

Sibyl Barsky Grucci
December 4, 2004

Tape 1 (1 of 3) Side 1

Interviewee – Sibyl Barsky Grucci

Interviewer – Barry Alfonso

BA: I'm speaking with Sibyl Barsky Grucci. Your birth date is March 20, 1905. Is that correct?

SBG: Right.

BA: What's your place of birth?

SBG: I really don't know. You see, our parents saw that we were all teenagers and we never asked questions so I really don't know. One of my brothers went and visited the Soviet Union, he and his wife. He did some research but the government was not cooperative and he couldn't get any information. So I don't know. He was of course interested.

BA: Your family came from Kiev, is that right?

SBG: I really don't know. I've never heard. You see, my uncle Barsky and his family moved to California many years ago, and he might have been able to answer questions, but we were not in touch.

BA: You don't know much or anything about your parents' lives?

SBG: Not a thing. I do know I was told that my father was a craftsman; a cabinet maker of quite a reputation. My cousin told me that. I can believe it because, I know so little

about him, but I know that he was left-handed and I'm left-handed and there are so many signs that I take after him, but this is only later. I didn't know it at the time. In fact, I have a cabinet that we used in our house, this one. It was a music cabinet that he made and I remember watching him work on it, but I don't know how old I was. That's the only memory I have. That came to me only much later. I did see an old photograph of my mother and my father, and I look like my father, I think. That's the only connection I have.

BA: His name was Morris?

SBG: Morris.

BA: He never told you anything you could remember about his growing up or anything of that sort?

SBG: The only thing I remember about my mother was they spoke Russian usually. Children were never part of their conversation and I had the knowledge that she was not happy in Pittsburgh because there was a reference to Odessa. What a beautiful -- you know, it was culture, there was music and theater and apparently she missed all that. I don't know.

BA: That would make you think she was from there.

SBG: I remember that, yes.

BA: You don't know if that's where your father and mother met or anything like that?

SBG: I don't know a thing.

BA: But she did talk about Odessa.

SBG: I do remember. This is what I have of a memory of her. She did not like it.

BA: She spoke and your father spoke Russian but the children at home didn't speak it. They didn't learn it.

SBG: No. My sister and I were sent to learn Yiddish and Hebrew. Of course, the Hebrew didn't take but the Yiddish did.

BA: This was at a school run by a Jewish institute?

SBG: Oh sure.

BA: Do you remember what that school was?

SBG: Huh um, huh um. My sister did much better than I did in Hebrew. Although today I can still, things come back and I can make out some of the consonants without the vowels and I can move around.

BA: And this was in Pittsburgh. This was in the Hill District. This is where your house was, do you know?

SBG: There were several places. One was on Bedford Avenue, I believe. A lovely house on Bedford Avenue, because I remember a girl I played with as young kids whose house was there. She was my friend for years and years and years. In fact, I did a portrait sculpture of her.

BA: What was her name?

SBG: When she and her husband lived in Washington, I remember going to Washington. I did a sculpture head of her and I also did a black and white of her husband, Harold Weinberger. Of course, they're both gone. I suppose, I think a daughter has both pieces.

BA: What was her first name?

SBG: Pearl. Pearl Breskin was her maiden name and she was married to Harold Weinberger.

BA: Was the Bedford house the earliest house you remember?

SBG: Oh no, huh uh.

BA: What do you remember before that as far as where you lived then?

SBG: This is where I made my friends whom I had as lifelong friends. That's the only one I remember.

BA: Ok, but you think there were other houses that you lived in as a child.

SBG: Oh, we moved oh yes, back of Schenley Park there's a community there. I don't remember what...

BA: Not Panther Hollow?

SBG: Oh no.

BA: Squirrel Hill?

