in being against being for prohibition but my mother was this goody-good. She insisted on bowing in a pious way to prohibition. Yet she drank and she gave her friends drinks.

MR. BROWN: Was she a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt or some of these--.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, very good friend. They both belonged to the same book club. And my mother was always very affectionate and tender about my love and interest in animals and in drawing. So she took us, for instance, one summer to out West where I fell in love with a I was seven years old I fell in love with a half-blind horse that they gave me. They gave me a half-blind horse because I was very small and it was a very unspirited horse, but I thought it was a fire horse. I'd go galloping through the clouds in Wyoming. And it was the most romantic experience in my life, and of course I just had to have a horse when I came back to the East.

MR. BROWN: And did you get one?

MS. SAARINEN: We were only there for a month, but it seemed liked four months. I mean, that it seemed like four years. Yes, after drawing a picture of a horse for her and leaving it for her before I went to bed every night for a year, I got a horse. But I mean, the way we got it was she was scouting around in Stockbridge where she could get a nice, beautiful, little, young horse that was not too strong in the mouth. And that was the thrill of my life, and I went on drawing horses--no, I stopped drawing them then because I had my horse. But the trouble is the horse, the first thing he did was run away with me on the railroad tracks. So I was terrified, and I never, never rode again, until I went to Munich.
And there I went with a group into the woods on a moonlight ride, and I had a naughty little pony and though I was in good shape and I had ridden well once, he would head me for a ranch in the woods and I would have been beheaded unless I kept lying down forward on my saddle. And that was no good so I gave up. [Laughs]
MR. BROWN: Tell me, as a small child then you were doing a lot of drawing?

MS. SAARINEN: I was drawing all the animals I came in touch with. And the mice; they came at night in our brownstone house. I was always reading about Ernest Seton Thompson, and I was always watching the mice, who collected--because there were crumbs in my room because I had two dogs in this pen, and they always spilled a little food so there were a lot of mice around and I'd keep the light lit all through their feast of the crumbs, and finally I'd just watched myself, watch them to put me to sleep. It would just put me to sleep. So about twelve o'clock I got to sleep every night, and then I had to get up at seven to go to school. So I always was over-tired.

MR. BROWN: But you were always interested in animals. You drew them and drew them.

MS. SAARINEN: Drew mice all the time. And bred them according to [Gregor Johann] Mendel's law. I wanted to see--I had Japanese waltzing mice, and they are black and white, and I wanted to separate according to Mendel's law the whiteness in the animals, in the mice, from the blackness, as far as inheritance goes. And I found that when I bred the black ones, or put the blackest ones away from the white ones and they were all breeding amongst themselves I realized that running around in circles got worse and worse with the black, furry mice. And the whitest ones got whiter and whiter and bigger and bigger, and they became large white rats. So what to do about this poor little tiny waltzing mice. They're called waltzing mice because they ran in circles. And they were Japanese. Well, that's enough of that.

MR. BROWN: What was school like? Was your art encouraged or your interest in animals at school?

MS. SAARINEN: I used to get all let's see I used to get "A" in art, though my art was very bad and all it was was drawing pictures of girls in the uniform that I hated, sitting posing on the platform. They were perfectly good copies of what was in front of me, but it meant nothing to me, and no action, no fun about it. And then I got "A" in science always. I mean, I really was good at zoology, biology, physiology. I was teacher's pet in ornithology, and that was the only source of confidence that I had as far as school went. But I had--.

MR. BROWN: Otherwise you didn't care much for the school?

MS. SAARINEN: No, I hated the school, but I loved two or three friends. So I think that kept me sane, just loving them, and we'd spend nights with each other and go back and forth and even try out smoking and things like that together.

MR. BROWN: What school was this?

MS. SAARINEN: Miss Chapin's School for Girls.

MR. BROWN: And you were about--when were you there? What years?

MS. SAARINEN: From age four to age, oh, I can't think--.

MR. BROWN: Until you were a teenager?

MS. SAARINEN: To tenth grade. So that was much too long. That was ten years in the wrong school. And I began to resent it more and more and more. And my mother was frantically looking for a place to send me that would suit me and it was very difficult to find. And so finally she found--she went to my--my sister was at boarding school, and there was a very nice man who'd spoke the valedictorian--is that what you call it at commencement? My mother fell in love with that man and his speech. He was so wonderful and he was so tender about his peonies. He was a great tree peony expert, and he was dean at Hamilton College and he taught astronomy, astrology not astrology it's astronomy, and he grew the peonies and he was always interested in everything scientific and so was I. So he put me up with a Mrs. Hess, who was very good at biology and lived across the street and taught biology to the--.

MR. BROWN: Was this one summer you went up there?

MS. SAARINEN: No, this was two winters and visits in the summer. It was only for two winters, but it seems like ten years. And the way I'm speaking of it you see that it was a life saver. I had to make up for ten years in those two years, and I almost did.

MR. BROWN: Now would he give you little problems to solve?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, she was the one who taught me most. She was an ex-Bryn Mawr teacher so she was very good.

MR. BROWN: What was her name?

MS. SAARINEN: Louise Saunders.

MR. BROWN: And he was Arthur Saunders?

MS. SAARINEN: And he was Arthur Saunders, who's well-known among circles now. I think he must be in the Archives isn't he?

MR. BROWN: Oh, as an astronomer, he wouldn't be but--.

MS. SAARINEN: No, not that, but as a peony grower, a botanist.

MR. BROWN: Well, he'd be known in horticultural circles then.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, and also school circles; he was very popular among the men. He was Dean of Men at--.

MR. BROWN: At Hamilton College.

MS. SAARINEN:--Hamilton College.

MR. BROWN: And what did Mrs. Saunders teach you?

MS. SAARINEN: She taught me--she thought of everything, what would I like the best. It was history of art and it was--sure I liked that, I loved it. And she taught me how--she didn't really like the Roman sculpture as well as the Greek, and the early Greek particularly, and I agreed with her, which was very important. Of course, she must have been a big influence. But what I liked and what I didn't like, because I really liked the archaic period of almost every place in the world better than I did the real flowering end of things.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose you did, as you look back?

MS. SAARINEN: Because they were simpler and they gave the feeling of being about to bloom but not having bloomed and being full, and just full of life and then just peter out. This was just before. It was like a teenager going to debutante dances. And these little animals to my mind, sheep and all the things that the archaic people in Greece did--. Oh, what'd I do?

MR. BROWN: So those years with Mrs. Saunders then were very important?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. Plus the fact that she would stroke my face and my neck when I couldn't go to sleep. She mothered me. And I remember writing my mother that Mrs. Saunders is the most motherly person I've ever met who is also intellectual. And I thought that was so wonderful. In other words, my mother hadn't had that time to rub my neck and mother me. But Mrs. Saunders just loved me, and I just thrived under it.

MR. BROWN: Your mother really had been quite busy, had she, and occupied with her own--.

MS. SAARINEN: Well, with social things, but she tried very hard to do things for me because I was--. My sister never knew what to do, much. She was always playing with dolls, but then she began to make dresses for the dolls. But I always knew I wanted to go to the Museum of Science and the Metropolitan Museum. My mother always took me on weekends about once a week all through my life.

MR. BROWN: Had at this time, you--.

MS. SAARINEN: No. Something about going to the--. I was allowed to go to the park while I was at Chapin School and draw the animals. That goes back, it's--.

MR. BROWN: Even the same time, or even before you went away?

MS. SAARINEN: Before I went to the Saunders'.

MR. BROWN: When you look back at those drawings, were you trying to capture the movement of the animals or their essential form?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, yes. Well, I'd studied comparative anatomy so I had that to go on.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you'd taken a course in that?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. But the first thing you should do anyway, I think, is have it and then forget it, throw it away. And I almost reached that stage rather soon, because I was very interested in the anatomy, and I got good at that and I had a model of it. And then looked up the animals' comparative anatomy. So it was a [Johann Wolfgang von] Goethe's kind of science that I was interested in.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, as opposed to today's science. How would you describe school--I mean it's entirely different how they would teach science in school now, I would say. Much more technical it would be. Mine was quite earthy. It was like the way Goethe wrote about nature, and I read all that. I loved all that stuff.

MR. BROWN: So was this anatomy lesson in an art school?

MS. SAARINEN: No, it was with Miss Brenda Putnam, a very nice spinster.

MR. BROWN: And a sculptor.

MS. SAARINEN: A sculptor, but not with talent, but she had the things that are good for a student. And she found me interesting to teach because I was so responsive and I cared so much.

MR. BROWN: Then when you were drawing in Central Park, were you with a teacher at that time?

MS. SAARINEN: No, I'd buttonhole my mother's maid, who came for me at school. She'd say, "Well, where are we going now?" And I'd say, "Well, I want to go to the zoo and draw. Okay?" "Okay." Or something like that. [Laughs] And so I went and drew there every day I could, even without that Miss Johnson, as we called her. Or I went to the ice cream parlor and guzzled sweets at Hick's Ice Cream Store. Or I went to the Plaza Theater, bringing her along I had to to see movies. I saw a lot of movies in the afternoon at the Plaza Theater around the corner from my school. I wasted hours there, and I wouldn't call it wasting because it was Greta Garbo and all of those people.

MR. BROWN: Oh, sure. Well, also about this time didn't you first have some first sculpture instruction? You were a pupil of Alexander Archipenko, right?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, yes. That was also sixteen. Everything seems to be sixteen. No, it was seventeen when I came back from the Saunders', where I was gone, you know, like boarding school.

MR. BROWN: How did it come about that you studied with him?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, I liked his work, and I went and asked what I had to do to get in. I've forgotten how I got in. Oh, it was just by copying a drawing he made on the wall, and he'd see how good your eye was. He could tell a lot by what you did with his drawing just how good you would be. And I think my drawing was--it wasn't full of shades and shadows. It was a line drawing, but he said it was a sculptor's drawing because it showed, it had form inherently in line. So he immediately said I could come right into the top class. But then I went into the top class, and I was surrounded by women, mostly all doing absolutely abstract things, or so I thought it must be because I couldn't understand any of them. I felt completely bewildered about it. So I just went ahead and copied the model whenever the model was posing. I copied it literally, and they would do abstractions from the model, which was what I later would be doing but--.

MR. BROWN: Was he a good teacher? Did he come around frequently?

MS. SAARINEN: He was a very good teacher. Well, he was a very good teacher. He was very sympathetic and he was--to me, I couldn't understand why everyone else was doing something different from me. I was just doing realistic faithful sort of renditions of what I was seeing what he told us to copy. I mean, from the--and so I hadn't started being original. But then I started making horses, and he let me do that and he even helped me with that. But I was much younger than the others, so he was very understanding.

MR. BROWN: What kind of a class was it? Was it a large class?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, there were all kinds of young girls and old girls, all in love with him. I was too young to go along with that or get along with any of them, but I used to be fascinated by how they could do these things that I couldn't even understand what they were derived from.

MR. BROWN: But did he encourage you in what you were doing?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, what I did from the model. He didn't make me just go into a trance and try to think up something to do. Because if I had done it, I probably would have undoubtedly done the students around me.

MR. BROWN: About how long were you with him?

MS. SAARINEN: Just about one winter.

MR. BROWN: You were about seventeen at that time?

MS. SAARINEN: About.

MR. BROWN: Then after that did you go on to study more? What did you do after that?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, then I was getting to be eighteen soon, and I was supposed to come out like most debutantes in a quiet way though. That's when I began going drawing at the zoo. I was working, studying with who was the name? Albert Stewart, because my mother heard about him and I was asked to come into his studio I could be a special student; he had one other special student where he was doing his Prometheus for Rockefeller Plaza.

MR. BROWN: So about when was this, then?

MS. SAARINEN: It's when I was about eighteen. What year would that be?

MR. BROWN: But the Rockefeller Plaza project was under way? And Stewart was--.

MS. SAARINEN: Stewart had these men working for him who were trained in Europe and who were very good at copying what Stewart wanted them to do. Stewart did these mock-ups, and then they would enlarge them, the architects. There were about three sculptors there. One was named [Carl Ludwig] Schmitz and one was Henry Kreis, and one was--. I've forgotten what the other one was. And I used to watch them all the time and they got interested in my things. And I was starting to do a bull one day, and I worked on it and I was very happy and doing it, and then all of a sudden, Albert Stewart came around and said, "Well, that's not the way to do a bull." And I said, "Well, what should I do?" And he started to work on my piece and change it to a [Paul] Manship bull. It wasn't even a Stewart bull, but it was--he was copying Manship and doing Manship bulls, which were very stylized and not at all like what I wanted.

MR. BROWN: I see. Was Manship Stewart's ideal, do you suppose?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. He thought everything Manship did was perfect. So that's when I burst into tears one day. And I ran out to my car, and I was going to drive back to Long Island, because I commuted every day from Long Island, an hour drive. And when I sat in my car, I started bursting into tears and Albert Stewart I mean, Henry Kreis came out to see what was the matter with me, because he saw that I was miserable and he thought I had talent and he was interested in that. And he liked me anyway. I mean, I liked what he was doing. I always thought, why was he doing it for Manship? So he said, "Look, don't you worry about Manship. You just come with me. I go up to Connecticut. I have a farmhouse there, and I live right near a great friend named--.

MR. BROWN: Heinz Warneke.

