TOS: This is Tom O’Sullivan of the Minnesota Historical Society. I’m speaking with Evelyn Raymond, at her home in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, on February 27, 1997.

Evelyn, to start off, can you tell me where and when you were born, and about your family.

ER: Well, I was born in Duluth in 1908, from French and Canadian stock, and I think it’s fun, because I think those particular people have a lot to do with Minnesota, and I like being a Minnesotan. I think artists should have roots. So I had a chance to be a pioneer with them. My father used to build roads in northern Minnesota, and we would go with him in the summertime, my family. It would be like camping out all summer, and they would hire as many as 200 people, men that eventually ended up settling up in that area, up north, in what would you call that? The mining area.

TOS: Oh, in the Iron Range?

ER: In the Iron Range. My dad would build a shack, a tar-paper shack for us, and we’d have an army blanket for a door. We went light, we traveled light, and I think that’s where I began to start creating things, because we didn’t take toys or anything. We made things out of twigs and our imagination. I learned how to make a whistle out of a willow. We lived like Indians. My dad was French, and he always kidded us—French Canadian—that he had Indian blood in him, so we always pretended we were Indians, and we had Indian names for each other.

TOS: Do you have brothers and sisters?

ER: I had two brothers at that time. My sister and younger brother were not born when we were at this period in our life. My nickname was “Old Eagle Eye.” My oldest brother got a BB gun, or some kind of a gun, and I got my name because they let me shoot the gun, the oldest brother let me shoot it one time, and I told him I was going to shoot a branch off a tree, and I did, and that’s where I got my Indian name, “Old Eagle Eye.”

And anyway, I like being—my parents and my grandparents were pioneers in Duluth, and I like the idea of being in a pioneer era, because I think the pioneers had some control over their lives, a little more control, and could be more creative than when civilization became more a part of our lives.
My grandfather was a captain on the lakes, and he was also—my Swedish grandfather was a builder, and he built the houses in his block. My dad and his three brothers, they came from Quebec in a covered wagon to Winnipeg, and then they were put in a lumber camp, till they eventually ended up in Duluth. I like all this about my early parents because I’m a pioneer myself, and I like the freedom of pioneering things. It brings out your creativeness, and you can get ideas and feel that you can carry them out.

And also, I think—I’ve stayed in Minnesota. I love Minnesota. I love being part of it, and I don’t think of Minnesota as being a prairie state, because we always lived in Duluth, amongst the rocks and the lake. As children, we used to go on picnics with our parents and climb the rocks and the hills in west Duluth, and then later on we lived up near the other end of town, where you could go down by the lake and crawl around all the big craggy rocks. I just feel that it’s more sculptural where I come from than if you were in a prairie area.

Anyway, I used to kind of sit down on the north shore, and because we had this little feeling that maybe we were Indians, I’d pretend I was an Indian, and that I could erase all what I call “visual clichés” out of my mind and just see a world that didn’t have all the stuff that you took, that older people took with them from other times. I don’t know if I can explain that, but I wanted to clear my mind of what I call “visual clichés” so that I would feel they were truly creative and not influenced by anything. It was a little game I played with myself.

Anyway, up to a certain point, my French family owned the first movies and they had a supermarket, and my dad and his brothers used to make launches, and they used to race. There used to be sort of a sport on the St. Louis River where they would race launches, or whatever they called them, up and down the St. Louis, and my dad and his brothers had an old barn where they built these by hand, and as a kid I could watch them build these things. They steamed the wood, and they’d make these beautiful launches, and then they’d race them. And along the St. Louis River were restaurants, and there were many steps going up into the restaurants, and it was really a kind of a sport that was pretty popular at that time.

I liked watching them build the boats. I just have a sense that I was kind of like a sponge, and kind of, with the building, that became part of me, sort of, and that’s why—one of my uncles—each uncle did something different. One was a builder, and my dad was a contractor, and these were all self-taught people. One of my uncles, they found a clay pit, and built this huge Indian head. It got into the newspapers. It seems to me the Raymonds, even back then, every time they’d launch their new boat, it would get in the newspapers, and there’d be a parade after, and there were horses pulling these launches down to the river. Maybe this isn’t important stuff, but to me as a child, it was important, and I could see people building things and it gave me—I think it had a big part in my wanting to be a sculptor.

TOS: Did you work with them on building the launches or anything, or pick up some tips?

ER: No, I was just a tiny child. I mean, I was only about three or four years old then. But I remember them steaming these boards, and they’d put layers and layers of varnish on them. They were beautiful. I mean, beautiful things that they built.
And then during the First World War, my father got a flu that was going around and he contracted tuberculosis, which was the big disease at that time, and he became a bed patient at the Nopeming Sanitarium for sixteen years, and what had been a life of some affluence became pretty slim, because the one brother had become an alcoholic and he had ruined the business, and so Mother was left with five of us kids to raise by herself. At a later date, she was able to run a big farm and do the cooking for a big farm just above Lester Park. It belonged to a big hardware company, and she cooked for twenty-five people, and sent us kids to—I went to Central High School.

They had a lot of money for their schools up there, and they were always trying different things in their schools. I suppose, I don’t know, I suppose the money came from either shipping or mines. I don’t know where. But they had what they called an art course in Duluth Central. Next to Duluth Central was Washington Junior, and every morning in their art course you could take art. And all the teachers came from the university in New York, Columbia. We had metal work, we had drawing, we had what they called “related arts.” We had art history, we had pottery. It was really almost a full art school course for four years, so I was really fortunate. They didn’t continue this for too long, but I was able to be part of it all the time I was in art school.

**TOS:** Do you remember any of the teachers?

**ER:** Huh?

**TOS:** Do you remember any of the teachers from high school?

**ER:** There was Inez Squire [phonetic], but I think she’s long gone. This would have been back in the 1920s. I graduated in 1928, so that would have been back in ‘24 or ‘25. Anyway, my mother was—it was very important that we kids—at that time, there were five of us—that we did what we wanted with our life, and she encouraged us in the best way she could to see to it that we were able to fulfill our dreams.

**TOS:** What was her name?

**ER:** Nellie Pearson [phonetic], my mother’s name was, and she was a lovely Swedish lady. When we were building roads with my dad, she would be the only woman in the—and she always, she dressed in riding skirts, corduroy riding skirts. She was so pretty. And then she wore a holster with revolvers in it. She was the only woman, and when my dad would go ahead to build the next addition, so that they could move the crew and us, she would be all by herself. I mean, the lone woman in this camp. She was pretty much of a pioneer herself. So I have this really good feeling about my parents, which I think would be nice for most kids to have.

Anyway, I do bounce around. Where do I go now after art school?

**TOS:** So did you live actually in the city of Duluth, at some point, your family?

**ER:** A short time, before my dad—we had lived over the so-called supermarket for many years, and then my dad, when he took us with him in the summertime, we would go to maybe a
different place for the winter, I mean a different house for the winter, and then we’d go back. It was like camping out all summer. This went on till I was about seven, from about four to seven.

And then before my dad went to Nopeming, before he got ill, we went to Nickerson [phonetic] and built a farm for the university, an experimental farm. The area was very sandy, and the university wanted to put in an experimental farm to see what could be grown in that area. My dad called it the “Duluth Farm” from a previous farm up above Duluth, the Duluth Farm, named after, I suppose, Sieur Duluth, whatever.

Anyway, strangely enough, the people that he worked for are doing some of those—there were times when he would just go and clear land and set up lumber camps before he built this farm in Nickerson. He cut down the trees and set up a lumber camp and cut the trees, and the houses were all built from the trees that he cut from that area. The trees were kind of like scrub pines, I guess, because around, close by, was Hinckley, and a lot of fires, so the trees were not mammoth trees. Scrub pine or something.

My dad built us a house there. Before they got the barns built, he built us a house of logs that were vertical, with chinking in between, and we lived in that till the rest of the farm was built. I know I go on, but when they got the barn built and they had a barn-warming, where they had put a hardwood floor on the second story of the barn, and they had a big barn dance for all the neighbors. So I think I’ve had experiences that a lot of people are not aware of.

At that time is when my father got sick, and then we went back to Duluth, and my dad went to the sanitarium, which is just at the top, used to be just at the top of Duluth. It was a dread disease. They didn’t have any cure for tuberculosis at that time.

Anyway, when I was in Central, I always wanted to be a sculptor. Ever since I was a kid, when I even looked at books, and I didn’t want things to be flat, I could look at them and hope that they’d get so I could feel them, so that I could feel something, rather than just have pictures. Color has never been one of my important things in my life. I like texture. I like the natural quality of wood and stone, and I just kind of come through that naturally through my life as a pioneer, I guess. I’m kind of a pioneer. I know I’m a pioneer.

**TOS:** Did you see sculptures around Duluth? Did the buildings and things like that get your attention?

**ER:** No, no. I still don’t think they have anything. I’ve been trying to get something up there in my hometown. I don’t recall. I’m not aware. Probably the only interest that I ever, as far as sculpture, as a kid, was, there was a sculptor, and I can’t remember his name, who was in charge of the Chicago World—first World Fair. He used to come around and make his final appearance. He came down around about three times, and I went to his lectures as a kid, and I was fascinated. He’d always build a head, and talk about sculpture, and I guess that was my first actual interest in becoming a sculptor. And I know it was the time of Lee Lawrie or Saint-Gaudens, but I don’t remember, at this point, what that man’s name was.
TOS: Did he show slides or pictures of his work with his talks?

ER: Well, all I can remember is building a head out of clay on the stage, and I suppose talking about it. But as far as actually seeing sculpture, I don’t recall. I know we used to have an old book from the St. Louis World’s Fair that we got from some place, and there were a lot of pictures in that. I remember kind of wearing that out looking at it. But I know I didn’t come from any kind of typical family with art, but I do think their lives were sort of—and the things they did—and I feel that they were craftsmen and they were sensitive. I mean, the houses my grandfather built were—well, I have some pictures I’ll show you. And seeing my dad make those lovely boats. I think, in those days, pioneers had many talents that they were just either born with or came by naturally.

I remember, I entered—they still have a competition for high school kids. I think Carnegie competitions. I think its headquarters are in Philadelphia. And for years, I would enter stuff. The teacher would enter my stuff in, my things, drawings, etc. The last year I was in high school, she entered a drawing I made, a charcoal drawing I made of the kids going up and down the stairs in the high school, and I won first prize in drawing, in that category.

And then I tried for a scholarship, because my mother really had a pretty tough time to support us kids at what she was doing. And somehow I managed to scrape up $200, I think is what the tuition cost a year at the art school in Minneapolis. It used to be called the Minneapolis School of Art. I just loved trains. I used to love to take the train back and forth.

This is something that I’m really very proud of. The second month I was—I stayed in what they call a WCA Club, and my club that I stayed with for women happened to be inhabited by older women rather than—the club was started for women who came to town, young women, to pursue their careers. But this club seemed to be inhabited by many older women, during the Depression, that didn’t have jobs. And it was kind of sad. They were mostly sitting around, and I was the youngest one in the building. They were awfully intrigued to have a young artist in their crowd, and they were awfully nice to me.

Anyway, where did I go from here? Oh, the second year I was at art school I won a scholarship. Oh, well, the second month I was in town, I went out on a Saturday afternoon to get the paper. They had an early or later edition of the newspaper, and they had an art section, and I opened up the art section and in the art section were two big pictures of my stuff, the one that I won in Carnegie and the first drawing I’d made at the art school. And the first drawing was, because we were running this dairy, was a man milking a cow, looking down into this area where he was milking—what do you call it? I can’t think of what you call this area where you milked the cow. Anyway, it was pretty mind-boggling for a kid from the farm to see you take up a whole art page when you’ve only been in town for two months.