SBG: No. It was in back of Schenley Park. I must have been what grade? I don't know. I do remember that of course I had playmates. I was the only Jewish one among the group and what puzzled me. I still remember they fought among themselves on religious grounds. Some were Catholic and some were Protestants and it puzzled me and I wondered why. They were Christians, why did they fight? Logically they should have fought with me, but they didn't and I do remember that many years later. Of course it all became very clear later, but at the time I was so puzzled and I didn't know why they didn't fight with me.

BA: You were a little girl at the time?

SBG: Not so little. I must have been, what, twelve, somewhere around there. Thirteen, perhaps, I don't know.

BA: Did you go to public school?

SBG: Of course.

BA: You did. Did you remember anything about the school?

SBG: I don't remember where they were but I do remember that... And I don't know what grade -- there was a Miss Levy and there were two teachers, Brown. Tall Miss Brown and the other was little Miss Brown. I remembered those three for a very good reason. I remember that this Miss Levy had a very low voice and she was quite heavy. The reason I remember that she was heavy was that when the music period came along I took charge of the music. I went to the head of the class and took charge of the music part and she came to sit in my seat and I often wondered how she got into my seat because of her rear. Then from there I went to tall Miss Brown and I continued with music, three-part music and continued that and then the other Miss Brown. I remember those three because of the music.

BA: This would have been an early grade do you think?

SBG: Yeah. Of course. It wasn't an organ it was something, a piano-thing and you had to pump something down below for air I suppose. She used to have a little boy stay under there and pump for me because I couldn't reach the thing. So this is how I carried on the music thing for the three teachers and that's how I remembered their names.

BA: Was that a favorite part of school for you, the music part?

SBG: Well, music, I've always loved music so I just naturally...

BA: Was there any art education in school for you?

SBG: Oh we had in the elementary school. It must have been a wonderful school. We certainly did. We had music, we had poetry.

BA: Any visual art? Any painting or anything of that sort? Drawing?

SBG: The arts, I don't remember that. I don't remember that at all and I don't remember why I took to sculpture. I think it was the influence without knowing it because certainly there was no instruction in carving, you see.

BA: Do you think your father might have been an influence?

SBG: It must have been, because I don't know how it happened. I have a very individual style of working I understand from what I've seen. I don't make a small copy or whatever. Never. I go directly into the wood, so it's really carving, and it's the only way I know how, because they were never taught even in college, you see. Even at Carnegie they knew nothing about carving at the time and yet that was the only way I could work and still do.

BA: I was curious if you were exposed to sculpture or visual art very much when you were young?

SBG: Um, we were taken to museums to classes in elementary school. They don't do that today you know. We were taken to the Carnegie Museum and we were, I remember making a little booklet and putting paintings in, those that I liked, I suppose.

BA: These were reproductions of the paintings that you put in.

SBG: Um hum.

BA: I see.

SBG: Now I don't remember what happened to it.

BA: Do you remember anything from those early visits?

SBG: Not consciously. This is all rather, I don't know how to put it. It just happened. I don't do a drawing of what I want. I like drawing. I like line drawing but I'd have to, somehow it would come here. I'd start on a piece and work and then when I didn't know

what I was doing I would stop and have a cigarette, walk away, have a cigarette, come back and somehow everything went... It was just a normal kind of thing, very easy.

BA: But where that came from, whether it was from your father...

SBG: I wouldn't know.

BA: Do you have any idea, by the way, where that school might have been?

SBG: What school?

BA: The ones where the two Misses Browns were and ...

SBG: I don't know. It had to have been somewhere within the... You mean the music things?

BA: Yes.

SBG: It had to be a part of Bedford Avenue because, I don't know.

BA: That would have been the same school where you took the field trips to the museum?

SBG: No. No, no. Going to museums was much later.

BA: Like junior high or high school? Something like that?

SBG: No. It was still elementary, but where would that be? I can't place it.

BA: Do you remember what your first pieces of art were? How old you were when you started creating art?