MS. SAARINEN: Heinz Warneke, and he has a nice wife and they have a farm and they have two or three children. And I can teach you out there any time you get stuck, and anyway Heinz can teach you right along. And then I found I could live there. They asked me to live there as a paying guest. Behind these things, my mother was paying money that I never even was aware of, which I should

have been, but it made me freer, I guess.

MR. BROWN: But surely you were very happy to be able to leave Stewart?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, yes. I never went back.

MR. BROWN: Stewart was working for Manship. Is that right? He was building--.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Did you ever meet Manship?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What was he like?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, he came right up with a spyglass and looked in my eyes because he wanted to see if my eyelashes were real, and he said, "They are real." [Laughs] That was my first encounter with Warneke. I mean with--.

MR. BROWN: Manship.

MS. SAARINEN:--with Manship. And Manship was interesting always, and he was very kindly, but I just thought his work was like a machine most of the time, except for some early pieces he did that I've seen that were beautiful. I've seen them, you know, just at the Andover Museum way later than this, later. I admired him for lots of things.

MR. BROWN: So it was about in the early--. This was in the early thirties, I suppose, wasn't it, something like that?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, it was.

MR. BROWN: Then thereafter you went up to Connecticut?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, every summer, I--let's see.

MR. BROWN: For several years?

MS. SAARINEN: It was agreed that I would go and try it out, and I loved it and thrived on it, and they liked me and I always got--he started me wood carving.

MR. BROWN: Who? Kreis did?

MS. SAARINEN: Kreis did. No, Warneke. Because I was living with Warneke. Kreis was just a neighbor and a great friend of theirs.

MR. BROWN: Now, when he started you, did he give you many instructions, or just show you the tools?

MS. SAARINEN: No, he just had the tools and showed me how to sharpen them. He was a very good German craftsman. Very good. And he knew animals cold, but he didn't have much imagination with them. That was the one thing he lacked. He also didn't have, I realized later, a sense of form in relation to architecture. So if he decorated a building, he couldn't do it. It wouldn't look right. It was like if [Aristede] Maillol was trying to decorate on lintels over the doors, he never could succeed. They were awfully queer-looking figures he'd do. He was much better doing things in the round because he was a real sculptor.

MR. BROWN: The same was true of Warneke. He couldn't--.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. He couldn't--no, he had lots of knowledge lots of knowledge of the materials so he could teach any student in any material, and he was very good for them that way. And he'd show them how to do it by starting another one, not touching yours, but by just repeating what you're attempting to do, and wouldn't go very far with it but just enough to get the idea across.

MR. BROWN: Did you find you could master materials pretty quickly?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, I mastered--I loved wood. I loved it, but the first one I did was oak and that's very tough material and it took me all summer. But it was a newborn calf. And, of course, the calf was a cow by the time I was leaving. [Laughter] But I did do, I did love that little--. I hung around and watched it being born. And it dove out with its forefeet first. And I was able to do that when it fell onto the floor, and then Heinz came out the same morning after the birth of the calf. And he came out with an ax, and he was going to make a sculpture of it in full size by having it on the ground and jibbing it off in wax chipping it with the ax and making a whole calf. And he had a wonderful impression of a calf, round, a little body round together, you know, and it's a newborn calf. I can't say it right. But I took a different pose. I took it the way I saw it when it was coming out and when its legs were still like that.

MR. BROWN: Together, yes.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, and I just loved it.

MR. BROWN: So--but you worked partly from memory then?

MS. SAARINEN: No, that time I worked directly from the calf.

MR. BROWN: Did you do a very quick model? Did you model or carve?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, in one case, one summer I was working on a pig that was in the piggery, whatever, and I lived in that pigsty that summer but Heinz was good about animals and he didn't have them lying, you know, groveling in mud. He knew they didn't like that. He knew they liked dry, clean pens. So I could go into the pen, and I made a Plastiline pig that was just exactly, as exactly as I could, of that little female pig. Then my mother slipped it away and got it cast. And it's one of the best things I ever did as a student.

MR. BROWN: Were you, at this time, ever having anything exhibited in New York?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. I started--I think the first excitement was when Manship asked me to show twelve of my drawings in a show with him. And I was about seventeen, I guess, then, seventeen or eighteen and--.

MR. BROWN: This is when you'd been working with Stewart?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. I had been--I'd got a lot out of going to the zoo with Stewart. He took me and he was there and he could help me if I got stuck. But mostly I just
drew and drew and drew, and he drew and drew and drew himself. So I must give him credit for that. That was very nice.

MR. BROWN: Where did you exhibit with Manship? Your drawings.

MS. SAARINEN: In one of the galleries. I can't remember it. On Fifty-seventh Street. A good gallery. I was only one of twelve, and I was very flattered. No, I think he--yes, he had twelve--. He had several pictures of mine in it. I guess about five.

MR. BROWN: These were drawings of animals?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, of crayon. Four-sided lithograph crayons, and I'd become quite adept at pencil. And I began to combine pencil or ink line with the side of the crayon suggesting the forms, the real shape of the forms, three-dimensionally. It was very good for me, and I got too good at it. And I remember hearing from one of the teachers at the art school, the New York school--.

MR. BROWN: The Art Students League?

MS. SAARINEN: The Art Students League, yes. I can't remember his name. I remember once, him saying an artist is always unhappy because either his work is ahead of his technique or his technique's ahead of his ideas. And I realized all of a sudden, "Oh, my goodness. I've got to stop drawing like this or I'm going to get that way. My technique's going to get better than my content."

MR. BROWN: So what did you do?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, I think I just went into another kind of drawing. Get me out of the--. You can be quite tricky with the crayon sides. And they weren't real lithographs. I wish now I'd had them so they could have been mimeographed, but I wasn't taught that.

MR. BROWN: They were just single drawings? Yes. Well, was it about this time that you went to Europe then, to study sculpture?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. The time I went to Europe was, that's the second year I went to--. First I went the first year and studied in Munich for a winter. But there I was asked to go to ski in Austria, and I had come to do art in Munich but I got--.

MR. BROWN: Sculpture, particularly?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, to do sculpture just in Munich. But when I was invited to go skiing I didn't know how, but I knew it was animals and wild. I went there--. [Rudolf] Hess--. [Adolph] Hitler was all over the place and I met him. And then I was taken into the Braunhaus and met--Hess told me, "I'll show you on the map where you're going. You're going to St. Anton-Amalberg, and you're going to have the most wonderful country to ski in. And so before I'd done more than two or three little sculptures with [Harry Mohr] Weese, I was off to ski.

MR. BROWN: Weese was your sculpture teacher?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Well, you had this entree to the Nazis through a cousin, wasn't it?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. Puzzi Hamstengel. And he used to play the piano to Hitler when Hitler couldn't sleep. And he used to ask me to go to see, go to the U.S.R., the U.F.R., the biggest company of motion pictures in Germany. And we were going to go one night, and then he said, "Oh, would you like to meet Hitler?" And I said, "Of course I would." I didn't even know what he was. I didn't know what he looked like. I didn't know. And so he said, "Well, we'll go to the Braunhaus." In fact, I lived right around the corner from Hitler without knowing it. And so we went to the Braunhaus and [he] showed me around. And then--all of a sudden, we realized it was eight o'clock at night, and there was Hitler coming downstairs looking very pale and wan and tired, and I wrote home to my mother that "I just met Hitler and it's eight o'clock at night and he came down looking very pale and tired, and he had the big nose of a big personality, but he'll never make the grade as a leader." And I was introduced to him, and I couldn't speak German yet then, so I just sort of blushed properly and then we went--.
Then Puzzi Hamstengel said, "Now, I think that's such a holy moment, it would be sacrilegious not to go down in the basement and drink beer in the bierhalle now that we've met Hitler." And I thought, "Oh, golly, I don't want to do that; I want to go to the movie." [Laughs] But I went down, and there they all were, these men, clicking and heiling Hitler. And clicking their heels with loud bangs, and putting their hands up, and gesticulating, and my goodness, I was the only woman there girl. And it was just horrifying to me what it--. I never saw anything like it. It looked like tin soldiers, and I thought something terrible's going to happen.
And then upstairs Hess showed me a map of where I was going and said, "Now, look over here at Austria. You're going to Austria, and it's already 60 percent Nazi." And I thought, "Well, that's doesn't mean much to me, but I'll see what it's like when I get there." That was one of the things that happened.

MR. BROWN: And you then spent some time in Austria skiing, right?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. I was--I spent then--once I got there, I began to realize I was learning how to ski and I really had some talent in it. I stayed there quite late, into the spring. And by then I still couldn't do christiania [a ski maneuver], but I was supposed to do [it]. I could do a lot of other things. I could do stembogens and stop and go and do nice edging with my skis to keep me in control. And the next year, I vowed I'd come back. And I went back for eight winters. And they

were all--.

MR. BROWN: You studied with some important teachers, didn't you?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, when I was over there, I just drew the chamois that the guides would bring down when they went out to find, what they, bring down their trophies and hang them in the cold cellar at night. And I became devoted to the guides and was lucky to be taught by them and got better and better and better, and my whole life became skiing then, but then I began to realize that I love the form that I'm doing or living in. I loved the contour of the mountains and the contour and the feeling of stopping and going with the for
MS. And I think it was very close to sculpture. So I began to think it was very healthy rather than playing. I wasn't playing hooky, I was really learning much more. Oh, wait a minute. That's enough. I can't remember--. Finally in 1936, when I was about twenty-four or -five, I was getting good enough to be racing ski racing. And then I began to hurt myself. I hurt my knee, and I think I hurt my knee because I hated racing because I was scared, not of racing, but scared of letting down the team when I was on the team. So I decided the only way I liked to ski was alone, and for a gold eagle or something by doing it within a certain time. And I'd get all the gold eagles imaginable. But I just would not ski well, be a [inaudible] skier when I was with the team. So I knew that was bad for my skiing and bad for my confidence and everything. So
I got--finally, I ended up on a reserve of the of only four of them of the Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

MR. BROWN: The American Women's Ski Team.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. But I didn't ski down with them because I'd hurt myself. Just conveniently a few days before the race, I got hurt. [Laughs]

MR. BROWN: Do you think you were prone to be hurt?

MS. SAARINEN: I think it was absolutely psychologically that. I just couldn't stand the responsibility of losing my dash by being--to be careful and not let anyone down. So what's the sense if I couldn't keep my dash and have fun with it? What's the sense of going into it? I would fall and let them down anyway.

MR. BROWN: Was it pretty nationalistic, 1936?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. There were little Nazis all over the place. On the race course in Garmisch-Partenkirchen outside of Munich, we'd have to--we were practicing on the Olympic slopes, and these little girls about fourteen with moustaches and black hair in braids would come along and sneak up to us and try to trip us up with their ski sticks. They were so aggressive, oh my. Of course, they won, too. They won more than the men, German men, that year. And they would--those little girls were the fiercest things I ever saw.

MR. BROWN: Did you keep up with your cousin, Hamstengel. Would you see him from time to time?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, no, then I got so busy, serious about the skate--.

MR. BROWN: Skiing, that you really didn't see him.

MS. SAARINEN:--skiing and all that, after that first year or two, I was always at St. Anton.

MR. BROWN: What about sculpture in Munich? Had you abandoned your study?

MS. SAARINEN: No. At night when I came home--.

MR. BROWN: You'd make drawings, I know.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. I'd make drawings of chamois and of hirsch that's the word for big deer and raya that's small deer and they'd hang them up in the basement for me to draw with all their poor little feet tied together, and they were dead and everything. But I loved doing that. I felt that they'd died for more than just to be killed. And anyway the guides were so good, they usually killed them

outright, and so it wasn't so painful and messy.

MR. BROWN: Did you stay on after 1936 in Europe?

MS. SAARINEN: No. In 1936, I came to New York, and I looked up two great friends. One was Natalie Roth, Natalie Swann Roth. She was an ex-school friend of mine. And then St. John Smith, who was my first beau, and he said, "Well where are you going now?" And I said, "I don't know. I'm going to do art, I know that. And I've heard of somebody named Carl Milles, and what do you think about him?" And St. John Smith, who was my first boyfriend when I was about fourteen and he was about sixteen, said, "I think you should go to Cranbrook." And I said, "What's that?" And he said, "Oh, a place out in the Middle West where Carl Milles works and teaches, and it's a wonderful place. You're completely free. Nobody pays any attention to where you are and what you're doing and you can just--." And I was just looking for that sort of situation.

MR. BROWN: Did you have your mother's support in all this?

MS. SAARINEN: Well--.