I had a roommate. All of us kids thought we were geniuses, came from small towns. I had a roommate from Sauk Centre, that we shared a room at this woman’s club. She was so upset about me getting this publicity, she didn’t want to room with me anymore, and she didn’t talk to me for the rest of the time in school. But I found that a lot of kids were pretty envious of that publicity that I got. Anyway, I’ve been trying to find a copy of it, back in November 1928. My
copy’s been long since gone, and I would like to find it if I ever could, because it was my start. It was kind of a big push for a kid.

Anyway, because money was difficult, I lived in this—the matron of the woman’s club took pity on me because she knew money was a little difficult, and she let me have a room that was condemned. The ceiling had fallen down, and they’d put it up with cheesecloth, so it hung like a canopy over the top. And it was a fire place room, so you couldn’t lock the doors, so people had to get through your room to get to a fire escape.

I didn’t feel underprivileged, because everybody was so darned nice to me. And the old ladies were so bored with this time. At that time I probably thought they were old ladies, but they were probably in their forties. Anyway, they used to kind of fight to see if I wouldn’t sit at their table so I could tell them all the juicy stuff that went on at the art school, so they kind of adopted me. Just because I lived in a condemned room, I didn’t feel underprivileged at all.

TOS: So you started at the Minneapolis School of Art right after high school?

ER: Yes. And I’d go home in the summer. But the second year I was there, I studied—Mr. Charles Wells had been head of the sculpture department for twenty-some years at the art school. He was a Beaux Arts Fellow and his main thrust was academic art. But John Haley had just been to Europe on a Van der Lip scholarship, a young man. He stretched his two years to three years and studied in Paris. He studied at the Bauhaus, and he brought back with him these marvelous things of the modern art that were so fascinating.

Cam Booth had been in charge of the art school, but before I came, he apparently had won a Guggenheim. He was no longer there, and a new person was in charge of the—Kopietz from Chicago, I think basically an illustrator, taking over charge of the art school. And because I was so enamored of this modern stuff that John Haley had brought, and Mr. Wells was very interested in helping me go my own way, so I was doing, I think, the first abstract sculpture ever done at the art school. Mr. Kopietz called me in, and because I was a scholarship student, he thought he ought to tell me that modern art wasn’t going to go anyplace and I’d be wise not to continue that particular bent.

Then the end of that term, after two years, they decided to let Mr. Wells go, and John Haley, also. He had a contract that went with the scholarship where he could teach for two years, so they didn’t renew that contract, so he would be leaving, too. And those were the two teachers that I was most interested in studying with, and being a kind of basically a shy kid, but if I wanted something, I seemed to have enough wherewithal to go after it. There was a girl, a Norwegian girl was over here studying, and the two of us got up a petition, and we tried to get as many students as we could to sign the petition that we’d leave the art school if these two men weren’t kept on as instructors.

Well, I think we got about twenty-five people or so to sign it, and that was the end of a term, and so—I’m a little hazy about the term, because I know twenty-five of us did leave, and we got a—Mr. Wells got a place for us down at the Sexton Building. And we were going to go with Mr. Haley, John Haley, he was a painter, but Erle Loran, who was a Minneapolis artist, already was
head of the department down at UCLA, in California, and he hired John Haley to go down there, where John, I think, stayed the rest of his life.

TOS: Is that in Berkeley?

ER: In Berkeley. And then we didn’t have a painter to go in our new school. Then we found Leroy Turner, who later on, I think, spent the rest of his life over at Ham—what’s that college?

TOS: Oh, Hamline?

ER: Hamline. Well, he came in this little school that we called the Minneapolis Art Students League, which wasn’t a very original title, considering New York. But anyway, for it being Depression, we could just toss in what little money we could get, and we bought the lumber, and under Mr. Wells’ direction, we made the modeling stands and set up our studio in the old Sexton Building. And actually it was a school that seemed to do rather well, and a studio, considering that it was Depression. I was the business manager, and if you wanted a model, if you put an ad in the paper for a model, there’d be people lined up for two blocks because there was a need of work.

I remember at the end of the day—well, these were such wonderful years for us kids. We were all mostly from out of town, kind of small-town kids, and not any of us—we always traveled kind of in gangs so that we could share whatever we had, and the end of the day we’d maybe have a tea bag that we’d get awful high on, just sharing a tea bag. They were lovely, simple days as compared to nowadays.

TOS: How many students did you have in your Art Students League?

ER: Well, about twenty-five of us did leave at the art school. This was not the first time it happened. There was another group a few years before us. Some member of the Bauhaus, a painter, was teaching at the art school. That was under Cameron Booth when he was in charge. And for some reason, I don’t know who was in charge then, but he wasn’t asked to come back. I can’t think of his name now, but they started just a studio around on Eleventh and Nicollet.

And there were people like Everett MacNear [phonetic], who became, I think, Chicago’s most important commercial artist. He’d written a wonderful book on his travels in Europe. I mean, he was a very prominent, he became a very prominent commercial artist in Chicago. And then one of the women that I knew that was in that group was Miriam Ibling, and she became a WPA artisan. She did a lot of murals, and she was a fine artist, also.

Am I getting too far afield?

TOS: No, not at all.

ER: Is this stuff you know already?

TOS: Speaking of other artists at that time, Frances Greenman, was she around then?
ER: I don’t think she was in that group.

TOS: An artist named Vaclav Vytlacil’s name has come up. Cam Booth used to speak of.

ER: No, it doesn’t sound familiar to me. As far as the people that went with us, one fellow that went with us name was Otto Dahlmann, and I don’t know, I think he became a pretty well-known Minnesota sculptor. He ended up up in the Mankato area, where he seemed to have been connected with the stone up in there. I think he’s probably dead now, but he was in St. Paul. But he was one of the original people that went with us when we left the art school. And the Norwegian girl, she never went into sculpture. She married, went east and married one of the—I can’t say it, one of the big companies, somebody who owned a big company, anyway.

TOS: What about the teaching in Minneapolis in those days? Like when you were a student, what kind of classes or sculpture did you do?

ER: Well, mostly I was fooling around—as a student, you mean, what I did?

TOS: Yes.

ER: We used to work from life, for one thing, and I sort of had trouble. I didn’t have trouble doing—actually, I won my scholarships on my drawings, not on my sculpture. I won my scholarship on my drawing. But I drew more like a sculptor than a painter, because John was using a famous Beaux-Arts teacher that worked with clay. I can’t think of his name. There’s a difference between drawing for sculpture and drawing for paintings. You draw for sculpture to get the feeling of form, and for paintings you’re working with flat areas, working back into space. That fellow, Cam Booth brought him over at a later time to give lectures on—I can’t think of his name.

TOS: Is it Hans Hofmann?

ER: Hans Hofmann, yeah. Hans Hofmann. So when I studied with John Haley, I got quite a bit of Hofmann rather than—I mean, for a painter, you worked from planes rather than in the round. I mean, our drawings were a series of overlapping planes rather than—actually, the drawing for sculpture is more of an investigation for the artist rather than the finished product for a painting. Do I make myself clear?

TOS: So you draw from a model?

ER: When you drew from a model, that was more or less life drawing. That was more in the line of working for sculpture. But John would have us do still lives and all that, and he’d have us study Giotto and Fra Angelico, all Italian painters, and study their compositions. So I was well aware of Hofmann’s work, but basically I’m a sculptor, and somewhere along the line I discovered Lipschitz, and I have a feeling I studied with Lipschitz, because I saved everything I—there’s something about his work fit in with my interest in form and the different things he did with form. Well anyway, I used to have a lot of his stuff on my wall so I could look at it.
But at a certain, after I went for not quite two years to our new school, this Art Students League, my mother became ill, and actually there wasn’t—this was still Depression. There was really still not any place for artists to find their way. And I was still pretty young, and I decided before she got ill that I had to get a job, and I did a lot of drawings of tombstones. This girl from Norway, her name was Osla Brecke [phonetic], and she was a lovely girl and she just loved this country and everybody loved her. She wasn’t as serious a sculptor as I was, but being kids, the two of us went looking for a job together with my drawings of tombstones.

We went over to St. Paul on a hot day, and we went all around the monument places, and I think we ended up at the Twin City Monument Company or something. I don’t know if it’s still in existence. It was my portfolio, but they hired Osla. But that day was kind of something. We had 25 cents between us, and we had to decide whether we were going to get something to drink, pop or something, for that 25 cents, or take the bus back. Maybe we each had 25 cents. But we decided it was so hot, we better have something to drink. So we walked from St. Paul back to Minneapolis, and it was a very hot day. I was a little bit unhappy about the fact that they had hired her with my drawings, but it was my own darn fault.

So then about that time my mother became ill. She had a heart condition, and I had to go home, back to Duluth. I took her place, and I was up at five o’clock, cooking for the milk men. We had a big dairy, 160 cows and we had 600 acres.

**TOS:** Was this the farm in Nickerson?

**ER:** No, this was up above Duluth, up above Lester Park. It belonged to Marshall Wells, the farm belonged to Marshall Wells, and my mother and uncle were just running it. Mother was doing the cooking and the bookkeeping, and my uncle was running the farm. So I took over then for eight years.

I used to get ten dollars a month, do anything I wanted with it, which I did. I mostly bought magazines, art magazines, which there was, during the Depression, were a lot of wonderful little magazines that were started of philosophy, psychology, art. I read every art book I think I could find in the public library, and I read all night. No wonder I have a lot of trouble now. When I ran out of books on art, then I would take each country and find out who their best authors were. I’d take a country at a time and try to find out. I would read.

We were sort of about eight miles out of town, and I never did drive. And so if you’re cooking for that many people, you’re pretty steady in the kitchen. I remember three hours of washing dishes. But I didn’t live in the world I was, because I was constantly reading stuff. I remember getting into the Russian era when I was reading all about Russian literature. It seems to me my life has been either lots of people or no people, so I’m kind of content with both conditions in my life of being kind of a—actually, I was—anyway, I jump ahead of myself.

**TOS:** That was eight years you were out there?

**ER:** I was out there eight years. When I left in 1938, my mother died. I took care of her eight months. She had cancer. She ended up by having cancer. I tried to get a job then, and there was
nothing to be had, naturally, doing art work. I had taken a little class that I tried to slip in on Saturdays. Up in Duluth, they had—I don’t know what it was called, Mabel Wing something. I can’t remember the name, where I took kids for a while. I did for free a little bit of volunteer work for children’s classes, but that’s the only actual thing I did with art when I was up there, outside of reading everything I could lay my hands on. And then when she died, I went around all the employment places to see if I could get a job. I could have gotten a job cooking anyplace, but I wasn’t interested at that point.

It happened at that time one of the people that I was interviewed by knew Clem Haupers and knew about WPA. Of course, I knew Clem from way back. He’d been a student at—when I was at our little art school in the Sexton Building, I used to go over to the St. Paul school, where I could study a little bit on Saturdays with Cameron Booth and Saul [phonetic], Bill Ryan, I think, and at night classes, I would take some night classes over there, as well as to get as much as I could, because our little school only had sculpture and painting. I kind of gave up painting, but I did want to try to get as much as I could while I was in Minneapolis.

I keep jumping around. Is this what you want?

**TOS:** Yes.

**ER:** Just to cut a long story short, I was able to meet Clem Haupers. He was the director of the WPA art project for seven states, seven or eight states, and he told me he knew I had been cooking for eight years, and he wanted to know if I could still do sculpture. So he asked me to do some sculpture to prove that I could do sculpture, and that piece that you people have is the first piece I did after eight years. That piece has been in national magazines and it’s printed locally I don’t how many. I have a feeling that’s my most-famous piece. It’s been in more, you know, art papers and I don’t know how many different.

**TOS:** You named that ERG?

**ER:** Yes, I named it ERG. I guess that means a unit of power.

Well, Clem did give me a job, and the headquarters of WPA was over in the Lutheran Brotherhood’s building over at the university, and that’s where the WPA headquarters was at that time. At first, there was something moved into our quarters at the Sexton Building I don’t know too much about, because I wasn’t in town then. I don’t think it was called WPA then. It was called something else.