SBG: My first piece, very interesting. I did my first piece without any instruction anywhere. What I did was go to a monument place to get a piece of marble, a piece of something to work on. A piece, oh no wait, it was stone. Where did I get a piece of stone? I think it was at where they do, yeah, for cemeteries, marble. I got a piece of stone and I did a head. Years later when I got to know something about sculptors and

their work, I came across the Italian sculptor, Jewish sculptor. Oh you know who it is. I saw his work and there was my piece, it could have been made by him. I never showed it for that reason. A niece of mine bought it and she has it, and now I'm sorry that I sold it.

BA: Was it an actual sculpture of a living person?

SBG: No. It was a... I should have brought out some pictures.

BA: We can look later. That's ok.

SBG: It was just a head, just a head. No special person.

BA: Now this wasn't the first piece of art you ever created, was it?

SBG: It was the first piece.

BA: Really.

SBG: Modigliani.

BA: Yes, yes. Right.

SBG: Well, it could have been made by him. It looked so much like his work.

BA: He did paintings also...

SBG: Oh yes, he did. That's right. But when I realized that I never ...

BA: Now how old were you when you created that sculpture?

SBG: I must have been what, twenty, my middle twenties. I don't remember when I made it.

BA: But you hadn't painted or sculpted or done anything before that?

SBG: I did go to Carnegie Tech.

BA: Right, right.

SBG: But I was not a very good student. I remember we had to do masks. Drawings of masks and so on. But aside from that I never even saw the professor. The class was so

large and even without any instruction at all, I was getting a B grade. I thought, I'm not spending time there. I can do it on my own. I walked out and that was the end of that.

BA: Well, you had a natural talent.

SBG: Yeah. I hadn't had too much. I'm not a good student really. During the early elementary school I was either an extra special A+ student or I was -- I never failed, but I think it had to do with wanting personal attention. I thought of that later. Why did I act the way I did? If the teacher paid any attention to me, you couldn't stop me. At one time you changed seats according to the arithmetic, let's say, or spelling or whatever. And once I would get that first row, first seat in the first row, and if the teacher paid attention to me, no one could get me out of that. I just topped them all. But if I had no attention, I just went the other way. Didn't care at all. I was a peculiar student. Today I would have probably had different handling, but in those days... Looking back some years, you know, as you do as you get older and older, I wonder what happened there. I could not understand what happened there. At the time of course, I couldn't. Another thing, I'm left handed and I wasn't allowed to use my left hand.

BA: Would they punish you if you did it?

SBG: No, they slapped you, no. Use your right hand.

BA: Yes.

SBG: I went through a period I think of just a bit of stuttering. I was being abused. As a matter of fact, I remember the guy who did that, he was a professor at Carnegie Tech. He came across and he saw. I don't know why he said, why don't you use your left hand? I thought I should always use my right.

BA: Who was that professor?

SBG: As a matter of fact, he stopped me and asked me if I would sit for him.

BA: Is that your picture? [Looking at picture on Mrs. Barsky Grucci's wall]

SBG: Oh no. He was a contemporary of Samuel Rosenberg.

BA: Right. William Wolfson.

SBG: What's that?

BA: William Wolfson. Does that sound right?

SBG: No.

BA: It says, "To Sibyl with fond memories, William Wolfson." It's dated 1926.

SBG: It wasn't then.

BA: William Wolfson. It's a beautiful picture.

SBG: Yep, yep, yep. That was in the International.

BA: The International Show?

SBG: Um hum.

BA: That's beautiful.

SBG: Yeah. So what happened of course, I was just thrilled to sit for him and that was the end of that. It was in the International and I saw it. Then he moved to California, and that was the end of that. Many years later a mutual friend was visiting in California, and he said give that to Sibyl. That's how I have it.

BA: That's a lovely picture. So when you were a little girl in elementary school you weren't drawing or sketching or painting or doing anything.

SBG: I don't remember that.

BA: How about when you were a teenager or a little bit later.

SBG: Huh uh. It just happened. I certainly don't remember that.