MR. BROWN: Or was she wanting you to settle down or what? [Laughs]

MS. SAARINEN: No. My mother had married someone I didn't like because I was jealous of him, because he ran off with my mother. But, of course, I got over that. I had to. He was a wonderful man in many ways, as I see it now. But she had my blessings, because she was just as soon to be happily married and no interruptions from her two teenage daughters. And so I didn't feel I was hurting her at all. In fact, I think she was very proud of what I was doing.
[Interruption in taping]

MR. BROWN: You wanted to say something about going to ski at St. Anton.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. When I got this invitation from my mother's friend, Alice Damrosch--. She was the daughter of Walter Damrosch, the well-known symphony orchestra man. She asked me, she invited me to stay with her in a place called St. Anton-Amalberg, and I thought, "Am I going to a nunnery or a monastery, or what is this place?" And when I got off the train, I saw Alice Damrosch for the first time, bristling with pins and medals--.
Tape 1, side B

MS. SAARINEN:--me and they looked up at the station and pointed to me where we were going to go tomorrow, which was way, way up on the top of an enormous Alpine mountain. And Alice said, "Do you know that Otto is going to help you get up there and then you're going to ski down for the first time into another village?" And I said, "No, I couldn't do it." And she said, "Oh, yes. We'll see." And, so--. And I was then way overweight. I weighed a hundred and seventy. [Laughing] I'd been eating so much in Munich. Well, anyway that day came and went so fast. I was exhausted and had to fall all the way down but I'd fallen in love with the guide and with Alice, who was so wonderful. And they did get me down and we skied down to the train and came home at the end of the day, and that was my first day skiing.
[Interruption in taping]

MS. SAARINEN: After that I began to get better under the tutelage of Otto [Fürer, Furer]. And up in the Alps, we climbed for every inch we skied down, whether it was little hills or mountains, and I got to feel very confident and interested in the whole problem of the [Kandehara, Kandehar] race and of the christiania, which is the name of the kind of skiing we were learning. The other is telemark and that's more Scandinavian than Austrian. And then I--let's see, then I have to think.
[Interruption in taping]

MS. SAARINEN: I realized that Otto Fürer was not only the best skier in St. Anton but the champion of the world. And he was such a nice man. And he asked me out to just follow him in the woods when it was a snowfall in the morning. And I bounced out of bed and went and just followed him. I felt as if I was following an Indian tramping through the woods. It was so romantic, the whole feeling, and then nobody else was there and there were virgin snow. It was virgin snow as we

call it nobody's been there before.
And then Alice became such a friend of mine. I introduced her to her second husband, and that was a duty I didn't expect or a joy that I didn't expect. Then we got closer and closer, and in the spring, we'd all go into the mountains and on a trip to the Willspitz. You start way below water level and you end way above in the highest mountain of the earth's tower called the Willspitz. We went in a group, and we were roped half the time because there were glaciers on the way, and we were always frightened of the glaciers. And Otto after all we were roped to him so it was up to him whether we went into one or not. But we were so confident of him because he was such a great man.
This was for eight years I was in that sort of situation, and I'd come home every summer and go back to the Warneke's and draw, and I'd stay with my mother on Long Island and I'd go to so and so and to these wild-animal training places and draw the animals the lions, the tigers, everything. It was Frank Buck's show on Long Island. Everywhere I went, everywhere I looked up animals. And I bred dogs and I drew them all the time. And they were not first-class dogs as far as the show room was, but as far as my mind their beauty was, they were just great. And so I was always drawing and learning different techniques of it, and nobody was telling me what to do, which was just great. And that's all.

MR. BROWN: Those were a great series of years, then, weren't they, for you?
[Interruption in taping]

MS. SAARINEN: And Eliel [Saarinen]--. I saw that there was a whole crowd of young people there, all with their pads and pencils waiting to hear about the, get the latest tip on style, and instead of that, we got nothing but sort of like a sermon from the Bible, from Eliel. He was talking in terms of nature, big grand things. Never mentioned the name style, never mentioned the name, anything so small as oh, how shall I say? where we're at now, but just about the important big, big things in the world of architecture and city planning. And that if you're going to do an ashtray, you have to know what table it's going to be on. And if you're going to do a table, you have to know what kind of room it's going to be in. And if you're going to do a room, you have to know what kind of house it's going to be in. You have to always think of the next largest thing to what you're commissioned to do. I never forgot that, because it applied a lot to when I was doing my sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Is this something you'd not really thought about before?

MS. SAARINEN: Never thought about it, no. Because I hadn't made any architectural sculpture before.

MR. BROWN: Did he strike you as a very perceptive man?

MS. SAARINEN: He struck me--. He absolutely bowled me over as a very warm, fine, intelligent, wise, as a most unphony kind of person imaginable. And very much a humanitarian. And he felt that all cities and towns should have their own church and their own beliefs in religion. And he said, "Out in Cranbrook, you see, my students studied city planning with me, and it's a very wonderful experience and my son is doing that, too, but he's always practicing it now in Fenton, Michigan. And I sort of perked up my ears when I heard "my son." [Laughing]

MR. BROWN: I know.

MS. SAARINEN: But that isn't why I went to Cranbrook. When I heard that he had gotten Lillith [inaudible] out there, and he had been the one that won the prize that put the whole idea of Cranbrook being built into G. G. Booth's head, and G. G. Booth was a very, very rich man, so was his wife [Ellen Warren Scripps Booth]. So that Eliel really--Eliel's ideas fitted Booth's idea of a great big barn where a whole lot of artists got together and they all shared their talents. One would be reading in one corner, and one would be doing metal in another corner, and one would be doing drawing and sculpting and so forth. There'd be groups, and they'd all be working together and help each other. And that's exactly what Eliel believed and that's exactly what Cranbrook had. The only rift in their plans that way was that somehow the science institute--. There were five institutes. There was the church, there was the science institute, there was the academy of arts, there was the

boy's school, the girl's school, the kindergarten. That's five isn't it? Those were the institutions, all of which Eliel was asked to build. And they are beautiful buildings, just beautiful. And romantic. The girl's school is the most romantic, heavenly place you can imagine. And then they dotted the whole area of Cranbrook with casts of Eliel's--
[Interruption in taping]

MS. SAARINEN: Not Eliel's--.

MR. BROWN: Carl Milles' sculpture.

MS. SAARINEN: Carl Milles' sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Where did the rift come that you were mentioning?

MS. SAARINEN: The what?

MR. BROWN: There was a rift you said: the science school and--.

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, the only rift I--. I'm so scatterbrained, my goodness. Wait a minute. Oh, was that the architect--. The thing that made me think of that was Eero [Saarinen] built the Museum of Science; Eliel built all the others. He'd gotten to a point where he was told to build the Museum of Science. And then so there was sort of a separation there. It was in a different--it was a little far away from the other academies, the other departments. And there never seemed to be a head of the Science Institute that was friends with the heads in the Art Institutes and in the schools. Only lately, towards the very end of my stay there, before Cranbrook became a different place, did people start using the books in the Science Institute and vice versa. The scientists would use the books in the Art Institute.

MR. BROWN: But when you were there, they didn't associate too much together?

MS. SAARINEN: No, not enough. That was a big lack. That worried Eliel. And it worried me too, because I was forever tracking down to find a book on animals or something to do with nature in the Science Institute, because there wasn't one in the Art Institute. And so I really--I was often there when nobody else was. I thought it was wrong. It was not right.

MR. BROWN: When you went out there, then, you decided on your own to go out? Or did you talk to Eliel before you went out?

MS. SAARINEN: No. I just--I asked what was necessary. I asked him at the end of the lecture what was necessary that I should put in, in order to get into Cranbrook. And it was the summer term I was starting with. So it was a lovely time of the year. And I'd just finished the ski team and I felt like a million dollars.

MR. BROWN: Did he tell you then what he required?

MS. SAARINEN: He said, "Oh, you just have to bring a few things you've done. Bring anything you've done a picture, anything you've done and come." And I thought that was mighty simple. Oh, he said, "You can put down your name. You can send your name in and your address and what you want and how long you want to stay, and they'll let you know the prices and the particulars that you need to know. That's all."

MR. BROWN: And you knew exactly what you wanted to do?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes.

MR. BROWN: You knew that Milles was there.

MS. SAARINEN: I knew I wanted to do sculpture and that Milles was there.

MR. BROWN: And you knew Milles' work a bit?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, but I'd only just gotten to know it because I looked it up in St. John's, and Natalie [Roth] told me about it.

MR. BROWN: Did you like it? When you first saw it?

MS. SAARINEN: I was bowled over by it. But I didn't realize how eclectic it was in the sense as Renaissance sculpture, how practically it was copied from Renaissance sculpture. But now I realize he was more than that because on his own, in his own, he couldn't possibly have done what he did without having a tremendous sense of sculpture in relation to architecture, and water the way they had in Rome. He was influenced by that, too, because--and so that his sense of what would go in an area that Eliel might build, have in his buildings, his sense of it was just superb always. He did a Pegasus screaming through the air once that was again as a Grecian or Roman, a Roman conception. But then he had two boars on the entrances of Cranbrook. They were cold steals from the Renaissance boars. But they were grand days. He had a marvelous sense of putting what he'd done.

MR. BROWN: Where to place things.

MS. SAARINEN: And then where there wasn't something, he made it up. He did Jonah and the Whale.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. SAARINEN: That was his only one he did original. And partly it wasn't his fault. It's partly that it was cheaper for Booth to get casts of what he'd made, than it was for him to commission them all new, which is very understandable.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MS. SAARINEN: It would have been very expensive. I wish he'd told Carl to make all new things, but instead of that he had such a wonderful selection of things that there was always a place to fit it.

MR. BROWN: Well, was Milles happy with this arrangement? What was he like, by the way?

MS. SAARINEN: No, no. He wished he'd been asked to make--. He was given a marvelous studio, and so were his students. He always wished he--he said that the Swedes used to throw ink on his sculpture, so he was glad he was in America because they didn't here. They liked him here. But he said he wished he was asked to do more sculpture, new ones that he hadn't done before, not just casts of old ones which is understandable.

MR. BROWN: What was--.

MS. SAARINEN: Later, of course, he got new commissions on his own from St. Louis, the great big huge pool.

MR. BROWN: Right, some of the railroad stations.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, reminiscent of other ones he'd made. And that's one of the grandest of his things. And then the thing from the Metropolitan Museum and then the thing for Arlington Cemetery, which he did for when he was very old. And it looks like it's done by an old man. And it has lovely ideas. It's a great big pool. I don't know whether you've seen it?

MR. BROWN: Um hmm.

MS. SAARINEN: Well, did you notice--now each one of those people are people he knew that died. One girl or one little baby was holding up another child. Everyone was some friend that he had that was died. And they were rising up out of the water. So it had a very nice meaning to him and anyone who knew that.

MR. BROWN: Did you respond pretty easily to what he was doing?

MS. SAARINEN: I didn't respond--I responded too much to anything he told me to do.

MR. BROWN: Did he tell you what was--.

MS. SAARINEN: I overdid--.

MR. BROWN: You said at one time his critiques, he was rather vague in them. But you said they were also really rather wonderful criticis
MS.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. Oh, he was vague. Yes, Bob, but the thing is that he would tell--for instance, one of the first things I made was a Ballou, from Kipling, with a Mowgli on his back the bear with Mowgli riding on his back. And the first criticism he gave me, he said--first of all he liked my work because he'd passed on it, what I had showed him, so I had that much confidence. But he said, "Why do you make the bear round? Why do you make his back round? Nothing is round. Don't you see really? Everything is a straight line with a curve on the end of it. Nothing is a curve like this." That made a tremendous impression on me, so bad, so strongly that I was making things like square sticks and matchsticks and like a flat board. I just--it hit me so hard.

MR. BROWN: And you immediately changed.

MS. SAARINEN: And I grew out of that the minute I touched clay. Because then I made--. I went absolutely Baroque. And I showed him what I'd made, some dragons I'd made in clay for a sketch for somebody, Eero's sister had asked me to do for the house. And I was just beginning clay and getting very free with it. He said, "Now that is fun. You can do curves all you want in ceramic. That's different. But if you're doing a bear in plasticine for cast stone or for--."

MR. BROWN: Bronze.

MS. SAARINEN: Yeah. And I understood exactly what he meant because I'd been working in wood, and when I worked in wood, I used planes a great deal.

MR. BROWN: Yes, you told me that yesterday how you'd learned there. So you knew exactly--so in the end.

MS. SAARINEN: That influenced me very well. The wood. And so--but I couldn't make that bear look wooden, and I wasn't trying to, but if I'd thought of wood--but why not do it wood then, you see?

MR. BROWN: Sure. As you look back, do you think his criticism was fair? You were working in Plastiline, which is a very easily modeled material.

MS. SAARINEN: He said don't use Plastiline, use a real material. But he didn't know. I mean, it's all right to muddle around in plasticine if you want to. But I know that made a tremendous impression having worked in wood with Warneke when I finally, I got back together with what Milles had said and I was all right. I was doing planes.

MR. BROWN: By this time, were you beginning to learn--.

MS. SAARINEN: Excuse me just a minute. Eero told me that often, when a teacher tells you something and you misunderstand it, which you obviously did by making sticks and flat things that weren't you, that you come across something else. And it's true. Your misunderstanding turns into something new and a revelation to yourself and works out in the end.

MR. BROWN: And you, in fact, went into ceramics about then, did you?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, no, first I went into stones and for the Fenton, Michigan, center that Eero was doing.

MR. BROWN: By this time, you knew Eero pretty well, by then?

MS. SAARINEN: No, I didn't know him well at all. I got to know him by--.

MR. BROWN: But he was already working on that, right.