Anyway, Mr. Wells was in charge of the sculpture. He had continued on through this period, and he was in charge of the sculpture on WPA at the Lutheran Brotherhood’s building over there at the university. But everybody that was on WPA at that time had to teach, and so I had to teach, and it was so difficult. I think I taught drawing. I don’t remember exactly, but it was part of that you had to teach.

I don’t know how long I was there, a year or so, I guess, and then they took over the Walker Art Center, the WPA did, and there we taught, as well as—our studios were in the basement of
Walker Art Center, and when we moved into, the WPA moved into Walker, the front looked like a Muslim what do you call it, a temple or something. It was covered with tile, and it had sort of a frosting of tile across the edge.

**TOS:** T. B. Walker’s old gallery?

**ER:** Yeah. As I understand, the gallery had been built by T. B. Walker to house his collection, and it was opened about only once a week. Apparently he had offered his collection to the Art Institute before he built the building. This is the rumor, anyway. Apparently the Art Institute didn’t want it. They would have taken his jades. He had a lot of interesting Chinese jades. I guess they were Chinese. But he wouldn’t take that. Either they had to take the whole collection or nothing. I have no firsthand information about this. This is a rumor that we had heard. Anyway, he supposedly had Raphaels and Titians and masterpieces, every kind of masterpiece. I don’t think he had a Da Vinci. But the reason the Art Institute, as the story goes, didn’t want to take it, because they didn’t think the paintings were authentic.

**TOS:** Were you teaching artists or just the general public or anybody who came by?

**ER:** When we moved in at Walker, naturally all the studios were in the basement where we taught. People did come from the East to work on the gallery up above, and I know there was a Leroy Turner and his wife. They were people that had a great reputation for Oriental art. I think he was an assistant director. I guess Defenbacher, Danny Defenbacher, I don’t remember him coming in right away, but maybe he did. I can’t remember. I remember Leroy Turner.

Anyway, they cleared out everything, all the old cabinets with all the old—and they gave us, I understand, they did give the jades to the Art Institute. And then they took all those paintings down and kind of cleared out—they had a carpenter shop. There were a lot of different people on the WPA besides artists. There were people who—which was so exciting for a sculptor. In our department, there would be a master plaster caster, woodcarvers, and just people who needed jobs or just he got people to help with. It was a wonderful education for me, because in our school you never got stone carving and you didn’t get much in the way of plaster casting. It was just like a wonderful, you know, going to school again as far as for me.

Everybody had to teach then. I don’t know how many of us were on the project then, but it was quite a few of us. I remember Miriam Ibling, who I still think is one of Minnesota’s better women artists, that she taught dressmaking, and she was a fine mural painter. I learned a lot from Miriam. She kind of took me under her wing when I was kid when they were with that fellow from the Beaux-Arts, and she set me right in what to study and things I could do.

There was a big department that was run by Stan Fenelle, and he was a fine painter, was a good friend of Cameron Booth, and Stan was in charge of a department. They must have had thirty people in that department, whose only business was to copy artifacts from pioneers and Indians and whatnot. They were building a big book of some kind or something.

**TOS:** Taking pictures of them?
ER: Right, drawing pictures of early pioneer tools and quilts and all that kind of stuff. There was a big department there.

We all had to teach, and I can remember we’d have people standing on their necks. I mean, there were so many people. They only had to pay 25 cents a class. And I remember having a gentleman that collected old fabrics, kind of like a junk collector, and I had a woman that her husband was the head of Munsingwear. It was a wide collection of different people, and executives. Your classes were just filled with people at night, and everybody had to teach something that came to Walker. I don’t know how many of us came or whether we selected, I don’t know. It was a little while. That would be back in 1939, I suppose, or beginning of ‘40 and ‘39, I guess. I don’t know.

Anyway, there was two other women in my department, besides me, for a while. One was a woman who had been a nun over at St. Kate’s, but she was put in charge of a home project to go around—that was a WPA project—to go around to handicapped people’s houses to get women to knit and do quilts and stuff. That was her department. And then the other woman got married shortly after we moved to Walker. So I was the only woman in that department.

The way they used to run it, they would ask everybody, the artists—some of the artists didn’t have to go to Walker if they had a studio of their own, but those who didn’t happen to have a studio, why, we had to work in the building. We had to punch a time clock. Those of us who were sculptors in the sculpture department would be given—say, we did public projects, like for schools and stuff, and we were all given a problem, and whoever was in charge of the building could take pick of whatever design they wanted.

TOS: Like the architect?

ER: The architect or builder, whatever. About six months after I landed there, they picked mine for International Falls. It was a stadium, a high school stadium. We all at that time would work on Sundays or weekends, mostly Sundays, doing something to get people interesting in coming to Walker. You know, they modernized it. They took everything out, and then they painted everything white. They had a carpentry department, and they built sort of simple modern chairs, kind of in the manner of, I suppose, whatever was—I don’t know, I keep thinking of Beaux-Arts, but I don’t know, maybe it was very modern. They were all handmade stuff that they used to make, you know, the chairs and the furniture that was in the gallery at that time.

Anyway, somebody got the bright—Mr. Wells was still there. He was still at Walker. He was getting to be a pretty elderly man. After they chose my design for International Falls, they got the bright idea I should do it as a piece to interest the crowd in Walker. After all, Walker hadn’t been anything up to that point, you know, just open once a week and 25 cents to see all those old paintings. So this piece of sculpture I was going to do was a bas-relief. It was twelve feet and eighteen feet long. I had to do it in three sections, and they set up scaffolding and stuff for me.

You had to punch a clock. You got $76.00 a month, which you had to take everything out of that for your living, your food, your clothes, everything. There would be people, part of the public disliked WPA, like the public does now, I guess, about welfare people, living off the government, so you felt like a second-rate citizen. I remember in order to get on WPA, it took me
about two weeks, I think, to get okayed. You had to go to the courthouse and stand in line, and you had to take a number and then come back, and it took me like three weeks to get on the project. You had to go and declare yourself, you were poverty-stricken or whatever, sign something that you didn’t have any money. It was a little bit difficult, and it was a little smelly, too. A lot of those people probably didn’t have any place to bathe, I don’t know. I shouldn’t bring that up. But anyway, it wasn’t easy, and it wasn’t easy to declare yourself poor.

**TOS:** I’ve heard artists and other people say it was kind of demeaning to them.

**ER:** Exactly. And if some WPA artist or whatever project committed murder, then we were all murderers. I mean, it seemed like what’s happening to other minorities. I guess we were a minority group. It’s kind of amusing now. I don’t know if it’s so much now, but a few years ago WPA was something that—well, even now. Somebody interviewed me this summer. They got a grant to do we WPA artists and what we’d done. And so now we’re no longer second-rate citizens.

Anyway, I always like to tell that, because the money was so little, that I needed—women didn’t wear slacks, as a general rule, then, and because I was up on a scaffolding, you had to punch a clock, and at eight o’clock you didn’t know how many—sometimes there’d be maybe 100 or so people watching you. It would be, probably, a good idea to have slacks on, I figured, and I had to make my own slacks, because I couldn’t buy any. I was a pretty good dressmaker. I had been in the habit of making clothes myself for my family, my mother and sister and stuff, so I was a pretty good dressmaker, which helped me in my sculpture, actually. The sculpture I do in metal is basically making patterns. So there again, something I did in my youth was helpful for me when I grew up.

I don’t really feel sorry for myself with some of the things that’s happened to me, because it seems sort of corny, but it’s all work towards some goal. Anyway, after coming from a farm and working by yourself and washing dishes and then find yourself in the center of the Walker Art Center with several—I don’t know if there were 100 people, but it seemed to me there was such a crowd all the time. And I’m a basically shy person. After all, if you’ve been a hermit for eight years, you get pretty shy. And look around and see all those people staring at you, and then you’re doing your first big job, it’s not all easy.

**TOS:** Did you do that all yourself or did you have any assistants working with you?

**ER:** Well, I had a young man who was on WPA. He was on WPA, but he had never taken an art course. I was still teaching sculpture at this time, too, at night, working in the day on this stuff. You didn’t hang around because you were on WPA. You worked on the art project. People got some idea that you’re sitting all the time, and that isn’t true.

Anyway, he used to carry up clay for me, and it got to be hundreds of pounds of clay on this. This is a big project. I did a third of it at a time, and it had to be athletes, because it was going on a high school stadium. Later on, several years later—he was just bringing up clay. He took credit for my job, which upset me a little bit. I should have been flattered, I suppose, that he wanted to
take credit for it, but that’s beside the point.

After doing two panels and getting up hundreds of pounds of clay, the building began to sag. It was right in the lobby, and it was such a wonderful place to work, glass all overhead. You couldn’t ask for a more wonderful studio. And then because the building—and there is a fault underneath Walker. I don’t know if that had anything to do with it or not. I hoped I didn’t ruin the building, because they had to rebuild it eventually. I don’t know if I had anything to do with it or not. But they cast what I had done.

[Dogs barking in background.] What is it, sweetheart? What is it? Am I talking too much?

TOS: The dogs just want to get on the tape.

ER: Where were we?

TOS: So you had two panels finished when the building—

ER: I had two panels finished, and then they made me go downstairs, because the building was sagging and the floor was sagging. There was hundreds of pounds of clay on that.

The interesting thing about that is, on a Sunday, on December 7, 1941, I am working on this, and I had a radio on my scaffolding, and that’s when the Pearl Harbor. So that connects that date. And it’s from there on is when they began to close down the project, so it’s kind of an interesting date.

Anyway, they made me go downstairs in one of the small studios that didn’t even have a—well, it just had a basement window. The light was terrible, the space was small, and I did the third panel downstairs, and I keep saying “in the closet.” But I never like to look at it, because that third panel was just not right, but what could I do? Anyway—

TOS: So was that cast from your clay model?

ER: The plaster casters made a mold over it. I told we had Italian plaster casters that some of them were part of the family of the St. Paul Statuary.

TOS: Yes, the Brioschi?

ER: Yeah. Not Brioschi, but some of his family. Andriati [phonetic] or something was the one of the—something about Andriati. Anyway, there were two for that member of the family over there that were casting, doing plaster, called them master plaster casters. But anyway, that’s an interesting family. They’re related to the one that got streetcars out of our area and got in buses. He was that famous—I can’t think of his name. He was the godfather of this family. He got General—what is it, car.

TOS: General Motors?

ER: General Motors to put in buses. Osanta [phonetic] or something like that. Anyway, he was—
I don’t want to say what he was—a prime figure during that period when [Hubert] Humphrey was then mayor. You remember Humphrey—

**TOS:** He was kind of cleaning up the town.

**ER:** Are you taping what I’m saying—or recording?

**TOS:** Yes.

**ER:** Oh, I shouldn’t be—I don’t want to be sued for something. But Humphrey was mayor during that time, and when he was getting rid of the Tommy Banks and I don’t know who all. Anyway, I remember seeing Humphrey a couple times in an elevator.

Where were we?

**TOS:** Was the casting of your work done in Minneapolis?

**ER:** Yeah. We made a mold over it, you know, and just took the mold up to International Falls. That was in January, that would have been.

[Break in interview]

We took the sculpture in the middle of winter—it was in January. That would have been in January of 1942 we took those molds up to International Falls. I had seventeen fellows with me, and they were some of the casters and some of the people who just needed jobs that were with us to do the work.

[Break in interview]

**TOS:** Did you take the molds up on a train or a truck or what?

**ER:** A truck, and then went up, I think, by train, and went up with seventeen fellows. I know I went on the train. And what they did was, when you were out of town on a job, they would make arrangements for where you stayed and where you eat, and they made arrangements for us to eat in a restaurant that didn’t have a floor, packed earth, and the benches were, I mean, put on poles that were knocked into the earth, and all around, you know, like benches. And then we stayed at, I think it was about the only hotel they had up there, and all they as a key was skeleton keys to the door, so we had to pack up the furniture up against the door.