BA: It happened in your twenties, you think.

SBG: Perhaps a bit earlier but around that period. It had to be earlier, it had to be earlier. It had to be around seventeen or eighteen.

BA: Were you painting first or were you working with solid materials first? Which do you think you were doing first?

SBG: I never liked doing ceramics. I didn't like the feel of the stuff. As a matter of fact, I don't like building up using clay. I rather like carving.

BA: Right, right.

SBG: Although I have, of course. You have to when you do portraits and I've done quite too many, really. But when I do something to please me, I go another direction. When I get a commission for example. In Pittsburgh some years ago an interior decorator, a woman whom I didn't know, phoned me. She said she was doing a house in Squirrel Hill and she was having a problem with the dining room; perhaps I could help her. So, I went to see what it was about. What happened was it was a different kind of a... in the dining there was an inset there and the dining room was rather oblong and narrow. She didn't know just what to do with it. Well, what I did was used that inset to do a sculpture piece and put it in there. And what I did was do two drawings, one to please me, I had to show the woman what I had in mind, and one that would please anyone. Of course she chose the anyone piece. So I did that it was a kind of Grecian, not quite, but the idea with... on her head was a...

BA: A helmet?

SBG: Plate of fruit. She was carrying fruit. All I did was place that in. At the bottom I had a florist put in some things just so high. I had a light centered in there and had little

iron black like thing, a little fence like thing. The woman was ecstatic -- not only that, she kept sending me boxes of candy.

BA: Do you know when you created this?

SBG: This was in Squirrel Hill.

BA: Around what time period you might have created this?

SBG: I never even dated my pieces. I never worked with time.

BA: Maybe the thirties or the forties do you think?

SBG: Oh, oh. It had to do with the thirties, I think; around the middle thirties, somewhere around there.

BA: I wonder if it still exists.

SBG: I doubt it. You know, so much has happened. But I do have pictures. I never liked the piece, of course, and I had the copy of it in my studio. I had a studio here.

BA: I heard, yes.

SBG: Mark, my nephew, was visiting. He took it. He has it. He has it in his home and every time I go to visit him I look at that and say, oh my God!

BA: Just to be clear about this, I know that you've painted as well as...

SBG: But you're asking like you want to know more about what...

BA: Well, I do want to know about when you became an artist and your influences on certain things.

SBG: Oh, oh influences. I don't know.

End of Tape 1 (1 of 3) Side 1

Tape 1 (1 of 3) Side 2

[Off tape, SBG mentions that she had to take care of her brothers after her parents' deaths.]

BA: I heard about that.

SBG: We were too busy just taking care of them.

BA: You would have been a teenager when that was the case and all your energies were focused into taking care of your brothers.

SBG: Absolutely and when they were gone, when I was on my own, then I began to work.

BA: That's when you realized that you were an artist.

SBG: That's right. When they graduated high school and they went to California to the other Barskys, I was able to be on my own.

BA: Just to make sure I understand your brother's names were William, Saul, Sam and Sidney. Is that correct?

SBG: Yeah, that's right.

BA: And your sister's name was Belle. You had another sister Frances who died young at age seventeen.

SBG: That left a terrible, terrible hole. I didn't know my sister well. She went to different schools and for what reason, I don't know. Even grade school I was never with her, I don't know why. But my younger sister was fairly close.

BA: That was Belle?

SBG: No, Belle was the older one. My younger one was very close and she died.

Osteomyelitis bone – at the age of what, fifteen or something.

BA: It sounds like it was a very difficult time for your and for everybody in your family.

SBG: Yeah.

BA: You and Belle must have been very strong to take care of those brothers.

SBG: You see, even thinking of it now -

BA: Oh sure. Of course that sort of thing never goes away.

SBG: No, my childhood growing up, there was too much tragedy in the family. So my schooling was broken up pretty much and I too was ill. The one time I was sick was when I had typhoid fever and was supposed to die. I do remember that.