MS. SAARINEN: He was already working on that. And I met him--. The first night I met him, Frances Rich was there, and [Chino, Shoono] [inaudible] was there, and there was a very distinguished small group of us. I mean, they weren't known yet. And Marianne Strengell was there

and--let me see. We all went out for dinner, and then I asked Eero when he came from Finland. And he said, "Why do you ask that?" And I said, "Because you have such a foreign accent." Very rude, insolent, and all. And he said, "I understand you've just come from the Olympic Ski Team." [Laughs] So I said he'll forgive me for this now. And so he liked me because of the skiing, and I liked him because of his--I know why I liked him. When I first saw him, he was standing listening to one of those early news reporters--I can remember he--he just died, I think. Gabriel Heater.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes.

MS. SAARINEN: He was listening to the news constantly. I'd never listened to the news in my life only music, you know just didn't interest me. And I liked--he was so serious listening to it that I liked that, because I always liked seriousness. And I was sort of in awe of him. And then I began to find why I was. Then he asked me to do these things for the civic center--.

MR. BROWN: In Flint, yeah.

MS. SAARINEN:--having looked over the other students' work. Most of them were doing little Milleses, figures. And I was doing this rather ambitious and wrong bear. So that's how he chose me. Because he liked what I'd done, the one thing I'd done there. And then after that it went into ceramics when his sister asked me to make three dragons for a house in Grosse Point, very rich people there.

MR. BROWN: And this was about the first time you'd done much in ceramics?

MS. SAARINEN: No, no. Warneke's school was the first.

MR. BROWN: This was even after. What did you do for Flint?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, that was a very big job. That was the first job I did.

MR. BROWN: The one in Flint?

MS. SAARINEN: No, the--.

MR. BROWN: In Grosse Point?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, in Flint we--.

MR. BROWN: In Flint what did you do? What sort of things?

MS. SAARINEN: Flint was limestone.

MR. BROWN: Limestone. And you said that there you began to sense how sculpture has to relate to architecture. You'd already heard this in Eliel's lecture, and you'd seen Carl Milles' work, but it was only when you yourself went on a project, right?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, then it began to become real.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Was this a large space you had to sculpt for?

MS. SAARINEN: No, it was just a column. Eero had made a very ornate, rather dated kind of column that his father might have made years ago, and it had convolutions. And I was to decorate that column, and in an amusing way. Well, I could sense that if it was going to be the children around, you know, a community center. So I decided to make what I wanted to make, and I'd make it in plasticine and have it cast and pointed up in limestone so it could be part of that--.

MR. BROWN:--column.

MS. SAARINEN:--pillar, part of that pillar. That's how I got out of that. And I made a raccoon climbing way up in the top of the column as a little surprise. And then down below, I made things conducive to the history of the place, like an Indian head and a--oh, God, there was a little oxen head and little animals from that part of the country, a bear's face. Little sort of blobs like that at the bottom of the column. That was all I did for that.

MR. BROWN: How did it work? Did you think it was pretty successful?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, I did. Most important was that it's Eero who thought so.

MR. BROWN: Did he like it?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, he liked my ideas. He liked what I did. But I don't like what I did, because it wasn't doing it directly. What I should have done is do it directly in that piece of marble before it was erected. But I wouldn't have been able to do it. I didn't have the tools or anything. So it was better to have it done after I made a plasticine model of exactly what I wanted. He liked what I did. And then they asked me to make the clay figures, the ceramic figures. "Have you ever worked in ceramics?" he said. He started telling me about the difficulties of ceramics, that he'd made a lion and he had to have it hollow, and that it's almost impossibly difficult. And I sort of thought "Oh, well, I wonder if it is so difficult?" [Laughs]

MR. BROWN: You doubted what he'd said.

MS. SAARINEN: I didn't really doubt it, no. I just decided I wasn't going to be scared ahead of time. I was going to wait till I got familiar with clay. Which I had never really used in a [inaudible]. Well, all of a sudden, when I started doing those, I started using clay very freely on my own in my studio and on other things. And then they would always get shown, and then the students shown and then they'd get bored or somebody'd order something more, and his sister then ordered these dragons which I did again what I wanted to do with the history of the Pekingese dog.

MR. BROWN: Oh, really. [Laughs]

MS. SAARINEN: You know how a Pekingese dog started?

MR. BROWN: No.

MS. SAARINEN: Well, it's Peking, you know?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MS. SAARINEN: So it was really Peking stock. A marmoset that married a lion, you see. And their progeny was a Pekingese dog. And so I did one that--this is wildly wishful thinking for doing animals. I had--let's see--I had three niches in a wall. One was the marmoset large with a little tiny lion on his knee. And the other one was a lion large with a little marmoset on her knee, or whichever they were, and in the middle was the offspring, three Pekingese dogs. [Laughs]

MR. BROWN: This was for his sister, for Eero's sister [Pipsan Saarinen Swanson]?

MS. SAARINEN: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did she have quite a sense of humor?

MS. SAARINEN: They were good enough for her. I said I would not do "St. George and the Dragon." I wouldn't know how to do it, and I wouldn't have any feeling in it. She said, "Well, do whatever you want, just as long as it's wild." And I had it too wild really, because the form was very busy and the color was very busy. But it was really just what she wanted. It's dangerous to combine busy form and busy color. Very dangerous.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Were you just beginning to learn how to handle color in sculpture then?

MS. SAARINEN: Yeah. Or I'd find a friend who would tell me how to do something, from the pottery department. I didn't belong to the pottery department, but I--.

MR. BROWN: You were a student still at this time?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes.

MR. BROWN: But you were at the--were other students also getting commissions, or were you pretty unusual to be getting commissions while you were still a student?

MS. SAARINEN: I really don't know. I think some of them were, some of them weren't. And some of them had been there a long time. Some of them were brand new and didn't know what to do.

MR. BROWN: Students could stay there quite a while if they wished?

MS. SAARINEN: Yeah. You could stay as long as you wanted. In fact, you could die in your studio, swept up a month later and just a skeleton because nobody ever--.

MR. BROWN: You mean because there was a great deal of independence? You were left alone?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, we were left alone completely, and that's why you had to be quite mature, about your work at least. You had to have the discipline to work and self-discipline to be busy. I was busy, busy, busy all the time. And I was lucky because it was just right for me. Because I had a studio to myself. It was on a floor in connection with other studios, you know. Somebody'd pop up there and say "You want a cigarette or something?" and I'd go and get the cigarette and go back to work. There was a very wonderful feeling down there, and they were all working very seriously. Bud West, Clifford ("Bud") [Bateman] West, I don't if you ever heard of him? He worked right across the way from me. Harry Weese was right there doing architecture. And somebody else down the hall. And that was in the basement of the--not in the great big students' studio, which I didn't like as well as the little ones.

MR. BROWN: Did the masters then check in? Did Milles and Eliel Saarinen check on their students very much? Did you have regular criticisms?

MS. SAARINEN: Not regular, but, well, Milles would just wander over this lovely green lawn and open our door and just appear unexpectedly. And there we'd be barehanded with whatever we were doing. [Laughter] And somebody'd slapped their knee, and they were killing a mosquito. And he'd say, "Killing, killing, always killing. Killing mosquitoes." [Laughs] You know, make sort of--he really didn't have to work very hard. Well, I mean, he did his duty because when he saw you were serious--. One time, I almost felt suicidal because I couldn't solve this problem of this bear with the Mowgli, and I knocked on his door and I had tears in my eyes, and he got very worried and he called up Eero and said, "I don't know what to do with Lilly. She's so upset about what she's doing." That was funny. That showed how much I cared, that's all. And he respected that. He liked what I did. He liked everything I did after I started clay.

MR. BROWN: Was he a very talkative man?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, he was very charming. He had wonderful stories tucked away from Europe and his childhood. He had a childhood that--he lost his parents when he was fourteen, and went to sea with some sailors. Just how much of it's true, I never quite knew. But I have a feeling it might have been true. Because then he studied very hard and seriously in Paris. That's how he got on his way to Rome, where he was so overwhelmingly influenced by the Roman stuff. And he loved the ornate [Giovanni Lorenzo] Berninis, and all those. In fact, he liked them--. I like the early Greek stuff best of all, but he loved the ornate. But that's why I guess he liked my crazy clay things. That's the way to use clay. That's crazy in a way.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, this dragon here. Is this from that era or is that much later?

MS. SAARINEN: I didn't make that.

MR. BROWN: You didn't make that.

MS. SAARINEN: No, that was Eliel's. But I never saw that till after I had made several things like that. But Eliel left--Eliel wrote in his will at that time that if anything happens to me I'm going to leave this to Lilly because she has some affinity with the Far East.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, and this is Chinese.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, because it wasn't an influence.

MR. BROWN: But you had not--.

MS. SAARINEN: I'd never studied--.

MR. BROWN: And yet there's quite a coincidence in the Pekingese dogs and the form they take, not to mention their Chinese origin your dogs.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. And I loved them from the time I was eight.

MR. BROWN: I know. Did you see a good deal of Eliel when you started there. Was he the--did he come around? Did you befriend him?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, I saw him more than most of the students because he was Eero's father, and I was seeing a lot of Eero.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you were seeing a lot of Eero, right.

MS. SAARINEN: And I saw--I was scared of her [the mother, Louise (Loja) Gesellius Saarinen]. She was very rigid. But then I wasn't scared of her when Eliel was around because he could control her completely. You know, at first we used to have very stiff coffee parties you know, everybody in their proper place, all the way around, and supposed to be loosening up and talking about art, all the students of different departments of the Academy of Arts. And pretty soon after I got there, I noticed that there was a subtle change going on, and it was that Eliel didn't like these stuffy coffee parties. He thought we should have cocktails. So he'd have cocktails. He'd have his architect boys over, and then we'd all be asked eventually. It worked out so nicely. And it's what got us, all of us together. We didn't drink too much, just much more, less shy. But Loja wouldn't have thought of such a thing.

MR. BROWN: No. She preferred very formal things?

MS. SAARINEN: Very formal, very Germanic. She was the most perfect Germanic hausfrau that you could have imagined.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean? Do you mean very neat and organized?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, extremely. When the house was finished, it was finished. There was no room for imagination or for a mistake or for anything to be fixed. You know, it was all perfect. There was just no room for growth somehow, and to breathe. I can't explain it.

MR. BROWN: Didn't Eero find that stifling?

MS. SAARINEN: I think so. I think that's one reason he liked me because I was messy. [Laughing]

MR. BROWN: What was his--you could see--he was in a way his father's student, wasn't he, there? What was he like around his father, then, when he was still studying and just doing his first project?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, he was always very respectful of him and very jealous of him, deep down, frankly. He hadn't found himself. The way he set out to find himself was to do furniture and win competitions that his father didn't win or didn't go into. Sometimes his father did win the ones he went into. In fact, he won a competition to come to this country. The Chicago Tribune competition of 1922, Eliel did. He thought it was a wonderful way for young people to learn, and I still think it is. Other people have ideas; they hate that idea of competition. I don't at all. I think if you've got it in you, the drive, you're going to survive competition. I mean, survive losing in a competition.

MR. BROWN: Well, was Eero at this time--did he strike you as very imaginative?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, the first thing he asked me to make was a little tiny soap carving. He said, "Have you ever carved in soap?" And I said, "I used to go in the Ivory Soap competition." He said, "Oh, so did I." And I said, "Did you ever win anything?" He said, "Yes," he won three things. And I never won one. So that made him like me, I think, too. [Laughs] But so he said, "Will you make me a little--to scale," he said. "Do you know what that means?" and I did, just in the simplest way, "a little statue for this mockup of an interior that I've made for competition, for the mantlepiece of it." And that was the first little private job. Of course, nobody ever mentioned money or thought of it, you see. I didn't want any money for that. I don't think I--.

MR. BROWN: And was he pleased with what you did?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. He had to show me what he wanted without doing it. And I did my own, which I think was probably more interesting. I think might have been. But he knew where to put it on the mantle. And you said, "Was he very imaginative?" I would say he was very inventive. He was inventive. For instance, that black, black iron stuff that the beer factory is made of. What's the name of that stuff?

MR. BROWN: Oh--.

MS. SAARINEN: Black, but it's called--. It's very strong stuff and very rigid.

MR. BROWN: Not a steel or something?

MS. SAARINEN: No, but it's a steel that is a different--steel with something in it that makes it rust without rusting away.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. SAARINEN: If you lay out--.

MR. BROWN: Corten or something like that.

MS. SAARINEN: Corten, that's it, right. I began doing things in that, but big things. But that--he used--that had been done before in this country, and he didn't invent Corten. He dug it up. So that was a matter of research, and then choice and cleverness of finding it. And then it was--the reason he glazed the bricks on General Motors was because he liked the glazed bricks on Winnetka, I think. And he liked glazed bricks. It's marvelous, but it's almost too good to be a General Motors Technical Center. It's like a temple. And he got all the same colors that I have in my book by chance. And that did it in a huge mass scale, that each building's blue. Have you seen it?

MR. BROWN: Um hmm. But so you would say that he was superb at selecting and inventing and choosing and researching?

MS. SAARINEN: And getting the right people to do it.

MR. BROWN: Was he quite persuasive at getting the right people to do work with him?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, he tried everything. He had a sort of Germanic system. You know, how the Germans persist and persist and--there's a word for it. That, you know, persistence makes--if you persist--.

MR. BROWN: Right. "If at first you don't succeed," and so forth. "Try, try again."