The contractor of the building wanted me to stay with the board, somebody on the school board, because he thought it would be better than having me stay in this crummy old hotel. But nobody would take me in because they were afraid they were taking in a WPA worker. So once in a while he’d come over in the afternoon and take me over to a neighboring town for a short cocktail or something.

Anyway, the only thing I could do at night was go with these seventeen fellows, and I used to kid myself I was Snow White and the Seventeen Dwarfs. There was one drinking place after another.
The fellows were very nice, and there was an Irishman whose name was Kennedy, an elderly man, who used to make my tools for me all the time. He made them by hand. I had lovely tools made out of apple wood and whatnot. He was such a sweet old guy, and he was like what in Spanish you call a *duenna* or a chaperon or something. He always sat next to me, and when the fellows would get a little geared up—and they had nicknames for each other at different times, and he’d say, “Don’t call them by their nickname,” and he was kind of clueing me. He was always whispering to me what I should say, what I shouldn’t. So I was well taken care of.

But then I got kind of bored. We were up there for twenty-one days, and it was well below zero all the time we were up there, and the sculpture had to be cast in one fell swoop. You couldn’t start casting it. It was an experiment. It was going to be done in cement in one piece, and it was twelve inches thick, and you don’t pour cement below zero weather. And International Falls gets cold, so they had to work when they had to build a big tarp over the front of the building to kind of cover it up, and then they had a little stove down below to keep it warm.

During that time, while they were getting scaffolding and all this stuff built up, I wasn’t during very much, and so I went to the library to see if they’d give me some books and give me a card, and I decided to read Thomas Wolfe. You don’t read Thomas Wolfe in International Falls. His words just fly off the page, and you get so excited and I don’t what.

They had bedbugs. It wasn’t the nicest place to stay. Anyway, it was fun pouring the sculpture. And right after that, of course, the money was withdrawn from WPA because of the war, and so I don’t know who decided they’d start a school, and I don’t know whether six of us offered, I don’t know—it’s a long time ago—or whether we were asked, I don’t know. But Mac LeSueur was director of the school. It was all down in the basement, the studio was, the studios were, and there was Leon Sorkin, who taught early, first-year drawing, and there was Bert Old, who taught painting. He was from Stillwater. And Bill Norman taught—he was originally from Duluth. He taught commercial art. And Mac’s wife taught children, on Saturday, painting. I taught the sculpture department. I taught drawing.

[Tape interruption]

Where were we?

**TOS:** You were talking about starting the school at the Walker.

**ER:** Oh, we were starting Walker.

**TOS:** Mac and Lorraine LeSueur and Sorkin and Old and Norman.

**ER:** Actually, the modeling stands were the same as what we made in that school over on the Sexton Building that we had originally made. Those are the modeling stools that I’m using now at Walker. I like to mention that. That kind of pleases me, sort of.

And then we were offered the building, and I think they took care of the janitor service. We paid for the registrar. I don’t know what else we paid for, but they would dole out money to us from
the tuition. I know it wasn’t much over a hundred dollars. It wasn’t very much. They kept promising when the school grew, we’d make more money.

**TOS:** So you were kind of running your school within the Walker rather than the Walker actually having a school as part of it.

**ER:** Exactly.

**TOS:** I never knew that.

**ER:** They had offered in their bulletins that they were offering scholarships, which meant that we weren’t getting any tuition. Actually, we were giving the scholarships, not Walker. So they never had any money for anything for us. That’s why after we left they built that theater and all that stuff. When we were there, they never had money for anything.

**TOS:** Were there other sculptors teaching there besides you?

**ER:** At that time, I was the only sculptor. I took a drawing class for a while there, too. I taught a drawing class for a while there.

When we first started, I think for a year we didn’t have day classes, because it was the war. We had night classes. I had three classes and Saturday classes all day for kids. And then I taught in the public schools. They were short of teachers, male teachers, to teach—what do they call that, like woodwork and stuff. They thought maybe that a sculptor would take the place of that, and I’d have sometimes all men, boys, and sometimes I had an awful problem with discipline. It was the blackest year of my life, I swear.

**TOS:** Were you in one particular school or did you move around?

**ER:** Well, I had to move around. That was fun, too. You had to get up at the crack of dawn to find out where you were going. Towards the end of the year, I got stuck at Roosevelt for a few months in the high school, and then I got a few months at Jefferson Junior. That was a junior high, and, God, that’s a terrible age for kids. I had one youngster in my class who had had one of his arms run over by a train and he was right-handed, and all he did was throw clay all the time.

I hadn’t been used to discipline, because the kids who came to Walker were youngsters that wanted to do art. But we did well. We kept their darn cabinets full of art. I know this is kind of sentimental, but I remember many, many years later some man called me and he said that I made a big difference in his life and he wanted to thank me for what I did at Jefferson. So maybe it was worthwhile, I don’t know.

But I did teach, and I did get a lot of stuff out of them, even though I had discipline problems. We were told it was a terrible time. All their parents were in—there was a kind of a wild—half the parents were parents with money and half of them were working in defense plants, so you had two groups that didn’t seem to have very much discipline.
One little youngster I felt so kind of sorry for. He looked he was from the cover of the old *Saturday Post* with freckles, red hair and freckles, tiny little guy. I used to give him money for his lunch and I used to kind of—he was teacher’s pet. Damn little snot, he got to take advantage of it, and when I had to make him stay after school one day, he came up and started hitting. I slapped him on the cheek, and I got, really I got—they had sent around word from the school board that we could slap them if we wanted to because the discipline was so bad, but even so, then I got bawled out by the principal. He didn’t understand how anyone could ever slap a child. Of course, I killed the kid with just a little slap on his cheek, you know. It was just kind of a natural response.

Anyway, because I was kind of helpless with discipline, there was a young woman that had taken classes from me at Walker in the junior high class, or homeroom, I had, and she’s eventually become quite a writer. She has written a book on the woman that used to be in charge of the public library, and she’s just written a book.

**TOS:** Is that Jane Pejsa?

**ER:** Yes. Anyway, Jane started a homeroom letter, and I can give her credit for calming that damn homeroom down, because she said they should be so lucky that they had me, and she really bawled them out. This is a kid that got my class in order for me. I feel kind of ashamed that had to be a kid to do it. I felt sort of helpless.

**TOS:** Only a peer could do it.

**ER:** I guess so. But they weren’t allowed to have a homeroom letter, but she put that on the side and she wrote that letter, and she straightened them out. Towards the end, I didn’t have any trouble with that homeroom. So I keep thinking I should call her and have her do a book on me. Don’t you think I’d be worth a little book?

**TOS:** Yes.

**ER:** I mean, my life story is kind of interesting.

Anyway, during the years, eventually Walker got very busy with GIs, and we used to have forty kids, forty GIs to a class. They told us that Walker, when we started working for nothing, that when the class built up, then we would be doing great. Well, we were doing great, but not too long before they decided to close it.

**TOS:** So the GI Bill brought in a lot of students?

**ER:** Yeah, lots. It was such fun, those kids. It was such fun for them to get out of the army, and it was so exciting. I mean, it was so lively and such fun. I still hear from them, and about four of them visited me.

I mean, Mac was a really fine teacher, I think, and I really think Mac was a fine artist. He was so easy-going. I mean, everybody just loved Mac. He did a fine job as the director, because had a lot
of—you respected him for his art and you respected him as a human being. It was just, I suppose—you don’t give this out, but we used to have teachers’ meetings at the end of the year, and Art Kerrick taught drawing and painting. And painting. He taught painting. I forgot to mention Art before. I don’t know that Art was ever on WPA before that. Art was an artist, but in order to make money, he drove a cab. He always had a following, the avocational lady painters who used to take him out on a little, you know, adventure, whatever you would call, painting, outside to paint something, and as a group they’d end up having lots of good food and lots of fun.

Those starting period were really very rewarding and just fun kind of. I remember those. We didn’t have any money, but then I never got to used to money, so what difference does it make?

I’m trying to remember more of what happened at Walker while we were there.

TOS: Did you have time to do your own sculpture while you were teaching so much?

ER: Yeah. I taught three night classes. For years and years I taught three night classes. Ever since I hit Minneapolis, I think I was teaching. Even when I was in the public schools, I taught three night classes, and besides kids on Saturday.

I worked on weekends after—with my kids’ classes, I just had morning classes. Oh, during the war, one of my night class one night, a gentleman came, a middle-aged gentleman came and wanted to know if I had a student—that was that year that we didn’t have day classes. That was when I was in the public schools and just had night classes. He was an architect, and his name was Mr. Hills from the architectural firm of Hills, Gilberts, and Hayes [phonetic]. They mostly built churches. Anyway, he asked me, he said he had a customer that collected horse’s heads. Did I have a student that would be willing to make a horse’s head for him?

And so with my usual charm, I said, “How would you like it if somebody came into your office and asked one of your draftsmen to design a building?”

He said, “Well, would you do it?”

And I said I would, and I did, and I got $75.00 for it.

TOS: Did you do it in bronze?

ER: I did it in plaster and he had it put in bronze, and he gave me back my model. Since then, I’ve made a model of it, a mold of it. I’m going to have to give you one of those for the Historical Society, because that’s my good-luck horse, because when the war was over, he asked me to do the “Good Shepherd,,” and that was pretty big stuff.

I mean, they weren’t putting stuff on walls, you know. That was an eighteen-foot piece of stone on not on a wall. And that was my first big piece that was a private commission, and I made the big sum of $3,000 on that. I don’t know how much that was worth in those days. But it’s a very beloved piece, and they still ask me out there for every doing they have, and those old people
come up with tears in their eyes and tell me how much they love it. So I think I did the best I could artistically, and I suppose I’ll be criticized for it that it wasn’t the greatest.

But I think the fact—it has nothing to do with art, probably, but the fact that those people have that since 1951 and it’s their pride and joy and they just love it, I think it takes on another kind of thing beside just art that makes it valuable.

TOS: Yeah, I agree.

ER: Anyway, they’re still so proud of it, and they treat me like I was, I don’t know, something awful special. Every time they have a doings, they announce that I’m there first, and it’s a nice feeling to be so honored.

Then later on—let’s see. When I did that job is when—Walker had been going on then since ‘41 and it was now ‘51, and I had been teaching before that on WPA. That’s why I always say I was thirteen years at Walker, but actually I suppose it would be only like ten years, wouldn’t it? By then, they decided to close the school and—it’s such a mixed-up period.

Do you have me on? I told you something about that. I don’t know how much of that I should say.

TOS: You know, I’m about at the end of the tape here. What would you think of ending here for the day?

ER: I’d love that.

TOS: And I could come back with a fresh tape and talk some more about your work, okay?

ER: Okay. You really want it?

TOS: I want to continue.

ER: Okay.

TOS: So we’ll continue on tape two next week.

ER: Okay.

TOS: Thank you, Evelyn.
Part 2 of interview

TOS: Well, Evelyn, we talked up to the 1930s and through the federal art project and up to the Walker. So continue there.

ER: Try to get some order out of my life. I taught at Walker professionally, as well as taking three night classes a week and children’s classes on Saturday. I think the school was closed—in 1951, I think they closed the art school. Walker, the gallery, was still open, but they decided not to have a school any longer. That year was the first year that I was able to get a large architectural job from a private source.

TOS: In ‘51?

ER: Yes. In ‘50, because we put it up in January of ‘51. Earlier during the war, Mr. Hills, from Hills, Gilberts, and Hayes architectural firm, had come to me at one of my evening classes and wondered if I’d make a little horse’s head for one of his clients, and I did this little horse’s head. After the war was over, Mr. Hills gave me the “Good Shepherd,” the Lutheran “Good Shepherd” job, on 48th and France. It was the first big piece of sculpture that had gone up for a long time in Minnesota. It was called the large—they did a full page on it in the newspaper. They called it “the largest piece of sculpture on a wall in Minnesota.”