BA: How old were you at that time?

SBG: That's when we lived on Fifth Avenue. That I remember we lived on Fifth Avenue. I remember being in bed and relatives around and they were crying. I remember somebody had influence to bring a special child doctor. Well, I wasn't a child at the time. I was what fifteen I guess, fourteen or fifteen at the time. I do remember he did this to the soles of my feet.

BA: He rubbed the soles of your feet?

SBG: I recovered and then I was supposed to drink meat broth. The beef was cooked and I was supposed to drink the broth only. I understand the typhoid affects the lining of your stomach. I recovered and was sent to a farm for the summer.

BA: Where was the farm? Do you know?

SBG: I don't remember. It was in Ohio. It was at a farm called *The Maples* and they were supposed to fatten me up. I remember taking *Les Miserables* with me and what other book. Oh, I was quite a reader even at a very early age. I remember *Les Miserables* anyway and sitting under a tree and reading. My experiences on the farm were awful. It must have been very hard for the people to take care of me. I never saw

an outhouse. I never saw chickens being killed, being beheaded, hopping around on one leg. By the time I went to this farm my hair was cut off and I weighed so few pounds I wore my little brother's clothes. I wore pants and whatever a boy wore and for that whole summer. Orwell, Orwell, Ohio is where the place was, *Maples*. I had a wonderful time there watching barn dances and so on. When I came again the next year with my hair in place, they didn't know at the time that I was a girl. It was only the second year when I was there they were shocked. Sibyl meant nothing to the farmers you see, the name. They thought that I was a boy.

BA: How did you happen to go to that particular farm?

SBG: I don't know. My parents, apparently. I know nothing about it except that they sent me there. They must have heard from somebody or other, you know. Matty and Floyd Yarnell, I still remember their names.

BA: Yarnell?

SBG: Uh huh. Matty and Floyd. Matty was five by five and Floyd was the most beautiful man. Slender with black hair with blue eyes, I remember. I remember him because he so loved to dance, and he would try to pull me in. He was the one that would take me to barn dances and so on. So I remember both very well. I remember they would take me fishing. They would have overnight guests from Cleveland and they'd knock on my door at six o'clock to take me with them. They would sit me down and put a thing in my hand and tell me that when the thing bobbed to pull the rod. That was fishing. What I didn't like was when they went frogging at six o'clock on a summer day. They carried a sack. They carried a light on their foreheads and a spear or something with it. The frogs would usually come out of the water to them. They would spear the

frogs. They would put the light on and spear the frogs and then you would come back and dump them into a washtub full of water. The next morning Matty would come out with her knife, take the frogs, chop off the head and keep the legs. They would prepare the legs for breakfast. They couldn't get me to eat. When I saw what they did to a chicken, I wouldn't eat the chicken and so on. But I had a wonderful experience all the way around.

BA: Did they manage to fatten you up any? Did your weight improve?

SBG: That's where I read *Les Miserables*.

BA: What was Pittsburgh like when you were a little girl? What do you remember about it?

SBG: Not much. Not really much. I know you want to know Pittsburgh was like. What could a kid tell you, you know?

BA: Did you go downtown much?

SBG: I remember being taken to a theater. I remember my father taking, there must have been others, but I remember going to a theater and I was just fascinated. It was fantasy for me. It was wonderful. I remember that.

BA: Do you remember what you saw?

SBG: No, I don't remember what I saw. But the thing was fairyland, absolute fairyland.

BA: Was it a play or a movie or...?

SBG: I don't remember, I don't remember. I was just being there with lights and people and it was just fairyland. And that I remember too, there was something to do apparently at a department store. I think they brought children, I don't remember that but I do

remember coming back with an elephant, never a doll, but an elephant with its head moving back and forth. That I remember. But I never had a doll to play with.

BA: Did you want a doll when you were young?

SBG: No, huh uh.