MS. SAARINEN: "Try, try, again." And he would--. He didn't trust his own judgment very often. And sometimes at night when everyone had gone out of the office and gone to bed my studio was downstairs he'd ask me up to see something, knowing I'm not an architect in the slightest. And he just wanted to have my intuition about how it looked. This mass with this door, with this thing, you know. And without knowing anything about--well, I'd have to know a bit, a little about the plan, the function and things, to be able to say anything, but he--I think he lacked his father's intuition self-confidence and his intuition and made up for it in other ways. For instance, this, the chair thing was imagination. He didn't invent plywood, but he knew the factory that made plywood glider wings in--where's the big furniture place outside of Detroit?

MR. BROWN: Miller or--.

MS. SAARINEN: Famous place--.

MR. BROWN: Herman Miller?

MS. SAARINEN: No. It's another famous--more famous and more old-fashioned. But he took a piece of this plywood, and he got it in his head that maybe he could make a chair out of it. It had form, and it was really, it really had form. It's where [Francie {inaudible}, plastic shirts] comes

from. Now that--. When the Design for Modern Living came into--the competition for the Design for Modern Living was put out by the Modern Museum of Art [Detroit Institute of Arts, 1949].

MR. BROWN: When was this? In the 1930s or--.

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, when was the--.

MR. BROWN: Probably before World War II.

MS. SAARINEN: No, no, it was after.

MR. BROWN: It was after.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, it was after the war. After we went to the war--I can't tell you that. That has to be looked up, but that'll be in his chair, in this [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: Okay. But he entered this competition.

MS. SAARINEN: He entered this competition absolutely wholeheartedly as one of his ways to make a name on his own. And then Charlie [Charles] Eames came along and seemed a very affable person to work with and also with wonderful ideas. Charlie had his ideas, and together they put in this whole thing and they won everything every category in this--.

MR. BROWN: They did?

MS. SAARINEN: Um hmm. And it's hard to tell which was which, but really, I would say that's Eero's invention, Eero's recognition of what you could do with the hascolite--.

MR. BROWN: Hascula, the plywood, molded plywood.

MS. SAARINEN: Molded plywood in chair form and in bed form and in footstools and end tables. That was inventive of him in a sense. He didn't invent the thing, but he recognized it.
MR. BROWN: Was Eames, on the other hand, the designer? The man who--.

MS. SAARINEN: Well, Eames had--I would say that Ray [Kaiser Eames, wife of Charles Eames] had quite an influence on the shapes. And both of us sisters, we sat in all the chairs all the time because she had an entirely different figure than mine. And if it was comfortable for both of us, it must be right, we figured. And it was awfully funny. Then Charlie was the one that became so ingenious with wood laminated wood, more than bentwood, three-way curves, three-dimensional wood. He became a virtuoso on that, and when he went out west and left Cranbrook and all that lovely era was over, he didn't have the money for steel tools, for carpenter's tools for a carpenter shop. And he made his tools out of wood. So that's how smart he was with wood. But you see he had a lot to do with that.

MR. BROWN: Was Eames there at the same time when you came to Cranbrook?

MS. SAARINEN: No, not yet. He came soon.

MR. BROWN: Well, then you and Eero got married in '39 or so?

MS. SAARINEN: I think that was it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. You'd been there several years. And did you settle--had he designed--did you live right near the place? Right in Cranbrook?

MS. SAARINEN: Right on Cannery Row because Eero was teaching under his father in city design, what do you call it?

MR. BROWN: City planning.

MS. SAARINEN: City planning. And he never liked teaching because he was too itchy to do his own work, which I'm not surprised. But he never could be a good teacher. He couldn't be that generous, and Eliel had so, said so much in his life that he was very patient because he liked the students, not teaching.

MR. BROWN: And Eero never had that patience?

MS. SAARINEN: No, he was too ambitious. Yet, so far. And then, let me see. He and Charlie did an awful lot of work and thinking together, I would say, that was very complementary. What Eero lacked in coldness and stiffness, Charlie had in warmth and gaiety. Let's see--now I'm--.

MR. BROWN: Did Eero continue to collaborate with his father down to his father's death? [My confidence in the transcription diminishes here due to poor tape quality -- Transcriber]

MS. SAARINEN: No. The big break of that was [inaudible]. I'll tell you a little vignette about that. In nineteen--. When was the competition for the Arch? 1948? [Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Competition for Sculpture Gateway to the West, 1948]

MR. BROWN: '48 or so.

MS. SAARINEN: I think it was. I know we got $48,000. When I say "we," I mean he and his team, but I was one of them. He only had five. And he was by far the head of it. So it was 1948 and $48,000. That's why I can remember it. Let's see, Eliel also entered that competition. And George Howell was the--.

MR. BROWN: The juror?

MS. SAARINEN: No, he was the--he started the whole idea and started that whole getting the money for it.

MR. BROWN: For this arch in St. Louis?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, promoted the whole thing. And when he said--when it was judged finally, after a terrific lot of problems there came a telegram to--. I told you this, I think. There came a telegram to Eliel saying, "Thank you. Congratulations. You have won the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Competition, your wonderful solution." And then all of a sudden, the older Saarinens asked us over to champagne, you know, a celebration. It was just us alone. And then when we got back, just as we walked in the door, the telephone rang, and it was George Howell on the phone and he said--. He felt simply terrible, that he'd made an awful mistake. It was Eero who had won it. I think I did tell you that.

MR. BROWN: No.

MS. SAARINEN: I guess I told other people about that. It was Eero who'd won it. So this was the show of how wonderful Eliel was, really, both of them. So Eero called that up to his father, and his father said, "Well, congratulations, come on over and have another bottle of champagne." Which we did, of course. And then Eliel was happy in two ways. He'd come that close and his son had come first. And it's just what his son needed. Exactly what he needed.
Tape 2, side A

MS. SAARINEN:--so that was a really very, very marvelous thing. Then I was to go--. And Eero said, "Hurry up and go to New York and get a nice dress now; you don't have anything that looks like anything." And I went to New York, and I thought, "Oh, my goodness." He said, "Yes, we'll probably all be sitting at a table, not because of first prize, and all the prize winners will be. And so I went to Lord and Taylor's and I asked--. I got some net and I got some taffeta, and I didn't know what I was doing, and I asked the woman in Lord and Taylors if there was any dressmaker she knew of, and she told me about one in Jackson Heights and I went flying over there. And I said, "Could you do this little drawing of this dress for me in the next two days?" And she was just beginning working, and I saw that she could sew well, and I knew exactly what I wanted. So I stood for hours while she made me this sort of--you know, it was net up here, and then it was net down here, and the rest was taffeta. It was quite nice and French looking, modest, but a little bit risqué. And then I went tearing back and I almost missed my train back to St. Louis, with this dress. Oh! And when I got to the hotel, they took me up to Eero's room, and no one was there, not a soul. And still I didn't

know that it--now it's something funny. Still I didn't know it was they who had won it--Eero.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you weren't, didn't--.

MS. SAARINEN: We knew that Eliel hadn't.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. SAARINEN: But we didn't know whether Eero had yet. We still didn't know.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you didn't! The phone call hadn't made that clear?

MS. SAARINEN: No, it hadn't made it clear. It had made it clear that the mistake was made that Eliel had not won it.

MR. BROWN: I see. Yes.

MS. SAARINEN: That's a very important point to get right when I say it.

MR. BROWN: Then, when we got to the hotel, I went upstairs and waited, and suddenly the telephone rang, and it was George Howell, and he said, "Oh, is this Lilian?" and I said, "Yes." And he said, "Is anybody there?" and I said, "Nobody's here?" He said, "Well, I'll just tell you that it's Eero and his group that won, and you can tell them when they come." And I was a friend of his then. He liked my work. He has a drawing of--George Howell, I loved him. He was such a sweet person.
But anyway, so then I had the great pleasure of telling them that this was all official and so forth. And it's lucky I had the dress.

MR. BROWN: How did--.

MS. SAARINEN: I think Eero sensed--Eero might have been--I think he sensed that it was him.

MR. BROWN: That he had won?

MS. SAARINEN: I have a feeling.

MR. BROWN: He was pretty sharp.

MS. SAARINEN: Or somebody else might--I'm not sure; I really don't know.

MR. BROWN: How did he take the news that he had won?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, well, naturally it was a thrill. Just thrilled. I mean, you know--.

MR. BROWN: But his father was very generous. Even in defeat, he was proud of his son.

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, extremely. And Eero I'm sure appreciated his father's magnitude or whatever you call it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MS. SAARINEN: Yeah, that was very exciting.

MR. BROWN: But all of this was overshadowing--well, of course, you had two little children, but also your own work was--you weren't doing it very regularly at that time either, were you?

MS. SAARINEN: No, but I had--. What I was doing, I had a job for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, and I was in the middle of that when Jay Barr, one of the five that did the main drafting for the Arch--he came by, and he said, "Hey, Lilly, what's that for?" and I said, "It's for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. It's for a bar out west." And he said, "Well, we could use this for the--." Somebody else--. I had suggested another sculptor for them, and he had come and failed. I felt terrible about this.

MR. BROWN: What was the sculpture to be?

MS. SAARINEN: Henry Kreis. Kreis was a great friend I'd suggested, because I thought he could

do it.

MR. BROWN: What was it to be? Something outside by the Arch?

MS. SAARINEN: No, it was the underground.

MR. BROWN: Oh, in--. Yes, right, under the Arch.

MS. SAARINEN: It was completely separate. It wouldn't have even been necessary. As it turns out, they've never done it because the Arch was so expensive and so much more than they thought.

MR. BROWN: Yes. But you did a--you were going to do in ceramic sculpture, something of the Mississippi River, weren't you?

MS. SAARINEN: A colored bronze. What do you call that? Enameled bronze. I was doing--. You see, there was a long hall that you were walking through, and part of it was a museum and the other was something else and the other was maybe more museum. I don't remember just what. I was only interested in my part. [Laughs] It was a pool, a great big pool, and then you walked around the edges of the pool, which was very arresting, of course. And then it was open to the sky. And I did a very linear thing in bronze, in enameled bronze, of the joining of the Mississippi and the Missouri, up in the air, not touching the water or the ground or anything, and attached only by one of two tubes into the pool that you didn't even see. So it looked as if you were inside the experience of the joining of the Mississippi with the Columbia--wasn't it?

MR. BROWN: The Missouri.

MS. SAARINEN: Missouri. And yes, but it came out to the Columbia River, so I did a canoe with Lewis and Clark and I did things that would happen along the edges. They make like little knots in the river you know, Indians drinking. I did some horses drinking and covered wagons drinking. And all kinds of things using the water the way you would. Fishing. And so those were--all those little things would have been about this big just about [the] right size to see what they were. Horses.

MR. BROWN: About two feet long. Yeah.

MS. SAARINEN: Yeah, oh, yeah. But the whole conception--.

MR. BROWN: But it didn't get beyond the model stage?

MS. SAARINEN: No. There was a picture of it in the winning prize.

MR. BROWN: But you did this on your own through Skidmore, Owings and Merrill?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, when they--. Yes. No. When they said, "Oh, how about stopping doing this for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, and do the same idea and transfer it from the Great Lakes to the Missouri/Mississippi?" So I did exactly that. It was things that were happening along the water's edge, and the Lewis and Clark canoes and Sacajawea were standing there, and--it was very abstract little spots all along--.

MR. BROWN: Was this about the same time they just worked on the shape of the Arch? It was also about 1948, the same time that Eero's team--.

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, yes. That was right when they were hot on that. Because that's when they realized that Henry Kreis couldn't make the thing. See, Eero was trying to tell him what to do, and Henry wouldn't take what he was telling him. And it was terribly sad, and I felt awful. I felt awful because I was very fond of Henry Kreis.

MR. BROWN: But did Eero tell you what to do or you were--.

MS. SAARINEN: No, Eero said, "You've got to do it." 'Cause they all wanted my thing, but translated into their subject form-wise. You know, the silver and gold water and the colored--.

MR. BROWN: So this was the first real high point in Eero's career, when he won that competition, but you had had some work also in the early 1940s, hadn't you, the public works of art project, the

U.S. Treasury projects. Do you think those were pretty important in your career? You did something for a post office in Kentucky--.

MS. SAARINEN: Now they seem so old hat to me that I can't judge it on the whole. No, I feel what I did for--. I think one of the biggest thrills I ever got was when Jay Barr said, "This is what we want. We want what you're doing for Skidmore, Owings. To heck with them." I was thrilled, of course.

MR. BROWN: Sure. Sure.

MS. SAARINEN: And then it had to be passed by Eero and everybody, and everybody passed on it. And said it was great to do it. So I still want to do a little model of it.

MR. BROWN: Were you, at that time, yourself fairly dependent on Eero's approval and disapproval of what you did? Do you think?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, I couldn't--if he hadn't approved of that, I wouldn't have--. The others couldn't have gone over him.

MR. BROWN: No. I didn't mean--. I mean, did you sort of psychologically depend on whether he liked something, or were you pretty much self-sufficient in terms of judging your own work?

MS. SAARINEN: Both. Yeah, I mean that thing for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill was completely mine. He had absolutely nothing to do with it. I guess I was completely on my own by that time. And for a while I did things that were slightly Millesish. They'd have little decorations, little decorative spots, around that I wouldn't do now. I just would have it a clean form, you know. [Interruption in taping]

MS. SAARINEN: There was one time when Eero's Arch was like Mussolini's arch. In other words, in plan he had it as a triangle and not as a tripod, three, a triangle. You remember that very clumsy arch of Hitler's? I mean, of Mussolini's.