I was still teaching at Walker. I rented an automobile showroom on Harmon Place. I like to do my sculpture facing the models the same light as when it’s going up large to test the shadows as the day wears on.

TOS: Did you make smaller models to work up to—

ER: I made a smaller model to show the pastor and the architectural firm, and they seemed to be pleased with it. It was a shepherd with a lamb. I took one of my students and we went over to the University farm campus, and he picked up a lamb and posed for me at the university. It was going to go into a Kasota stone, Minnesota stone. I had about, I don’t know, about six months or so to finish it.

I was teaching at the same time professional. For part of the summer, we didn’t have classes, but I started when we had classes. The space I rented on Harmon was just a short distance from Walker, so I could walk back and forth.

And that same year, I had kind of been responsible for starting the Minnesota Sculpture Group, and it came about because during the war the local shows—John K. Sherman, who used to write the art columns for the newspaper, indicated that the sculpture that was showing during the war, during this period, were like doorstops and that the painting during the war era was better. So at that time, when he wrote the article, there were mostly avocational people entering the shows, and many of them were in my class. We decided to start the Minnesota Sculpture Group, and later on it became not just my class project, but I was able to gather together more of the
professional sculptors, and I can’t exactly remember. There weren’t too many of them. There was a Mr. McGuire, and he was actually not a professional, but he did do a lot of sculpture and entered shows. And Mrs. Bennett. There was a Mrs. Bennett. And then there was a gal that taught at the summer school in St. Paul.

Anyway, that year was so busy for me, it’s hard to figure out just exactly what I did first. But I talked the Walker Art Center into—that was still WPA, I think, and they started a regional sculpture show. No, I’m being confused. This was at an earlier date, this conversation.

What I did start was an outdoor sculpture show. I did a lot of extra work when I was at Walker. I became a lecturer. I wasn’t paid for what I did, but since the first month I came to Walker, I got involved, under WPA even, in giving lectures to advertise Walker, and I would go to any group that wanted to hear me—little women’s group, men’s luncheon groups, church groups, library groups—and I’d take a bucket of clay, and maybe a student, and do a head and talk about sculpture.

There’s always some funny story connected to everything I do, my different activities. I talked to a women’s group that had met for twenty-two years, retired schoolteachers, and before they started their meeting—it was a Christmas meeting—they took a good hour to try to figure out who they were going to send Christmas presents to. A particular group was called the Sunshine Club, and they gave five dollars every year to the Sunshine Club, and it took them almost an hour to figure out if they should still give five dollars to the Sunshine Club, because nobody could remember what the Sunshine Club was. As I said, these ladies had been meeting for twenty-eight years.

Anyway, when I got through doing my demonstration, one of the little ladies paddled up to me and said, “You know, we had a quartet last week, but you were a lot more fun.” And I’ve always held that as one of the nicer compliments.

TOS: Yeah.

ER: To be more fun than a quartet. Anyway, I really did—because I couldn’t talk unless I had a bucket of clay in my hand, to work with clay. I was not a professional lecturer, and I pretty much changed from the farm, where I was a loner for eight years, and to be suddenly put in the midst. My life has always been either I’m quite bit alone, and then suddenly I have more people around me. People used to say about me that I knew everybody in Minneapolis.

Anyway, to become a better speaker, I decided to take a course in lecturing at the MacPhail School, and the teacher told me how to stand in a plié position as a ballet dancer and how to breath like Madam Shumanhine [phonetic] and to hold my hands like a Sunday school kid and breath deeply and imagine I was floating on a raft. So I was asked to speak to a group in Rochester, and I didn’t take my clay with me because I thought now I don’t have to talk with clay in my hand. I went to Rochester and did the worst job in my whole life. By the time I got through remembering what to breath and what to stand and what to do, I couldn’t remember what the heck I was there for. I got out of Rochester as fast as I could. Thereafter, I always went with clay.
in my hands.

Do you want to know this kind of stuff about me?

**TOS:** Yeah. What better way to advertise sculpture than a demonstration?

**ER:** Exactly. That’s why I say I have touched more people with sculpture than any other sculptor. Somehow I seem to have an ability to get known by people who are not especially into art, and I think that’s fine, and the fact that my sculpture’s out on the streets where everybody can see it.

Maybe I should finish up about the—oh, I had the bright idea of having that show during Aquatennial down in the old women’s Y building on Eleventh and Nicollet. Anyway, John Rood and I were co-chairs, and it was the hottest summer. I did the “Good Shepherd” model, eight-foot model, in my automobile showroom, and it was so hot. I didn’t have air-conditioning. We put, really, a good show on down there. Bachman’s gave us boxwood to center on and they gave us benches, and Macy’s Flower furnished twenty-foot trees, high trees, to go all along the building, and when the trees died—we kept the show a week longer than the Aquatennial, because we got letters from everybody saying it was the most interesting thing that the Aquatennial ever put on.

**TOS:** Did you have sculpture outdoors for that show?

**ER:** It was all outdoor sculpture in the tennis court. There was a big tennis court there on Eleventh and Nicollet, and John brought over a lot of big stones. It was really a good show.

We had to get money for prizes and to put the show, extra things involved in putting the show, and then when the show was finally up, we had the help from the assistant director of the Art Institute came, even, to help us work on it. Then John left to go someplace where it was cooler most of the summer, so I was left with taking care of it. And supposedly people were supposed to come and sit with the show. Because it was hot, nobody, practically, showed, and so I was stuck with sitting the show, trying to get the “Good Shepherd” going, the model, and still teaching some classes at Walker. This was kind of a segment of what my life has been, and now that I’m eighty-nine, I can’t understand where I got the energy to do all this stuff.

Because of all my activities, I became probably the best-known sculpture ever in Minnesota, because you could go around—I could go in Dayton’s, and if they wanted identification for my check, they’d say, “Oh, we know you Miss Raymond.” Almost any place, people knew me because of all the activities. We had shows in restaurants and we had shows in barns.

**TOS:** Did you have them outside the Twin Cities?

**ER:** No, I’m just plain local. I should have organized this to give you everything in some kind of order.

Anyway, when the show during Aquatennial, that outdoor sculpture show closed, we had a meeting of the Minnesota Sculpture Group. That’s the catalog. Do you have a copy of that?
TOS: Oh, yeah, the first outdoor sculpture show.

ER: Did you get a copy of that?

TOS: I’ve seen a copy. I don’t know if we have one in the library.

ER: I had it on the table. I don’t know what happened to it. I thought maybe you took it.

TOS: No.

ER: But I don’t know if that’s of interest to you.

TOS: Yeah, definitely.

ER: I think it might be the last one.

TOS: Your work on the cover, “Minnesota Girl.”

ER: Yeah.

TOS: Were you carving stone at this time?

ER: No, I wasn’t. Well, yes. We were carving the back of Walker, because where the Guthrie Theater is, when WPA moved into Walker, they cleared all the tile. It looked like the Muslim temple or something. They cleared that stuff all off, and there was a lot of lovely limestone blocks behind it, which they let us have them. We had them in the back yard where the Guthrie Theater is, and my kids—I did some carving myself, and they were wonderful blocks of limestone, good size, about thirty inches tall and about fourteen inches square, just beautiful stuff for carving, especially for beginners. Anyway, I’ve got a picture of Tony Caponi working on them and Danny Soderlind. I’ve got a picture somewhere where the kids are all working in the back yard there.

TOS: For a really big figure, like the “Good Shepherd,” did you carve that yourself.

ER: No, I did a half-scale model. I did a eight-foot model. It was fifteen-feet tall. And because you don’t really get enough money for carving and not being a professional carver to use power tools or anything, I made it as simple as I could so the design couldn’t be ruined by other people. I did want to carve on some of the more delicate parts, but the stone carvers wouldn’t let me in the stone yard because I would have had to become a member of the union, and they wouldn’t let women become members of the union. So I didn’t do any carving on it myself, but I could see it. I mean, I checked it as often as I could, and I did make the design very simple and strong, so they really couldn’t go too far wrong with it. It is not unusual for a sculptor, even like Rodin or Rood, whatnot, to have their work carved for them by strictly stone carvers.

That was my first private commission, big private commission. I still have the largest piece of sculpture on walls in Minnesota. When we put that up, that was the largest piece. But the largest piece is twenty foot by twenty foot over on St. Thomas. That originally was done for the Mutual
Service Casualty Company at 1919 University [St. Paul], and that was up for about twenty-some years. There was a time when people were building buildings to save what we call utilities. What is that I’m looking for?

TOS: Preserving?

ER: No, not to use so much energy.

TOS: Oh, yeah, the energy efficiency.

ER: Yes, yes. So they built a building that was probably more underground than upperground.

This piece was in hammered copper. It took me about two years to do. I did a lot on that, but I did work in the sheet metal shop, and I had talked them into—they had never done sculpture before, so I talked them into helping me. At that time, they had a lot of good Scandinavian craftsmen, and it was fun working with them. I did the smaller things in my studio, and the bigger things I oversaw the shop. I’m jumping ahead of me. That was done in 1959.

TOS: Did you find the fact that you were a woman at a time when those unions were closed, was that a hindrance to a lot of work?

ER: What?

TOS: Did that often come up as a problem for you?

ER: No. I will say that I’m strictly a feminist as far as joining women’s organizations. I don’t think I ever lost a job because I was a woman. When I first started being a sculptor, I thought I’d just put my initials down when I’d show sculpture, because I would probably be not taken as seriously if I were a man sculptor. But I never had to do that.

I really can’t ever complain that I was discriminated against because of my sex. I’ve been extremely lucky. Anyway, it seemed to me that they seemed to think I could do the job, and in a way I think it’s highly unusual that, right after the war, architects would give this big job to a woman. I had done big jobs on WPA, but this was my first private job.

That same firm gave me two other big jobs to do. It’s plenty scary for somebody to put up a big piece of sculpture in front of a building. In those days, they were $7 million building. Sometimes I think I—I don’t fly, for instance. I feel that I’m not a very strong person. But it takes strength of some kind to put up a big piece of sculpture on a very expensive building. I don’t think I’ll ever go down in the books as a great sculptor, but I’m an honest sculptor and I would never let anything go by that—I would work for weeks on one single line if it wasn’t what I wanted it to do. To me, it had to be right, whatever I did had to be right. I think I’m a good sculptor, anyway.

What else? I sort of get carried away.

TOS: The Maria Sanford commission was one that—
ER: Oh, the Maria Sanford, that’s kind of interesting, because after I left Walker, I didn’t have any place to go. Any money we had coming to us, Walker kept back because they felt maybe they had overpaid us during the years we had been there.

So I rented an apartment on 31st and Hennepin, and there again, the loyalty I get from people has been one of the amazements of my life. About at least twenty or thirty people came with me from my night classes and some from my—so I opened up classes in what was the living room of this big old apartment, and they had rummage sales for me down on Washington to raise enough money to make modeling stands for me. I mean, very loyal, I always had very loyal and wonderful friends as a teacher.

From there, I was there for three and a half years on 31st and Hennepin in this big old apartment, and when I was in that apartment was when Dmitri Mitropoulos called and wanted to use a picture of a head I had done on his cards, on his holiday cards.

These people that were with me were like—they weren’t professional people. They were doctors, they were lawyers, and most of them were couples that came and enjoyed working with me. We did do wood carving, or stone carving and some wood carving in that old apartment. I was paying $160 a month for the apartment, and I thought that was too much.

It seems to me I’ve been haunted all my life by lack of money. I’m not very good. I’ve grown up in the Depression. I don’t have any idea what to charge for things. I go through my life possibly worrying about finances, partly my own fault. I never know—my classes, I always charge about a third what anybody else charges, because all these people became my friends and I don’t ask—I know I’m a little silly.