BA: What did you like to do to play when you were little? Or did you play when you were little?

SBG: Well I remember playing outdoors with other kids. Some of the games were run, shoot, run. Some of the others were where you hid and they would try to find you and so on. This is how I remember the outdoors really, the summer days. I remember living in that house on Bedford Avenue. I must have had a bedroom on the top floor because I could see in lights Duquesne spelled out. At that time I would look at that and pronounce it Du-kes-ne. Du-kes-ne. I was a kid and I would see that. I would often have dreams walking but I never walked on the ground. I would walk mid-air, on air and this is what I would always dream about.

BA: When you were a child?

SBG: Yeah, that I remember. It comes back to me. Odd things come back to me, disconnected things.

BA: Do you remember when World War I broke out?

SBG: Yes, I remember when a cousin, his name was Sam, was in the Army. I didn't know about that, only that when he returned there was a party and I wouldn't go. I don't remember why I wouldn't go. My family, I suppose, they thought I was queer. They went but I wouldn't go.

BA: You don't remember troops in the street or anything?

SBG: Yes, I do. I do remember why - it had to do with sex. I don't remember whether I was ever molested, but I do remember I wouldn't go because he would want to kiss me. Later I do remember living somewhere else and an Irish couple. I was in the hall and this grown up boy or man stopped me. I think he started to fondle me, and I remember breaking and running.

BA: Were you still pretty young when this happened?

SBG: That happened when we lived somewhere else, not on Bedford Avenue but where it was I don't know. Dinwiddie Street?

BA: There is a Dinwiddie Street.

SBG: It must have been there, it must have been there. Yeah, it was there because across the street there was either a family Zwilling was the name. Zwilling, whether I admired somebody there, I really don't remember. Yeah, we lived across the street and there was this somebody stopped me in the hall, and I remember breaking away. That happened twice to me on that street. We were playing and I could have still been very young.

There were a bunch of kids and I was hiding somewhere. The father of one of the kids, because I knew him, made a grab for me or something and there too I remember running.

So I remember twice being assaulted as a child or trying to.

BA: That wasn't talked about so much back then.

SBG: Well, this I remember.

BA: Any other assorted memories from that time?

SBG: Yeah. I remember it was at that house. It was one of the Jewish holidays.

Hanukkah? Was it Hanukkah? Yeah, that's at that house my sister and I had the measles.

BA: And that would have been where?

SBG: On Dinwiddie Street and we were isolated in a dark room. In the dining room I think because there was a clock there I used to like to hear it chime the hours. I remember we played with walnuts. My father was teaching us something to do with walnuts. I remember that. I remember the clock and I remember that's the only child disease I ever had. Measles and that was it.

BA: I was going to ask you if your family was affected by the influenza outbreak of -- I guess it was 1918? It was very bad at that time. Did it affect your family at all? Not that you know.

SBG: I don't know. I wouldn't know anything that affected the family.

BA: What do you remember about your brothers? Any memories of them particularly?

SBG: Only that we had a white mouse that Saul brought from high school. We called him Hector. At that time we were living in Squirrel Hill because I remember the apartment.

BA: Do you remember the street?

SBG: I think it was Phillips Avenue.

BA: Ok.

SBG: He brought this white mouse and we called him Hector. We would train him to jump from the living room chandelier to the thing there. We had a housekeeper at that time because my sister and I were trying to work and keep the boys, so we had a German housekeeper who didn't speak a word of English and we had Hector. I'd find Hector on my pillow in the morning or you never knew where he was. Well, she found him in her pots and pans and she came to us and she said either she goes or Hector goes. Before we

got rid of Hector we had a party and I had the bright idea of putting him in the drawer in one of the boys' rooms and closing the thing then. We had a bunch of kids over and we never used the dining room essentially. We made it our living room, you know, and I remember a bunch of kids were sitting on the sofa and there I see Hector peeping out from one of the little pillows. Well, I didn't want to say anything so I made a grab for him and of course missed. Pretty soon we were all running all over the house looking for Hector. Of course, Hector had to go.