MR. BROWN: Of Mussolini's.

MS. SAARINEN: This is what I mean when I say it [retreiving names] is hard for me. The triangle is infinitely more sculptural, and once when Eero asked Carl Milles for a criticism of the whole thing, he suggested that it be triangular.

MR. BROWN: Yes?

MS. SAARINEN: The whole Arch.

MR. BROWN: Oh.

MS. SAARINEN: Which lightens it enormously and simplifies the light and makes it infinitely more graceful. And then Fritz somebody, a critic in the New York papers, gave an analysis of the Arch but he didn't happen to know and it's just as well, I guess that it's thanks to Carl Milles that that arch was triangular in sections.

MR. BROWN: In section. Where it had been square before?

MS. SAARINEN: It had been--but who knows Eero might have come across the same discovery himself, but I rather doubt it. I happen to know that--. I was aware of it because I'd studied bull's horns, which are very intricate, and I've often wondered what made them so beautiful. And Eero never gave credit to Carl for that, but on the other hand if Eero's going to off the record just ask for criticism from Carl, why should he give credit to Carl? Carl was an old man
who was kind enough to say what he thought. And I think Carl never spoke to him again after that, though.

MR. BROWN: Oh, really.

MS. SAARINEN: That's the sad part. That was a very sad thing, because having done it, it was a

very irresistible thing for Eero to do. And Carl was the older man and he had had his day, practically.

MR. BROWN: But Carl wanted credit. He wished he could have had it.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, he did.

MR. BROWN: Did Eero become kind of arrogant after that, or not?

MS. SAARINEN: No, I think it--I don't think it even--he didn't show that it upset him. I think that he was sad that Carl and he never spoke again, but that was the reason why.

MR. BROWN: How did--.

MS. SAARINEN: They never did get along too well, anyway. They were very different people, Carl and Eero.

MR. BROWN: Was Carl more sort of an intuitive or impulsive person, and Eero more organized?

MS. SAARINEN: No. Carl was very organized about what he was supposed to be organized about, but rather free when he didn't have to be organized. And Eero almost was scared when he wasn't organized in a rather Germanic way. And I think they were very different types.

MR. BROWN: How did Carl--excuse me.

MS. SAARINEN: Carl was very bitter at the fact that his own people in Sweden didn't appreciate his work. That was a source of bitterness. And Eero always admired his things very much, as a matter of fact. What did you say?

MR. BROWN: What was the relation of Eero and his father Eliel before Eliel's death, following say this Eero's winning the competition after the--.

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, it was just the same. It was very good.

MR. BROWN: Very good.

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, yes. You'd never know anything had gone wrong. There was no rancor on Eero's part. I know there wasn't. I know that he felt he got so much from his father that--and his father had done so much and accomplished so much that there was nothing to grieve about, just be very glad about.

MR. BROWN: Was his father quite active till his death?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, he was. In fact, I went in one afternoon, very hot afternoon, and found him looking very hot and tired. I often did this on the way home from swimming in the evening. At Cranbrook it was so lovely swimming there. And he said, "Oh, what can I do for you?" And he always was very friendly, and I said, "Well, as a matter of fact, can I have a cigarette? But that isn't just why I've come. I've come to see you." [Laughs] And he walked over to the drawer and opened it and got out a pack of cigarettes. I smoked a lot in those days. I don't smoke now. And he--when I got home, we were going to go to the Girards, Alexander Girard's for dinner in Grosse Point, and the telephone rang and it was Loja, and in a hysterical voice she said, "Your father has gone up to your chairs." He always did at about twenty after six. "And he's gone to sleep and I don't think he's just asleep. I'm afraid something worse has happened." And then she began to sob, and Eero went right over there. And he had just died without any sign of pain, any sign while I was there of the slightest fear or panic. He had just gone up to have his nap, and so that was a very good death for him. He did know he had high blood pressure, and he didn't stop eating raw, salty fish like any true Finn. And that was bad for him. And he lived to be 76. But he could have lived, I think, to be 86, just the way [Alvar] Aalto could have. But they were high-livers. They loved life and good food and drinks and all, and when they were young--.

MR. BROWN: Because you wanted to do animals, right?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. Yes. And so I did get my fingers in the feel of clay. And that went on for about two winters, and I think I was one of her best students, but I never did exactly what she wanted because of wanting to do animals. Well, and yeah, I copied cold some Greek sheep.

MR. BROWN: But as an adult artist, young artist, when did you first start doing clay modeling quite a lot?

Tape 2, side B

MS. SAARINEN:--and that was at Cranbrook.

MR. BROWN: At Cranbrook. Now you--.

MS. SAARINEN: I was twenty-five.

MR. BROWN: And you went out there? And was this in the late thirties or so that you went out there? In 1930s. You went out there and what? You mean, you studied ceramics or--. How did that begin?

MS. SAARINEN: No, I went to study with Carl Milles, and I was making a Mowgli and Bagheera in Plastiline and an armature. And Carl Milles came along and said, "Why are you making those round lines? Bears aren't round. Every line, every contour is a straight line with a turn at the end of it. And it's unsweet. It's unsweet. Like you're just doing round blobs. And from then on I started doing practically boxes. Most anything stiff. Nobody liked it. I didn't like it. Carl didn't like it. I couldn't get the character of the animal into it.

MR. BROWN: You took his lesson too much to heart, or his advice.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, too much to heart. And it was very good, though, in the end, because I all of a sudden started making clay dragons for a job. For Pipsan Swanson, Eero's sister, for a job. And for it I had to make a lot of little sketches of what I would do. I didn't want to do dragons. So I made the birth of a Pekingese
dog the first birth of a Pekingese dog, which is a marmoset marrying a lion. And so I did the marmoset marrying the lion, and then I did the lion marrying the marmoset, and then I did the combination. Three Pekingese dogs was their offspring. That's how I got out of doing St. George and the Lion. I mean a typical dragon, a historical dragon. I could make my own dragon.

MR. BROWN: This is while you were working with or studying with Carl Milles. Is that right?

MS. SAARINEN: No, but he said--. When he saw my sketches, he said, "Now you're talking." And I said, "But Carl, these are round. These are very free. I just didn't even think about whether they were round or not." And he said, "Never mind. That's the character of clay. You do a solid--you do a hollow thing if it's big, or you do a solid thing, and then you add little frills all over it and it's very baroque and it's perfect for clay." So then I thought, "Ah, I found a good material for me."

MR. BROWN: Now these bears we're looking at here, these are among the earliest things you did?

MS. SAARINEN: No. I didn't do that under Carl.

MR. BROWN: But these are fairly early examples of what you were doing? Now is this--. By this time, this is the early forties, you think. These grizzly bears, are these--.

MS. SAARINEN: Those are hollow, when I knew quite a lot about clay. And I did do this very big thing.

MR. BROWN: Did you work with--was there anybody that you could go to out there? You stayed on at Cranbrook, is that right?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, I went to Cranbrook for at least ten years.

MR. BROWN: And you stayed--was there somebody you could work with?

MS. SAARINEN: I was living on the campus because I married Eero.

MR. BROWN: You married Eero shortly after you--Eero Saarinen, shortly after you went--.

MS. SAARINEN: But I did a lot a work before I married him, here.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But was there anybody at Cranbrook that you could study the clay with?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. I could ask Maija [Majlis] Grotell if this is such and such that I'd made. First Eero told me that he once made a hollow lion and that he thought I'd be very scared of the material because I had to be so particular. And I said, "Oh, that doesn't worry me. I'm sure I can do that."

MR. BROWN: What did he mean by that, "be very particular"?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, he made a lion--well, to build up hollow, a sculpture hollow, is quite an advanced thing to be able to do. And he was quite sure I wasn't going to be able to do it, so he warned me of the pitfalls. And then I never asked him since, because what I did after that I did for limestone for him.

MR. BROWN: But you went on on your own and did hollow clay work?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, yes, separately. But any job that came, I dropped everything and did that.

MR. BROWN: But by that time, you were most at home in clay. Is that right?

MS. SAARINEN: No, not yet.

MR. BROWN: Not yet.

MS. SAARINEN: Well, yes, I was beginning to get at home with clay. There were all kinds of ways--.
[Interruption in taping]

MS. SAARINEN:--successful one since my scolding from Milles about not making round things, and it was in clay, and it was small enough not to explode. That's all I can say about that. You can make things solid as long as it's not thicker than a brick. If you've ever noticed, why are bricks the thickness they are, that's why. Because it will explode if it's bigger, because it has danger of having water, collecting water, when it's drying out too fast in a kiln, in the heat of the kiln. A stone or a drop of water will make the whole piece burst, because it has to get out, as the clay shrinks. I've said it much better than that.

MR. BROWN: Did you have some real mishaps in that way, yourself? [Laughs]

MS. SAARINEN: Yes.

MR. BROWN: You had some accidents that occurred to you?

MS. SAARINEN: Yeah, even after I was good at it. But I have a thing called--. After trying a few materials such as wood and clay and even stone, and then after drawing a lot, I learned that I had to understand the nature of the material. Now clay is really mud, and if you treat it right, like the Indians do--you'll get a manure fire, get it through the fire, because it's only a brick thick. Otherwise you have to do it in sections to get a bigger piece. It's still got to be thin, like a pot. So I began making all my animals in pot form. But they weren't in pot form; they were actual animals and people.

MR. BROWN: Yes, but they had to be assembled when they were large.

MS. SAARINEN: When they were very large, yes. That's a whole other thing. They have to be a--if it's a seven-foot figure, it has to be at least three inches thick the walls. But hollow, open under the stomach.

MR. BROWN: In these years did you do quite a lot of experimentation?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. I was finding it out the hard way. [Laughs]

MR. BROWN: Well, you mentioned Maija Grotell, but were there other people, other artists, that you could talk to?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, Maija could help me with the firing because she had a kiln, and she could say, "That's too thick in that place." But I don't remember that she did much. I seem to have learned that myself already by making something too thick.

MR. BROWN: And it just exploded.

MS. SAARINEN: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Were there any other sculptors who were working in ceramic then, that you knew about or talked to?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. One--wait a minute. Arch Winter.

MR. BROWN: Arch Winter.

MS. SAARINEN: He got very well known as a potter. There were many potters there, but there were no sculptors doing free forms the way I was. So I was always in more trouble than--asking for trouble, but I got very proficient at being sure that the thickness of the clay was even, and that anything that you put on it, top, on the surface, had to be very well scratched and joined, or it would peel off in the firing, and my whole life was mixed up with doing what I wanted to do according to the rules of what clay says you must do.

MR. BROWN: So was there a tension there? You said, "The clay says you must do this," and yet you wanted to do certain things.

MS. SAARINEN: No. The clay and I got along very well. [Laughter] Because I was willing to give in and fake something to look like a tiny ear by having the base of it very thick. And then it was--. I mean, very thick so that it wouldn't break off.

MR. BROWN: And studded into the body of the form?

MS. SAARINEN: Right. In fact I used to put babies on top of big mother sculptures hollow ceramic. I used to figure they'd get broken in shipping or they might get knocked off in the kiln, so I made them like corks. Stick them in--. I'd make a hole, and then make the two little animals with a little cork on the bottom of them and stick them in the back.

MR. BROWN: So they could be removed if necessary.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. To ship and put back on when it arrived.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs] Speaking of shipping--.

MS. SAARINEN: Also it wouldn't get knocked off, see.

MR. BROWN: Speaking of shipping, leads me--were you exhibiting, and getting some public reaction to your work?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, I was.

MR. BROWN: Fairly early?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, I was. California Arts and Architecture was one magazine that took my things constantly and sympathetically because Charles Eames and Ray Eames liked what I did very much and it was a big help.

MR. BROWN: And they were people you'd met at--.

MS. SAARINEN: Met at Cranbrook. Because he was working with Eero on chairs. And they didn't know about how to do clay exactly, but they liked my things very much, and it was very encouraging. And it taught me more and more, you just have to go the way a material is metal too. I was annealing metal with Harry Bertoia. That's hammering it out repoussé. And I found myself

doing clay repoussé underneath so as to get it hollow. And that way I could have cross-structures to strengthen a very delicate piece.

MR. BROWN: Underneath? Yes.

MS. SAARINEN: Underneath. And you never saw the underneath unless you picked it up, and then it was interesting anyway to look at.

MR. BROWN: And in a lot of this, you were probably pioneering, weren't you?

MS. SAARINEN: I guess so. I didn't know it at the time. I didn't know it, but I certainly didn't disagree with any hints I got from Maija or--but she had never seen a seven foot lion in Bagheera Mowgli and Bagheera. She couldn't get over it. And I had to make that so that it was possible to come in three pieces seven feet long, in three sections. That's a very advanced stage in there.

MR. BROWN: Now, I was asking again about people seeing your work. You had a commission in Fenton, Michigan, very early, didn't you? You did raccoons and things like that.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. Eero came through the classroom and picked me out to do some frivolous sort of charming little things on his ornate columns of this Fenton, Michigan, civic center. That was one of his first commissions in building. That was up in the north of Michigan. And he had limestone columns so I had to do limestone raccoons, and limestone Indian oxen heads, and sort of things of the early country days.