Anyway, where did we go from there? Oh, I wanted to—there was an old duplex across the street. It was a hundred years old, and I decided that that would be a better place for me to have my little school. I had to have $1,000 down, payment down on it, and I big copper head that I had done. When I was at Walker, when we used to give demonstrations on Sunday, the janitor, I had done this janitor. While I was working on his head, I decided that all of a sudden I wanted to do it in metal myself rather than find another medium, outside of casting in bronze, that was available and something you could put your hand on yourself all the way without other people working on it. So I did this head of this janitor in hammered copper, silver soldered. And then because we had so many classes—that was during WPA—I didn’t have a lot of—it took me a year to do about this over life-sized head.

When one of my students knew—I have never had people give me vast sums of money or anything. It’s always been their help and whatnot. Some artists maybe have people with money backing them. I’ve had people with love and caring who wanted to help me, but there’s never been a lot of money involved, just their help.

Anyway, I had a student who took me over to—I have trouble remembering his name. He had a wholesale carpet place. She took an old smock and wrapped around this head. The model was a young black who’d come from the West Indies. He had a really interesting head, and that was what the head was all about. And she took me over to this wholesale carpet place. The man was a
friend of hers. He was kind of an important person here. He sold more bonds for Israel than anybody else, and he was very active in the city affairs. Anyway, Mrs. Rubens [phonetic] put the head down on the table in his elegant office, and he had a big reclining chair, with people standing all around him. I don’t know how to explain it, but like they were all his workers, managers or whatnot.

I’m sitting there very nervous, trying to get $1,000 in order to buy this duplex, and this old dirty smock on it. And then Mrs. Rubens took the smock off the head, and he said to me—his first name was Harry, and I can’t seem to remember his last name. He said, “Honey, if I like something, I buy it. If I don’t, I won’t.”

And then I’m sitting there, very nervous, and all of a sudden he turned to one of the various men standing behind him and he said, “Write her out a check for $1,000.” [Laughter]

I mean, this is some silly things in my life. Do you want me to talk like this?

TOS: Yeah, the way that actually paid for the duplex. Did you move your school into there?

ER: Yes. I bought the duplex, and because we could rent the upper part, there was enough room for my sister and I to live in the back part. And then I had my studio in this old house. It was the first house built on 31st. It was 100 years old, we discovered, the day we moved out, and I was there for eight and a half years. I had classes. I had day classes, and I always had three night classes. I had about forty kids every Saturday.

TOS: Wow.

ER: That’s what I mean. I’ve never stopped teaching, and I don’t take vacations from these things. I just keep going on. I have had very little vacations.

TOS: Did you do any traveling during those years?

ER: I’m the greatest untraveled sculptor you’ll ever find. I have students that have been all over the world, and they keep coming back telling me all about it. But I’m an armchair traveler, and I don’t feel that—I mean, there’s so much wonderful stuff you can get in books and reading and whatnot. It seems to me so many of my students that are affluent go to these elegant places and stay in elegant hotels, and I don’t think they know as much about where they’ve been as I do.

TOS: Right.

ER: I don’t have any desire to travel. Actually, I’m a poor traveler. Even going to Washington. I went to Washington to see where they were going to put Maria Sanford, and I got sick then, too. I’m not a good traveler. To get to the Maria Sanford sculpture—I’ll just take certain episodes, is that all right?

TOS: Sure. How were you chosen for that commission?

ER: I’m going to tell you that. That was when we moved into that duplex. It was a very hot day,
and the doorbell rang. There was a little elderly lady came to the door, and I thought she wanted a 
drink of water. I asked her to come in. She said she’d just come back from Stillwater, and she 
had heard two women talking on the bus and several names were mentioned, and they mentioned 
my name.

This little lady was a china painter that was in my block, who kind of felt that we were kindred 
souls because she was a china painter. She said, “I think it’s a big commission. You better try for 
it. You better contact somebody.”

So I did. I’ve always done some work. I’m the last of the Roosevelt Democrats. I think the WPA 
project was one of the more important things, I think, done for art in this whole country at any 
time. I think so many artists, of every kind of art, were given a chance. I could not have 
accomplished what I’ve done without that help. It was only three years, and I don’t think they 
spent too much money on me for $76.00 a month, but I’m ever so grateful.

Anyway, I contacted Sally Luther [phonetic], and she told me—she was in the legislature then. I 
don’t know whether she was the first woman in the state legislature or not. Anyway, I know she 
was a Democrat. Anyway, she gave me the name of the chairman of the committee. For four 
years, the Women’s Federation Group tried to get a woman in the capital. Every state is allowed 
to honor two pioneers, and Minnesota, I think, was either the first or second to honor a woman, 
and the Federation Women’s Club had worked for years to accomplish this fact.

Anyway, Sally gave me the name of Governor—he was not governor then, Elmer Andersen. I 
started to get people to write letters to him. Everybody I met, I think, I asked them to write 
letters. And then I made a model of Maria. I got hold of a couple pictures. Pictures were hard to 
come by. I really didn’t have a profile. So after writing out my accomplishments and whatever I 
had—what do you call that?

**TOS:** Like a résumé?

**ER:** Résumé. I sent that to him. Then I got a letter back from him, saying that, “Thank you very 
much for giving us some idea how we can go about having a competition.” I hate competitions, 
because, I don’t know, it’s so tedious getting together slides, and I don’t know, it seems to me 
I’ve been judged enough on shows to know it seems to me that the one that should have got first 
prize is always getting the second prize or something. I had competition. But this was such a big 
thing, I felt, for me.

So I did enter the competition, and I did another model beside the one I sent already. I did a head 
then. I had done a full figure before. Maybe I’m not one of these very aggressive females, but if I 
make up my mind, I really work on something. And then I was fortunate enough to win the 
competition.

I didn’t have a studio. I had to rent—I rented a place near my studio on 31st and Hennepin. It had 
been a beauty shop. I had to have a ceiling tall enough, because when you put the sculpture—the 
sculpture had to be the same height as all the sculptures were in all the Statuary and the Capitol 
in Washington. I got one of my little old students to pose for me. I was able to get a dress from
the historical society near the Art Institute with the dress that she wore all the time, Maria.

Maria was one of the first women professors at the university, and she taught all kinds of politicians and she sold more war bonds than any other person. She got sewers for Minneapolis. She was less than five feet tall, but just a little ball of fire, I guess, and she did so many things. She was a very admirable little figure. I had a student that was about the same size and about the same age. She died in 19[20] or something, that period, somewhere during the First World War.

Speaking about the First World War, my first publicity came when I was eight years old in the First World War. It had nothing to do with art. My dad was building a farm for the university at Nickerson. It was just halfway between here and Duluth. And the women in that area had a Red Cross meeting, and they would knit soldiers for the First World War people and the men, and Mother used to take me with her and they taught me how to knit stockings. So I got my picture in the paper as the youngest person to knitting stockings for the boys in the First War. That’s really great, don’t you think?

TOS: Yeah.

ER: It would make any sculptor proud, wouldn’t it? [Laughter]

TOS: Get an early start with some publicity.

ER: I can say that—maybe I can’t say it absolutely for sure, but I don’t think I’ve ever asked for publicity, and it just comes to me like I’ve got a magnet, because I think for some reason I’m always doing something that’s a little bit different. I don’t know.

TOS: Did the Sanford commission get a lot of press coverage while you were working on that?

ER: Oh, indeed it did, because there wasn’t much else going on, and you could hardly pick up a paper if you didn’t see my picture in it. As I proceeded, I mean, the press was around me almost to the point where artists in the area went to the newspaper and were angry that I was getting so much publicity. So for about ten years, I never got any publicity. The editor told the paper not to give me anymore publicity.

One of the participants—I had a friend that—there was a lot of sadness. There were fourteen sculptors, local Minnesota sculptors who were asked to do that, to enter in this competition. A couple were my own students. Anyway, a friend of mine was sitting at some dinner affair next to one person who had tried to compete, and my friend heard her say, “Well, you know how she got that,” and then never heard the answer, and I keep wondering, “How did I get it?” I don’t look like Marilyn Monroe. I never did look like Marilyn Monroe. [Laughter] I hoped I’d gotten it on my talent, but I don’t know.

There was a lot of sadness. There was a really nice person teaching sculpture at the university. He was the only one to call me and congratulate me, and there were tears as he talked to me. His name was Philip. I can’t think of what Philip’s last name was. He was a very good sculptor, too.
Anyway, it was a $25,000 commission, and $6,000 was taken out right away for expenses for the committee to go to Washington. And out of that $19,000, I had to pay for the casting in bronze. Of course, I had my students—no, I didn’t have my students help me cast this. I had people from St. Paul Statuary help me cast that. You have to pay for insurance. You have to pay for delivery. I had to pay for a granite block with a bronze plaque on it, and I had to rent a space because my studio wasn’t tall enough. You don’t end up with a lot of money. I think I ended up with $7,000 for that.

When you do big sculpture, especially as a local artist, you don’t get a lot of money. Maybe they get advertisement, like the spoon down at the garden got like a quarter of a million or something, whatever. But the local artists, they don’t get that kind of money. You just have to have a great love for doing big stuff, which I do. I don’t know, I think in the past, somewhere in my past life I lived on Easter Island or something, where they made those heads; or I lived in Egypt, where they made those—I get such a kick out of doing big sculpture.

The fact that I gave this design for St. Louis Park recently. It’s twenty-seven foot tall, and I gave them the design. I had tried to sell it to them a few years ago, but I gave them the design because I just feel a need to have another big sculpture up.

**TOS:** Did you cast just one of the Sanford statues?

**ER:** Well, I think Elmer—Elmer was the head of our—Elmer Andersen is a really, very nice man. I think he had a bust made and paid for it himself, and it was given to the Maria Sanford building, I think. Anyway, outside of that, there was only one. It was such fun. Well, that’s on that tape I gave you. I don’t know if you ever got to see that.

**TOS:** Yeah.

**ER:** I had never had a profile. I was on the invitational list. The Federation of Women, they kept asking me for lunches to talk, and then I’d be asked to go to different women’s clubs to talk while I was trying to do the sculpture, and I was always looking for somebody to—Maria was less than five feet tall—somebody that maybe looked a little, because I only had two photos. I didn’t have a profile. And every time I appeared at this luncheon, there would be a man who was principal of the Maria Sanford School would be there, and I’m sure he must have heard me ask for photographs.

But then when it came time for the dedication in Washington, they had a luncheon for the—I guess Senator [Edward] Thye was then senator, and all the dignitaries from the university, in I don’t know whether it was the Jefferson Room or not, one of the important rooms in the Capitol. And sitting next to me, I had a feeling that this man that was principal of the Maria Sanford and I were some kind of a team, because we kept appearing at the same luncheons. Anyway, he hauled out of his briefcase some things that he wanted me to read, some of the essays that he had had the children write about Maria, and when he pulled them out of his briefcase, out fell at least ten pictures of Maria, with profiles.
TOS: You never saw them in all the time you worked on it?

ER: Never saw any of them. I was about to kill him in cold blood. I mean, I’m at this dedication, and I don’t know.

I was at one of these luncheons I had to attend, and there was a Mrs. Goode [phonetic]. I thought she looked a little bit like Maria, and asked her to come over and pose for me. And then when I got through doing it, it looked like Mrs. Goode, all right, but it didn’t seem to look like Maria. So I had to do it all over again.

There’s pictures of me that were taken. This was well over a half a year’s job, and I look like I’ve got great huge circles under my eyes. It was really a rough time, and I wanted to do the best I could to honor Maria.

But then one of the pictures that fell on the floor, I picked it up, and it looked like I really had it. I mean, I was so pleased. Anyway, I didn’t kill him then, or later on either.

They had a dedication of the sculpture in the Rotunda. The sculpture goes in the Rotunda for six months before it’s put in its final place. I had gone to Washington to see where it was going to be, because I always like to know the site of a piece of sculpture I’m doing to see the light and whatnot. The architect, there was a live-in architect for the Capitol, and he said I was the first one that came to look for the site.

There’s very few—they couldn’t keep all the sculpture in the hall of the Statuary anymore because it was so heavy the floor was beginning to sag. Because Elmer Andersen was so charming and persuasive, he got one of the fewer nice places left to put sculpture. And so I was able to see that site.

Oh, there was this huge dedication. They said there was more people came to the dedication of that sculpture than any other piece that they had and could remember since sculpture had been up. There were people, because of their connection with the university, there were past governors. It was a huge crowd. I was nervous. I was really nervous. Governor Andersen, bless his heart, he was running for governor the next year. Governor Freeman was there, that was then governor.

Oh, there’s so much to tell. My sculpture got lost on the way. I sent it by United Truck. The sculpture got lost on the way to the foundry. And it was a hot summer then, and I landed in New York to meet the sculpture. I was there for three weeks, and they lost it, they lost the sculpture. Each truck, United Truck, owned their own truck, so the company couldn’t locate them.

TOS: Was that the clay?

ER: It was plaster then. It was in plaster then. I was there about three weeks in New York.

TOS: It must have been terrifying, after all that work, to know it was gone.
ER: Oh, it was terrible. There were already, you know, plans and everything, and I didn’t know what I was going to do. I tried to get Governor Andersen—or Governor Freeman was then governor—to try to locate it for me, but the highway said that they’d only in case of life or death or something.

Finally, the engine had burned out on his truck in Toledo. He was holed up in Toledo, getting a new engine for his truck. It was finally found. I had it cast on Long Island. I still think they have the three best foundries in the country. B.B. Rossi [phonetic] was the firm that did the bronze for me.

There’s so much to tell. You don’t want all this stuff, do you?

TOS: I do. Your sculpture was found, cast in New York. What was the name of the foundry?

ER: B.B. Rossi. I think it’s B.B. Rossi-Mackney [phonetic] now. No, I’m sorry. I had another big thing cast at Bee. I had that Roman [phonetic] Foundry do that. There’s Roman Foundry, Modern Art Foundry, and B.B. Rossi-Mackney. There’s three in Long Island city. It was Roman, Roman Bronze that did Maria for me, and then they had to ship it to Washington.

I had to get granite locally from—I don’t know, was it St. Paul where you get granite? I don’t know, I can’t remember someplace.

TOS: Yeah.

ER: Anyway, one of the members of my committee was kind of a pain. There’s always somebody in a committee. She was in enamored of the fact that Maria came out here because of a sad affair with a married man, and she wanted to put that on this brown plaque. She was a writer, and she was writing the material for this stuff. If I’d put down on the plaque what she wanted me to put down, in the first place, it would have cost me a lot more, and in the second place, the plaque would have run across the floor for about twelve feet off the stand. Governor Andersen was very sensitive to everything, and he suggested that maybe we cut it down to the more important things in Maria’s life. When she came out here, she was about forty years old. She was not a real young woman when she came out here.

Anyway, that pretty much closes up Maria, doesn’t it?

TOS: Yeah.

ER: What I do want to say is—and I’ve said that on my tape. I was scared to get up. They had a special dais or whatever you call it for the principals, and Governor Andersen, bless his heart, he talked, and it made it sound like I was Michelangelo. Michelangelo would have been nothing compared to me. I am basically kind of shy, and I didn’t know how I was going to get off the dais and walk across the Rotunda and take the flag off Maria. And Governor Freeman escorted me across, and when I got off the dais, he winked at me and somehow broke the tension. He could probably see that I was so scared that I couldn’t walk.
There was an elderly gentleman that was in the invited guests, and he came up to me and he said he had studied with Maria, and he had tears in his eyes. He said, “I don’t know how you did it. Exactly like her, exactly the way she’d come into the classroom.” And as I said on my little tape, I really felt that I had done well. I mean, I really felt that I had done that one fine. I don’t know if any art people ever wrote it up, but I didn’t care, because I felt it was good.

**TOS:** Have you done other bronze figures on that scale?

**ER:** No. As a matter of fact, my big things I worked with, that method that I came upon when I did that first Negro head, where it’s done by sheet bronze and soldered together with silver solder, where the pieces are more for accenting the form, or are for accenting the form, rather for ease of handling. Each piece accents the form, and the silver solder accents the form.

I have a thing about—people keeping saying, oh, they just love to handle a piece of sculpture, and I think that’s like the primary enjoyment, I think. The sculpture’s got to make people, especially if you’re doing big sculpture, you have to make people aware of the three dimensions without having to put your greasy hands on them.

**TOS:** Right.

**ER:** Sometimes I’ll work for weeks on end on just a simple line, the square head on the piece I have in front of—

**TOS:** Is that a model for the family group?

**ER:** No, this is a model for—

**TOS:** Is it the one at Fairview Riverside now?

**ER:** Yes, it’s the model for Legacy. This actually I did as a smaller model. I was asked to submit something for a competition for the governor’s garden or something many years before that. The competition was to commemorate the Vietnamese War, and I thought something would suggest peace rather than war was more the point, people fighting for peace rather than [war].

The content of my work has always become a little bit secondary to the form, because to me the form has got to be the important thing about a piece of sculpture. When I was younger, I was in a modern dance class that Gertrude Lippincott [phonetic]—her husband used to be a professor at the university. She had studied with Martha Graham. Gertrude had a whole class of women artists, and I’ve gotten more ideas from that modern dance group than almost anything. I try to give life to each form.

In dance, you think of a swing movement. I try to get that in a very plastic quality. They work with sustained movements, and I try to get—each piece has got to have some kind of quality, like in itself certain forces. And then also a percussive movement. And then you work within a certain space. I like to have my pieces contained so that they’re not going all over the place, they’re contained within—I can’t think of that word. They have to be contained. Say, for
instance, you were designing within a rectangle or whatnot, or even if you have an abstract shape line around, and you keep within that territory. Restrained kind of a thing. You see my Moving to the Lake, for instance. The arm falls off there. That’s kind of like a little percussive movement to me. It gives your mind a chance to work at the same time. To me, that piece has more of me in it, of what I think sculpture ought to be, than some of my other pieces.

I’m talking. You better turn me off for a while. [Tape recorder turned off.]

There’s a Quonset hut in St. Louis Park, Episcopalian Quonset hut, and I was contacted by the pastor to do something for them. They had nothing, including money. I was asked to do a victory cross, a crucifix, a font, and sconces, even mix the paint for them. Anyway, I think I got $1,500 for six months’ work on that.

**TOS:** Was that in the 1950s?

**ER:** That would have been—yeah. That was later, maybe. Yeah, that would probably be 1955 or something like that.

I did a victory cross, and I had part of it cast and part of it fabricated. And I did a crucifix that I had spring up from the prayer rail. It really didn’t have a cross behind it, but the figure made a cross and it kind of sprung up in front of the victory cross, which was on the back wall of the Quonset hut. And then I did a font, and then these wonderful sconces. I thought they were so fun. They were over three feet tall, and I thought they were really very nice.

I was really pleased with that job, because I felt—as I say, I mixed the paint and everything. It got such much publicity all over, and probably even in another country, I don’t know.

At that time, when I finished that job, I ended up having one of my first cancer surgeries, and I was in the hospital directly after we put that up. Then they have a newspaper, Episcopalian national newspaper, and they ran pictures of it on the cover of this Episcopalian—not newspaper, magazine. I don’t know if it’s an international magazine or just a national magazine. But there was so much controversy over it. It was the first Episcopalian to do anything sort of modern, and I remember reading one article said it must have been done by a drunken sculptor. There were some people liked it. The pastor, Roger Schmuck [phonetic], he got the biggest church in Texas because it gave him publicity.

The sad part of it is, after a few years, when they got enough money to build a traditional church, they sold the victory cross to a little church in the Dominican Republic. They cut off my crucifix and hung it on a wall in the lobby, and I don’t know what happened to the rest. It was very sad. You know, you have a feeling that everything you do will eventually be torn down for progress.

**TOS:** You had quite a few church commissions. Were you brought up within a religion? Are you a religious person?

**ER:** No. My father was Catholic, and he and his brothers had been altar boys and whatnot in Quebec. They were French-Canadian. Then Mother was a Methodist. When my dad’s mother and
sister died, they had sort of a—there were four brothers. They had started a business in Duluth, and apparently they had a falling-out. That was before I was born. Mother always said they had a falling-out with the church.

So my dad and his brothers became atheists, and they wouldn’t let us celebrate Christmas or anything. But if my dad was out building roads someplace, Mother would send us—if we went with him in the summertime, we always sort of lived in a different place when we got back from building roads, so Mother would send us to the nearest church. As a kid, I’ve been to Sunday school in about every church except the Catholic church.

Anyway, I think I have a certain sense, a feeling that what I do, I do with a lot of help from whatever you want to call it, a higher power or whatever, and I think I am, in my own way, a person who recognizes that there is something besides just what’s here. I don’t know, I suppose one should really belong to a church, but I don’t. But I’ve worked for so many churches. In my own way, I think I have a sense of religion, or whatever the word would do better than that.

When I did the “Good Shepherd,” the pastor didn’t want it to be Christ. He wanted it to be a shepherd to represent Christ. It was okayed by the architect and okayed by the pastor, and it was just ready to go be put in plaster, the model, and then they got a hierarchy from the Lutheran Church who insisted that it become Christ and that I should add a dress and beard to it. After dying over the line, the line going down in the middle of the legs, I couldn’t put a chaff on that leg because it would cause the sculpture to become unbalanced. So I don’t know how many weeks I worked just on one line, and then suddenly they wanted me to add a skirt and a beard.

So what I did, I got off the scaffolding, and the pastor and the architect were there and this doctor, whatever he was, was there. I always keep kind of books—not that I copy them, but I can feel comfortable with Henry Moore. Lipschitz I guess has been the one that most influenced me, and [unclear], just things that I surround myself with, things that I like in the way of sculpture.

So I got off the scaffolding and I opened these books up one at a time and I said, “If you had hired any of these fellows to do a piece of sculpture and really paid them big money, you wouldn’t ask them to change it at this point.” I was just so forceful that the pastor and the architect were sort of grinning behind this doctor whatever his name was. So I had my own way. I didn’t have to add a skirt and a beard.

Tom, there’s so much dull stuff to tell about my life.

TOS: It’s a real important part of those kind of commissions, though.

ER: I know it is. I know it is.

TOS: Critical points to keep your own design.

ER: But you’re not writing my life story, and it goes so on and on. There’s something with everything. What do I do next?
The biggest job I did, that took about two years in hammered copper. I got the job from Warren Mosman, who used to teach at the art school, the Minneapolis School of Art, and I taught at Walker at the same time. Anyway, when Walker closed and Mosman was let go about the same time from the school, maybe he just accepted the job with Ellerbe and Company. Warren was head of the art department—I mean, Mosman was head for Ellerbe and Company. That’s one of the big architectural firms in the country. And then he gave me the commission to do the thing for Mutual Service. That’s “The Family.” It was up for twenty-some years before it was taken down and almost ruined, and then it was given to St. Thomas. St. Thomas, they’re very fond of it. They like it.

Anyway, Warren told us that—I got $35,000 for that, and it’s very expensive because you have to work with union labor and you have to pay for all the installation, you have to pay for engineers, you have to pay for moving and space. If you want to do big sculpture in Minneapolis, you don’t do it because you want to make a lot of money. You do it because you get such a heck of a lot of fun out of doing it. Anyway, Warren told us artists—he gave a lot of artists a chance to do things—if we ever went to the customer and asked for more money, he’d never give us another job. So you made do with what you got and had to be happy with it. Anyway, I suppose that’s his business as the director.

And then Ellerbe gave me a job to do six woodcarvings. They were about thirty inches tall, or three feet, I can’t remember. Anyway, they had to represent every agricultural pursuit in the country. In the lobby of the building was the Farmers Exchange over in St. Paul, I guess.

TOS: Oh, yeah.

ER: And they had a wonderful kind of imitation mosaic, big prayer thing in the lobby, and then they had with brass bands to suggest the different states.