MR. BROWN: Did you enjoy doing this? This was about your first commission with a building wasn't it?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, but actually what I did was I made them in plasticine, and cast them in plaster, and then they were pointed up in limestone and were inherently carved, not by me, but by someone else exactly to my directions.

MR. BROWN: To your model.

MS. SAARINEN: To my model. That was a different thing.

MR. BROWN: Were you pleased with the results?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, and so was he. It was just a wonderful commission to have the first time.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. SAARINEN: It had nothing to do with clay, yet.

MR. BROWN: No. And of course you did other things in other buildings with Eero. At what point would he bring you in to the design of a building where he wanted you to do sculpture? Was he thinking about your putting in sculpture fairly early on, do you think?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, always.

MR. BROWN: He did. He would think of--.

MS. SAARINEN: That's because his father taught him that.

MR. BROWN: That you bring the sculpture in in your thinking pretty early?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. But, you see, the thing is they would, for instance--the first pioneering, contemporary school in America was the Crow Island School [Winnetka, Illinois] and I was asked to decorate the walls for the young children, and then getting older, and up to teenagers. And they would--Eliel designated that he wanted a sculpture here, rectangular sculpture, and there the brickman would leave a hole for me. So then I'd go home and make something to fit into that hole where there were no bricks. And I'd just make it like a square sort of rectangular box, and then on top of it I'd have my animal, an animal.
[Interruption in taping]

MR. BROWN: Now we're looking at a cow and a pig from these high reliefs, and these I guess are for the younger children. They're very graphic, very--certain things are emphasized, the eyes and the patterns on the coats, and the udder on the cow, and I notice the snout and the ears are an entirely different color from the body of the pig.

MS. SAARINEN: And then I have a horse, a red horse.

MR. BROWN: Yes. It's right here.

MS. SAARINEN: There are three of them.

MR. BROWN: Did you consider--and these, you had to fit them into the format that Eliel Saarinen had designed, is that right?

MS. SAARINEN: Yeah. Just a regular rectangle, a very simple oblong, a square.

MR. BROWN: And these are all fairly near the ground because this is, as you said earlier, a pioneering concept in the schools. One of the first one-story schools, isn't it?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes.

MR. BROWN: With these doors that open from each classroom outside.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, so there were all these little courts, and each courtyard had sculpture. And I did purposely come down low enough for children to be able to touch them, and that was half the point, to have them relate to it.

MR. BROWN: They're very brightly colored. How did you achieve that?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, that's glazed. Just a yellow--you don't want to go into the subject of glaze, because it's very complicated. But it's just a--this is a cobalt blue glaze, and this is transparent over an absolute buff clay. But I had to go--to withstand the Chicago weather, these had to be high-fired when they were in the clay, when they were finished in the clay state, fired once already. They had to go for the high-fire because the low-fire glazes are red and bright and blue and yellow.

MR. BROWN: And they wouldn't withstand the weather? The low fire wouldn't be--.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, the clay would have disintegrated if I hadn't done it to high-fire first. Then when it was high-fired, I also had to think about the shrinkage from the dimensions I was given to set it in the frame. Then it would be--a second firing went down to lower fire, cone 04, to be exact. And that's when the color was put on. And that was glaze, and it just meant two stages. And these were hollow wherever possible, but not really because of frost getting caught in the little holes.

MR. BROWN: You had to be very careful.

MS. SAARINEN: You had to be very careful because of the frost. And that's how I made those.

MR. BROWN: Now did you ask children or did you show children some of the drawings?

MS. SAARINEN: No.

MR. BROWN: What was the--.

MS. SAARINEN: They liked them.

MR. BROWN: They did like them. What was their reaction? Do you remember at all? Did you sort of--.

MS. SAARINEN: Well, I wasn't there when they reacted, but I just know the whole school and Eliel was very pleased and amused. And the children used to go up and touch them, and sometimes they'd go a little too high to a rabbit, and they'd say, "Now don't do that because it might fall off."

MR. BROWN: Now this was for the youngest children. For the older ones, there's a series here of different heads and Indian and others where you--.

MS. SAARINEN: This classroom was studying Indian lore, American Indian, and that's why I chose that. I tried to choose subjects that were being studied by these children. That happens to be the entrance of the school, right at the entrance, inside. And it's just Noah's Ark.

MR. BROWN: A whole series, group of animals, different kinds.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. Just the dove, and a head of Noah, and a pair of wolves. It's the only interior one.

MR. BROWN: These are very simplified and you found the children responded? Or you were told the children responded very easily to it?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, they did. I remember some little kid saying, "Bird, bird, bird," you know.

MR. BROWN: Now, you worked fairly early in the design of this building with the architect?

MS. SAARINEN: Right from the word go. I was just shown blueprints. And I'm not good at reading blueprints, but this was so simply done and well articulated for me that I could tell how deep the indenture should be, so that I'd know what size to make my pieces and I'd know the clay would shrink about a third all around, inches. I had to think about that. Well, I did everything else. I just did what I wanted. I didn't have to get approval.

MR. BROWN: But in the end, you were saying earlier, you really didn't get full credit for your work.

MS. SAARINEN: I got no credit whatsoever. I mean I didn't get a credit line. People who saw them were crazy about them. In a show that we had at Cranbrook, the student's show, they were all up on a board, and that made a big to do and that pleased
me. Then when we got on the site and The Architectural Forum announced about this first modern school where children were allowed to raise their hands and go to the bathroom instead of being herded out every four hours. This was very modern. Well, so--.

MR. BROWN: When you got there, there was no further mention of you? The Forum didn't mention your sculpture?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. There was no place in the hall when you went in or anywhere in the building where it was said, "All Sculptures in this building" there were thirty-six or forty "were made by Lilly Saarinen." And that hurt. But it didn't hurt till years later. I was so happy making them and having Eliel and Eero pleased with them, and the people in Chicago pleased with them, that it just never occurred to me that there was something missing. And I was only paid five hundred dollars for the whole job. But then, of course, the materials and the holes and the mason's architectural preparations were paid for by the architects.

MR. BROWN: Generally speaking, did Eliel like what you were doing and praise you and encourage you?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Did Eero, too?

MS. SAARINEN: He wasn't a raving type, but he's the one that really, I think, said, "I think Lilly should make these things," and asked Eero, and Eero said, "Fine." And then never once said, "Oh, we don't like this," or, "We don't like that." They just accepted the whole thing. This is what's so wonderful about Cranbrook. You were treated--except, I didn't get the credit for it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But you were--.

MS. SAARINEN: And that burns me right today, fifty years later, almost.

MR. BROWN: Do you think it was their doing? They just didn't think to give you credit?

MS. SAARINEN: I think it was just thoughtlessness. Because they were the same way about

buildings. Eero particularly, you know, had all these people working for him, and as long as he paid for them, he didn't think it was necessary to point out who did what. And that kind of thing I don't want to dwell on because it's depressing. But it was natural. It was acceptable if you're paid for something, but I was only paid five-hundred dollars for the whole lot.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Your real payment--.

MS. SAARINEN: Just because I was married to Eero, that was--yeah. So there was good that came out of it. And I was so thrilled to get the job.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MS. SAARINEN: Yeah.

Tape 3, side A [November 13, 1980, cont.]

MR. BROWN: But the Noah, what happened? That's a fifteen-foot-high ceramic sculpture, an outdoor fountain. What happened to that? You said there were--.

MS. SAARINEN: Well, I went with that--. I made Noah as a one long nightgown, a concave nightgown, blue glaze, in brilliant Egyptian blue glaze, for all the concave part of him. And he was really in relief, but projecting from the wall on metal rods, and into the back of him, so that the rods would pierce the whole nightgown all the way down, which I had cut in slits. And you could see the slits because I didn't see any reason for closing them up. They were very decorative anyway and it made it much easier to handle these pieces and then assemble them on-site. And I put Noah's Ark in back in between the wall and his back. And that was full of two heads of hippopotamus and two giraffes and pairs of animals. And then I had a system of putting his hand in a cuff so that it would be safe and then it could not be--.

MR. BROWN: Broken off or--.

MS. SAARINEN: So that it could not be broken off and it would also be able to travel in pieces, in separate pieces and be reassembled on the site, which made a great deal of difference in the difficulty in making the thing as a whole.

MR. BROWN: So you made it in your home, in your studio, and then it had to be assembled at the shopping center.

MS. SAARINEN: That's right. And then when it was assembled, there was a deadline as always, and I was coming with my cement and my--. I had at that point a very nice potter boy that was helping me as an assistant. And we brought the cement, which was not going to break the pair holes for the installation reasons. I had paired holes that the metal was supposed to go into the back and into the pair holes. And that was going to secure each piece. It was when we met that morning that we were supposed to have everything ready and installed, we brought our cement and we found that already the unions had ordered it to have a different material, a very dangerous material to clay, the kind of thing that you mend automobile--.

MR. BROWN: Bodies with or--.

MS. SAARINEN: No, radiators with. It contains a metal which swells inside and would break my pair holes which were clay. And if we had been able to use our cement, it would have worked perfectly and we could have done it ourselves. But the unions had to do it, and they used their own materials. Now that should never be allowed again.

MR. BROWN: And, in fact, did it break the holes?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, it broke the holes, and the thing began to drip down, and the people became very upset because they liked it very much and they didn't understand what was happening. And they--finally, I don't know how they put it together, but they made a mess of the whole thing, and then they painted it in pastel colors.

MR. BROWN: Oh, they painted your ceramic--.

MS. SAARINEN: They painted it, yes. Because the glaze was all cracked.

MR. BROWN: So I suppose that's a risk you take when you do such commissions. I mean, when it's out of your hands, I suppose the owner can do what they want with it, can't they?

MS. SAARINEN: Now they have a law against that. I found that out. Since I've been in Boston 25 years, only, is when I've lately found out that it's happened here. And on that Noah, that was strictly--that was stupid of me not to have realized that I should have just stood there and said, "Don't touch," and "Coming soon" for them to know that I was going to have them all installed properly and safely. So there was not--it was no fault of the clay--.

MR. BROWN: Could I ask a bit now. With--Noah you were showing as a very old man. One hand is in the cuff. The other hand is upraised, holding a bird, I think, isn't it?

MS. SAARINEN: The dove.

MR. BROWN: It's holding the dove, okay.

MS. SAARINEN: The dove.

MR. BROWN: And then around his waist is the Ark, from which come the little spouts of the fountain.

MS. SAARINEN: And the mouths of the animals. They're all spouting. And then the other hand--in the hands--the main body of the shoulders and the neck, right up to the top, was all in one piece, but the little things like that, I assembled and put in like corks into a bottle.

MR. BROWN: The one fit inside the other. One over the other, inside.

MS. SAARINEN: Yeah, then they were all weatherproof. And they were very easy to assemble.

MR. BROWN: So you were pleased with this work. When you came back here to Boston--.

MS. SAARINEN: Excuse me. Now there's something about the head I didn't tell you. The head was made especially right in front of me on my table in the studio. And it was just about four feet by three feet, the beard included, and I stuck that in like a cork into the neck. And so I had the same theme for the sleeves and the neck. And it all sounds very complicated, but it was actually very natural. It came very naturally.

MR. BROWN: And even--the way you put it together then gave it a unity. The whole thing sort of a unified--.

MS. SAARINEN: That's right. Yes, and the long, long fourteen-foot long nightgown, concave nightgown, all hung together, though it was split into parts with the splits showing.

MR. BROWN: Yes. And as you said, there are nice little horizontal, where it casts, with the shadows, nice little decorative pattern in itself, isn't it?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, it is. And it does cast the shadows. I hadn't thought of that. I knew it would happen. It always does with--.

MR. BROWN: So this piece was very well received, was it?

MS. SAARINEN: It was. It was very much appreciated, and I suppose very much misunderstood in the future, but people might have liked it anyway. I know the children crowded around it when they first saw it. And I heard tell that they continued to do so, but I can't imagine just how.

MR. BROWN: Well, you did--only through the fifties, did you do--you did one or two other commissions. You did one that's now destroyed we don't have it here; we maybe can talk about it for the Dutch airline at Idlewild, now Kennedy Airport, the KLM terminal, you did a globe around which were various animals, weren't they? Oh, we don't have the picture now, but that one was sort of an extension of what you had done here in Detroit, wasn't it?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, it was. I'd never thought about it until you told me.

MR. BROWN: You were continuing the same theme.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, I was continuing the same theme.

MR. BROWN: But since you've come back here, you've concentrated more on smaller pieces haven't you?

MS. SAARINEN: No, I did one architectural piece for Franklin Street in the heart of the business in Boston for the Harbor National Bank. And that was a relief constructed with the slab system, which is a story all of its own. And that I'd have to tell you about that some other time.

MR. BROWN: Oh, we can tell it now. It is Harbor National Bank commission was the late 1960s, and you were working in the slab technique.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, and that was related to the Noah, actually. The slab technique is all cut up, just as the pieces were cut up for Noah, for facilitation in fitting in the kiln and transporting to the site and--.

MR. BROWN: Assembling them.