I just had my surgery then, and a lot of muscles were taken out of my right arm. And so I made mounds of clay, and I made them quite simple, and then I made them so I could take them to the mill and have the mill cut out areas so I wouldn’t have to carve so much, like if there was a square that could come out or an angle. So they were kind of blocked out for me by the miller, because I kept the model simple. And then because my arm was such that it wasn’t as strong as it ought to be, I got a little power machine with some different burrs in it to help me. I was always against using mechanical means for working with sculpture, but it was a help. But I had to end up by finishing them myself, but it was good to help model them.

I remember going down—a short distance where I lived on 31st and Hennepin there was a store that sold physician’s supplies, and I walked down—it was just a few blocks—in a dirty smock, all kind of mussed up. I had this little power tool that I could put little burrs in, and I thought a physician’s burr for brain surgery would be something I could use. So I went to this very elegant—this clerk looking like something from Fifth Avenue. I said to him, “I’d like to get some burrs, look at some burrs. I do a little brain surgery on the side.” I said it with a straight face. I think he thought he was talking to a nut. Actually, they didn’t help me too much because they had to be worked with a rapid—my motor hadn’t been rapid enough to use it.
Anyway, I got a nice story in the St. Paul paper about that work. And then the man that ran that Farmers Exchange was the son of Ellerbe, the architect, and somebody overhead him say at some dedication or something—I don’t know how I wasn’t there, but I suppose I wasn’t well enough. He said, “You know, we stole those things from her.” I got $500 a piece for them.

But it was a lot of fun. I’m not complaining because I didn’t—I mean, sculpture’s my life. You know, [unclear] talks about finding her bliss. Well, sculpture’s my bliss, and maybe it’s almost unnatural to be so involved. I mean, nothing makes me quite so happy. I remember when I first came to town, I only had about three and a half years of art school, though I was going, after we even opened up our own place, I was going over to St. Paul and studying over there at night and Saturdays, and I put in extra work. And, of course, all the reading I did. I didn’t have a degree, and I thought I better try to see what I could do about getting a degree. So I went over to St. Catherine’s, and there was a nun over there. I think her name was Sister Leone or something. I talked Sister Leone into making it possible for me to teach over there, even though I didn’t have a degree, and she was very kind. But just about that time, on WPA came the job that they wanted for International Falls, and I—to heck with St. Catherine’s, and Sister Leone never talked to me again.

Do you want me to quit? What else? Didn’t I tell you about him already?

**TOS:** When did you do the Dmitri Mitropoulos process?

**ER:** I did that while I was on WPA.

**TOS:** Oh.

**ER:** I came from Duluth, and I don’t recall ever going to an orchestra up there. I know we used to have—I keep talking about the school in Duluth, but they used to have classes where we listened to good music and we were taught the history of good music, but I’d never heard a live orchestra before.

I started to go to the—oh, I had a student in my night class that seemed to think I had potentials, and she was so nice to me, she and her husband. She had a famous blind husband. He was a blind lawyer who, he and his brothers, were on the Nuremberg trial, you know, the famous Jewish lawyers in town, very fine people. I can’t find the word, very—whatever word I’m trying to think of, but they were lovely people.

Hortense was a student of mine, his wife, and she kind of took this person from Duluth who could hardly talk, so shy, and she and her husband took me to the orchestra on Fridays or whatever, and it was my first chance to go to the orchestra.

And then Dmitri’s music—I was in the midst of kind of developing myself, and the modern stuff he was playing excited me so. It wasn’t that I was ignorant of music, because I did buy recordings myself. When I was on the farm, I tried to educate myself in many ways. Anyway, I did go to the orchestra regularly.
About that time during the war, it was just the war was beginning, and there was a fellow that
was a timpanist for the orchestra. His last name was Henry [phonetic], but I can’t remember. His
wife played the flute in the orchestra. And he couldn’t get parts. His timpani came from
Germany, and because of the war he couldn’t get parts. There’s all sorts of gears and wheels and
stuff under this big timpani, whatever it’s called, drum. Anyway, he came over to Walker and
asked me if I could do a plaster and he’d have them cast in bronze locally. And so I said I thought
it would be fun, interesting or something. I had pictures that were taken that were to size, and we
worked almost a whole summer in my spare time on these parts for the timpani. And he had them
cast in bronze, and he just got it done before the
symphony started.

The last day he was there he handed me an envelope, and it had $25 in it. My sister, who was a
little more hip about money, suggested I call him and tell him that I thought that wasn’t very
much for a whole summer’s work. So he gave my sister and I season tickets to the orchestra, and
they happened to be in the very last row of North Balcony, right against the projection box.
That’s when I got the idea, sort of a—what is the word I’m looking for—not a realistic
impression of Mitropoulos. Somehow the music was so exciting. When he’d get through, you
really thought you had heard something.

Then, because it was the last row in the balcony, he used to play over at the Art Institute on
contemporary composers, and so I started following—I didn’t follow him around, but I’d go to
those concerts over at the Art. And then I did the impression, and I showed it at some local
shows. I did win some prizes on it. And apparently, he saw the head. I had an idea I’d like to do
his head by real if he’d pose for me, so I had written—or called him, I guess—and I got his
secretary, who said he was so busy, he wouldn’t have any time to pose for me. So that ended that.

But after he got to New York, I got a call from him, and everybody knew kind of how I felt about
his music. I thought somebody was kidding me, somebody was kidding me. He had an accent. He
was a little hard to understand, and his secretary got on the phone and asked if he could have a
picture of the head for his cards. This thrilled me, like everything. I sent him a photo, and he did
use it on his cards, because I’ve got a copy on the wall. He’d written—it had big letters, my
name, and then he wrote across them, “God bless you, Dmitri Mitropoulos.” And he did send
them to all his friends, which sort of excited me to think of those musicians that were still alive,
like Koussevitzky and Toscanini and all of those, and all those guests probably would have
gotten a card.

I guess I told you about my friends made my honorary artist at the orchestra one year. It was
1980, and there was the president of the orchestra that seemed to be pretty, he seemed to be—I
can’t think of the word I mean. Smart ass would be good. Nice lady like me. Anyway, we started
talking about Mitropoulos, and he said, “You know, there’s a famous head that somebody’s done
in New York of Mitropoulos.” And I knew darn well if I told him I did it he wouldn’t believe it,
so I didn’t tell him.

See these little sidelights of my life? I should stick to the important things, shouldn’t I?

TOS: Were there other portraits you did that you were pleased with?
ER: I did a portrait of Bernie Bierman. Paul Giel gave me the commission, and I did that from photographs. They had a big dedication up in IDS Tower, and the Bierman family were there and some of the famous players that played under him. That was very exciting and a big affair for the athletic group, and the family was pleased with the portrait. It’s not over in the Bernie Bierman Building, and he died shortly after that dedication. So they invited me, the Biermans, and he was no longer coaching, but they invited me over to the university stadium for a game. It was fun sitting with them.

Then I did two heads of the Scolwins [phonetic]. He was the head of—the name has been changed now—the American Something Insurance Company, that big building that was right above Walker. Actually, he was a member of the Good Shepherd Church. I think he put up the funds—I didn’t know that—for the “Good Shepherd.” But he also gave me a lot of money, I think, to St. Olaf. There’s a fieldhouse. He and his wife are in that. They’re over life-sized portraits of them in St. Olaf.

And who else did I do? I’ve done some children.

TOS: Frederick Manfred’s head just survives in photographs now, I guess.

ER: That’s right. I didn’t have any place for it when I left Walker and it cost so much to move it that I—

TOS: That was over life-sized?

ER: Yes, and I cast it in cement, which was so heavy, I think it was a nice—Richard Davis was the head of the Art Institute at that time. He was very active in—he knew the local artists, where most of the people, head of institutions, don’t know the local artists. He had threatened to buy it for the Art Institute, and then he and his wife moved out of town. I don’t know where they moved. So he was no longer director.

TOS: It’s a shame Manfred couldn’t appreciate it.

ER: Well, I offered to give it to him, but he said it was so strong. He had a feeling it would make him feel weak or something to that effect. And he changed his mind after I broke it up, because I didn’t have any place to put it. It was too late then.

I broke up a lot of stuff. I think I’m one of the few local artists that’s had one-woman shows or one-man, whatever you want to call it, at Walker. That was before Walker became so famous, I guess.

While I was on WPA, I started to say, the Minnesota Sculpture Group put on a regional two or three years, and they talked to Paul Manship to see if he—because he was originally from Minnesota. He didn’t think he had anything good enough to put in Walker, or modern enough. I guess I told you that before.

I don’t know what else I’ve been involved in. I’ve been involved in so much, I can’t remember it
all at the moment. But I think I can say that I think I’ve introduced more people to sculpture than any Minnesota sculptor, and I think all my scrapbooks could verify all that.

I think I’ve been a little unhappy. We started Walker on WPA. That was supposed to help local artists, and I don’t think that it became something to help local artists. That was kind of sad. That was what let us when we were on WPA. It seems to me that they had a Minnesota gallery, and one became aware of how many Minnesota artists we had. Literally, they came from out of the woodwork, and some awfully good artists, too. I don’t know where they go now. I feel that I’ve tried to get some recognition for Cameron Booth, because I think of all the people, he probably was the one that had the most influence on Minnesota artists, and I think he should have been recognized for that. But I haven’t gotten anywhere, including trying to get a gallery in the Historical Society.

TOS: Right.

ER: I saw Governor [Rudy] Perpich before they built the Historical Society to see if they wouldn’t put a gallery in Cam’s name. He turned me over to the lieutenant governor, and then she gave me a name to write the Historical Society, but I never got anywhere.

I don’t know, I probably ought to sum up my little life in some way.

TOS: Say anything about any of your students as we wind up?

ER: Tony Caponi was a student of mine at Walker, and he went on to be a sculptor at Macalester. We were accredited to the university. Our classes at Walker were accredited to the university, and Tony got all his credits for his artwork at the university and he took some academic courses to get a degree.

During that time, I used to say, during the war years that degrees were not important, actually, for a practicing artist. When Walker closed, there was an opening at Macalester, and I went over and tried to get a job there. By then, I had quite a bit of big sculpture to prove that I was a fairly decent sculptor. And the fellow that was in charge of it sort of intimated that I’d had the job, and all I had to do was meet the president and sign some papers. So I thought I had the job, and I ran into Peter Lupori on the way home, and I was so elated I had the job.

Somehow word got around, and I didn’t hear from— I can’t think of his name now, the fellow at Macalester. I waited and waited and waited to be called to meet the president, and I never heard from him. And then all of a sudden I heard Tony Caponi had the job. I think it was because Tony was smart enough to get a degree, even though they said degrees were not important.

Well, it was a little hard to take to find out a student could be accepted, after I’d proven I was a pretty good sculptor. But I’m happy about it, because I really like being alone. I like to do things on my own. I think God does run my life for me and knew that this was the best thing for me. At the time, I felt pretty sad about it, but I like being my own—even though you’re in an institution like Walker where you have freedom, somehow you’d always feel that maybe somehow you’re influenced by the people in charge; where when you’re on your own, you’re on your own and
you’re free.

**TOS:** A lot of your students have stayed with you for a lot of years, too.

**ER:** Avocational people are the people that I have worked with mostly, because at Walker we had professional people, but, you know, it’s so hard to make a living as an artist in Minnesota, and for years I think I was the only one that was really making a living at sculpture. I mean, they didn’t have any galleries then. I mean, there was one gallery. Mrs. Harriet Hanley had a gallery, and the Beard Gallery. Those were the only ones.

I mean, it was difficult, and I at least made a living. My classes has supported my big jobs, and my big jobs kind of supported my classes. So I think if anything, one of my claims to fame, if there is any, is that I made my living actually as a sculptor in Minnesota. I mean, at least in the cities.

**TOS:** That old pioneer spirit we started with.

**ER:** Yeah.

**TOS:** That brings us to the end of this tape.

**ER:** You’ve heard enough about me.

**TOS:** Well, thank you, Evelyn.