MS. SAARINEN:--erecting, assembling them. And in this case, I made an idealized map of a--I was asked by two architects, two good architects in Boston to make a decoration for a wall, which they would have specially ordered in order to excuse the fact that they could put sculpture on it and a clock on it. Banks have to have a clock, so--that was fun for me. I made these clay forms that were reminiscent, vaguely reminiscent, of the Boston Harbor, and I hope nobody every tries to compare them, because no flight could ever make it on those airports that I made in clay. But I had the fun of making it like a map, and it was called Clock Harbor. I had to make the clock, too, as a matter of fact. And it was really a--it embellished the clock and it had codfish going out in one direction and little, all the--.

MR. BROWN: Other little fish going out the other.

MS. SAARINEN: Well, the Boston, the great Boston scrod and all the rest of it.

MR. BROWN: And the clock turning in the middle of that.

MS. SAARINEN: The clock is turning in the middle and the little seagulls are flying and the sun is coming up at one side and the moon at the other side. And then I had harbors cut out of the edges of the clay, where boats would be harbored. And so that children liked that too, and so did the people in the bank, very much. I was very happy because they had a great big black fellow watching the doors, and he always let me in, no matter what time it was, because he loved the sculpture so much. And it was quite a gaudy thing and it was painted blue because that's the color we used just to excuse the sculpture on the wall and be able to get the money for it.

MR. BROWN: Was that a good collaboration? You seemed to have liked doing that quite a lot. And you talk about children liking it. Is that quite important to you whether children like something?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. Yes, it's a very good checkmate, I think.

MR. BROWN: Why is it, do you suppose?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, because it--. I suppose I'd rather make children happy than I would almost anybody, or as much as anyone. And because they can understand things that grownups can't understand somehow.
I wrote on this plaque:
This sculpture was made for the Harbor National Bank (by me) by L.S.S. It is symbolic of harbors and banks the world over which offer security and encourage enterprise. A blue wall suggests both sea and sky for fish, seagulls, sun, moon, and stars. The large free forms are land, sloping down toward busy wharfs and jetties. A clock is central to the concept.

Since finishing that Harbor Bank, that sculpture, I was very pleased, and then I suddenly realized that they were going to change presidents every two years, which indeed they did, and the background became a different color every time I saw it. They repainted the blue into a foam green, which I rather liked, that was all right. But then I--and they left the--they were very careful of the sculptures, not to paint them. And then all of a sudden, I realized they were putting acrylic on top of the glaze that I had on the fishes, and the acrylic just make it look, well, like a cheap calendar. Now they have a rule that if someone is going to change an artist's work, they have to consult the artist first.

MR. BROWN: But they didn't then?

MS. SAARINEN: No.

MR. BROWN: So that was a risk, again, as I said earlier, that was a risk of accepting such commissions. You might find your work to be quite altered.

MS. SAARINEN: Well, I was just too enthusiastic to worry about it, and I'm glad I didn't because I had such fun making them anyway. But it's very grievous when something goes wrong.
Before I turned to clay for the majority of sculptures I was working on, I had made portraits in Plasticine of people I met and liked and had commissions for. And the plaster would be cast into bronze which was a very cumbersome indirect way to make it and very expensive way to make a life-size head, for instance. So when I moved here, I'd met some people I liked very much, and there was--in Boston, named Gardner Cox, who had seen some of my work and said he liked the portraits. And that pleased me very much because he's a very well known and excellent portrait painter and far superior to anything I could do. But I started with making a portrait of him, for which he sat on and off for two years. And it didn't bother me the interruptions, and it didn't bother him so I just thought "This is great; I can pick up right where I left off and I never would have thought I could." And therefore he could go away for jobs such as painting Robert Frost and go all over the place, and then we'd resume work. And he had a very rocky appearance, a very kindly sort of Santa Claus appearance. His face was not chiseled. It was clumpy and it was jovial like Santa Claus, but it was very interesting and strong, and it looked--. I have since been told that I made a portrait of him that looks like--that reminded someone of [Auguste] Rodin's Balzac, and that pleased me greatly. And I can see why; I think Gardner's head is rather like that. And at the end of the--when I finished this--.
[Interruption in taping]

MS. SAARINEN:--a portrait of his daughter [Phyllis ("Poppy") Byrne Cox], who was perfectly wonderful at posing, and we had long talks about life and its problems, and I had a perfectly delightful time because she was a beautiful girl. And then I did one of Edwin O'Connor out of clay, which was--he was author of The Last Hurrah. And he refused to sit for more than three times because I had a dog, a puppy, who was making a mess in the next room. So I had to finish it without his posing. But it came out to be a sort of horrible, Frankenstein-looking thing, but it won several prizes for its likeness. And I felt it was neither fish nor fowl. It was neither bronze nor clay as I saw either one of them.

MR. BROWN: It was a clay? Initially you made it in clay?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, I made it in clay and had to finish it in clay to fire it.

MR. BROWN: It's almost--parts of it are slab. The hair, the ears, and all look almost like to be slabs of clay.

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, that's true. Yes, and I glazed little hairs, short hairs that he had all over his thick head, thick hair on his head. They're all silver and gold, and that was a low-fired glaze that made them quite lively and like him. And then I had gray-blue eyes glazed, and the rest of it was just plain clay.

MR. BROWN: Did you try to capture just the way he looked? Or try to capture some of his

expression, the feeling you got about him?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, I wanted both because I, but then he didn't pose all the time, so I had to remember the feeling and impressions more, and also I had the problem that the clay would explode when I had it fired if I didn't finish it just as fast as possible. You know what I'm saying?

MR. BROWN: This is a very haunting kind of thing, really. The eyes are very deep set in large sockets. It's quite a different quality from your portraits of the Coxes or some of the other portraits you've done here, too, which are much more conventional likenesses.

MS. SAARINEN: That's true. I took complete licenses about the hollows of the opening of its mouth, which he did anyway. He talked a great deal. And then his eyes were very deep set. And I just was glad to express that it was clay that I was using, and so if there was something wrong, it was because I had to adhere to the difficulties of getting clay fired and safe without exploding.

MR. BROWN: Although admitting the limitations of the few times he sat for you and of the clay, it seems to me here you were trying to be more expressive than you were in the other portraits.

MS. SAARINEN: I don't know what you mean by expressive.

MR. BROWN: Well, I mean, to some extent at the expense of details of the likeness, you were concentrating, or emphasizing those features of Edwin O'Connor that would express his character or his force.

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, as a caricature more.

MR. BROWN: Well, approaching that.

MS. SAARINEN: More a caricature.

MR. BROWN: No.

MS. SAARINEN: And the ones of Gardner and his daughter, for instance, were more modeled--it was a lot of personal sensitivity, and I tried--I used just my fingers and left the strokes just the way painters leaves his paint strokes. You could see all the marks of my fingers. It was very rough and craggy in effect. And I didn't do it self-consciously; it just happened that way. But I never wanted to smooth it all over the way I could have done, but--it was better the way it was. As a matter of fact, on the one, the bronze head of Gardner, I had hollows. I gouged the eyes out and made sure that the bones around the socket of the eyes were very correct, as correct as I could make them, of the way his were formed naturally. And to this day, nobody has ever said, "Why did you hollow the eyes out?" or, "Are they hollow?" I think the funny thing is he wore glasses, and so you never--with a person with glasses on, you don't really see their eyes prominently sometimes and especially deep-set eyes. And his were deep-set. So the impression is it doesn't look abnormal. I was afraid it would, but I thought it was a very lucky license to have taken.

MR. BROWN: Now this was in the--these portraits you did mainly in the sixties. Since then have you done additional portraits, or what have you concentrated on, say in the last ten years? Have you concentrated on other kinds of work? Animal sculpture? Drawings or what?

MS. SAARINEN: I've been on the Cape a great deal in the summer and doing my beloved little animals around the grounds. And we're looking at them at night, as I always do when I get down on the Cape. I turn the nightlights on and I see the raccoons come out, and all day I see the squirrels, little red squirrels. And this summer, not having been well enough to sculpt physically big things, I made little sketches of them, which are so sincerely just my impression that I could never possibly repeat them without those sketches. So I think I'm going to make squirrels and sketches of raccoons and all sorts of things that I just jotted down last summer.
If you make a very sincere life sketch and a very quick one of little animals that you really know fundamentally a lot about and feel a lot about, you can really make a sculpture, a figure in the round, and know that you're on safe ground.

MR. BROWN: If you've made a sincere sketch?

MS. SAARINEN: It has to be honest and not changed, not fudged up. And anyway, if it goes all right, everything goes right, that's it. It's like a watercolor. But you don't erase anything on a watercolor. And you can't do that with clay either. It all dies; the freshness is gone.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose you've stuck with clay more than any other material.

MS. SAARINEN: Well, for one thing, I like doing small things and big things, and I like color glaze. I love to feel I can put spots of glaze on and bring the thing more to life, make it all the more real to children as well as grownups. And I've evolved a way of using clay slabs that is now, I think, the most interesting I've found out for myself. I'm sure it's been done forever but I can't think of instances in the past that I've copied from, but I just came across it in my own work. I make the piece from a slab and I just, I put a scrubbing brush all over it, not for texture, but just to give it more rigidity like a--. What do you call--.

MR. BROWN: A corrugated roof or something?

MS. SAARINEN: Corrugated roof. Rather than flat thing that has no compressions, stresses and strains. And that seems to suit animals very well.

MR. BROWN: You seem to have an innate sense of the structure. In fact, Buckminster Fuller is quoted as saying that you showed an intuitive engineering in that brass-rod eagle that you made for the Federal Reserve Bank.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, he did. And I know what he means--no, I was very surprised at what he meant, really I mean, by intuitive because I was absolutely ignorant of engineering, no technical knowledge at all. But there is a feel that clay gives me, because you can't force it. It has its own will. And if you follow along with it, it will reveal things to you that you never realized.

MR. BROWN: As you look back on your career, are you pretty pleased with most of the things you've done?

MS. SAARINEN: Well, of course I'm always very critical of them while I'm doing them and very often afterwards. But in the beginning, I'm absolutely positive it's going to be wonderful. And if I retain some of that enthusiasm and confidence, it usually turns out much better than one would expect and very well, I must say. People seem to be attracted to my clay things more than anything else, I think, because it's made really of mud, just Mother Earth. There's no expense to it. It's expendable. If you make a mistake, you can just take another hunk of clay and do it again. And, of course, if it's a big piece, you can't. There has to be a point with no return. And as you get better and better, that's possible to achieve, because you get very technically proficient. Otherwise, you get in trouble in the kiln: air bubbles and so forth.

MR. BROWN: Has the opinion of people you respect been very important to you throughout your career?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, very! Yes, I can't imagine it not. But I have a feeling that I know who's going to like it and who isn't, so I'm not often hurt and usually--and if there's a criticism, I usually am very glad for it. I mean, if I think it fits, just doesn't seem to--. I don't seem to have much pride about that. If someone says, "Oh, this needs something to the face," and I know it's a development, then I go ahead and develop it further, and I'm very glad for the suggestions. All the way along I've always been interested in what, and profited by what they think. But I've been crushed very much by a certain misunderstanding that some people had that these were little small mantelpiece sculptures. Little tidbits that were nothing, because they weren't. And other people say that they're like Ming horses and so forth, so I forget all about the vanity. [Laughs]

MR. BROWN: Well, those who talk about them as mantelpiece ornaments, were those people in the forties, too? Even when you were at Cranbrook, were their people that talked that way?

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, no. They all loved them.

MR. BROWN: Then you had a good deal of encouragement, at that point.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. Oh, very much, yes. And I've always been able to sell but trouble is I want to keep what I've made. It's terrible. It's like losing a finger or a toe or something to sell sculptures. It has to be up to what you can afford not to sell. But clay is very inexpensive, so that's another reason why I want to keep them. But--oh, no that's all.
[Interruption in taping]

MS. SAARINEN: I think I've said this wrong that I wanted to keep my clay sculptures, because clay is inexpensive. I meant that if my pocketbook was empty, I would sell everything, of course, and would manage to because I think people always want to buy my things. But I really fall in love with certain ones that I really like and then--.

MR. BROWN: You want to keep them around you? You look at them time and again.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, I do. I feel a sense of identity in a room with my own sculptures there. It's very funny. I love seeing other people's work, too; it isn't that.

MR. BROWN: But when you look at your work, does it recall certain times or certain--you've had interests for many years in animals.

MS. SAARINEN: Oh, yes, I started sculpting when I was seven. And it turned out to be animals right from the start, but that's natural in a child.

MR. BROWN: Yes, but this is something, in some respects, that's remained with you hasn't it?

MS. SAARINEN: Yes, it certainly has. And it's become my little language metaphorical language of, I think, human sentiments and human yearnings. All my little animals seem to be yearning. [Laughs] And I never realized it until someone brought it to my attention.

MR. BROWN: And this, of course, was brought out in Who Am I?, your book, in 1946, where--you brought out a children's book, supposedly, but it's one that adults can look at.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes.

MR. BROWN: A parallel between animal behavior and human.

MS. SAARINEN: Yes. Yes, it isn't like the, you know, in the fast--. Are you on? [referring to the tape recorder] It isn't like things in the, some artists in the past who would humanize their animals. They didn't give them human eyes and arms and legs, suggested arms and legs and wings. My things are really not trying to make them into people. It's just sort of bringing out the fact that they have feelings, too, and that they are perfectly adorable, anyway, looking. And beautiful, elegant, they are.