BA: Did you give him away to somebody?

SBG: I don't remember if they took him back to school or what.

BA: That's a sweet story.

SBG: But I do remember Hector and the name.

BA: Were you working outside the home at that point? Did you have a job?

SBG: As it happened I had a job. I never knew how good I was. My job was to use - what was the name of the company. It was a grocery chain.

BA: I wonder which one it was.

SBG: Eagle?

BA: Giant Eagle?

SBG: It wasn't Giant Eagle [the Eagle Grocery chain was a predecessor of Giant Eagle].

I remember the men. Mr. Porter, Mr. Chait and the brains in the family group, he became a very good friend of mine later. I'll think of his name. Before that job, a cousin of mine got me a job at an open market.

BA: Are you talking about the markets down in the Strip District?

SBG: Yeah. It was there. It was a food place. It didn't last long so I got a job there. I don't know what I did there. There was a bookkeeper there and I remember the son. This is why I got fired. The son there started to put food on my desk and pay attention to me and the bookkeeper didn't like it. I was fired.

BA: It wasn't your fault.

SBG: Certainly. I wasn't there long enough to... It happened again at another place. Again and that was the Rom's. As a matter of fact I did a sculpture of the old man, the father of these and that was a grocery. They took on the Eagle thing after...I don't remember.

BA: What was the family's name, Rom?

SBG: Rom. I worked for them and the older one, there were three boys. The youngest one, I remember him, Emory. He was in charge of the office. Again, there was a bookkeeper and this Emory was a boyfriend of the bookkeeper's sister. Well, and then there was Clara. My job was they would bring in figures, items, I guess grocery items -- three for so and so. There were figures and my job was, I had a little machine that was to see if they were correct and make a note and a total. The boy that sat opposite me did the same thing so that any errors were ok. Before that there was Emory who started to give me orders.

BA: And that wasn't his place to do that?

SBG: And I knew it. He was forever on my back and he would give me orders and finally I would disregard them. I would just pay no attention. He would say we have to stay but I wouldn't take any orders and it got so bad. He was a very ugly, ugly young man. He would mistreat some of the people. I suppose they were customers. I

remember one man especially who was being mistreated by Emory. All I could do is quietly make it right and this is what I did when I could.

BA: How did he mistreat him?

SBG: Ignore him when his time would come when he was supposed to be – I don't know how to explain the whole set-up. But he was mistreated very clearly and I wouldn't have it. At that point, then there was a son-in-law who was the outdoor man and would come only on weekends and he had an office. One day he called me into his office. I know he was married and had a couple of kids. He called me into his office and propositioned me for a weekend. But I said go to hell or I don't know how I answered him. I must have said something very, very drastic because I was fired.

BA: Was this the Rom family you're talking about?

SBG: The Rom family.

BA: And they owned the supermarket -- or is this the market down in the Strip District?

SBG: Yeah, but the other one was Goldstein, was the Eagle man. Porter, Chait, and Goldstein.

BA: And that was the market in Squirrel Hill you're talking about.

SBG: Well, at that time I don't know what it was. They had a chain of stores.

BA: It was a grocery market of some sort.

SBG: Later I think it came to Squirrel Hill.

BA: But Emory Rom, that was down...

SBG: That was another one.

BA: Was that down in the Strip District?

SBG: I don't remember whether those three... I don't remember. I know they were two different ones.

BA: I just didn't want to mix the two of them up, obviously. So that's what you were doing to earn a living.

SBG: So that's my working experience all the way. I was fired each time for no reason but men.

BA: Was it unusual for a young girl to be doing the kind of work that you were doing at that time?

SBG: Unusual, I don't think so. It probably was very common. Because don't forget that was during the Depression.

BA: You would have been about how old? Would you have been under twenty?

SBG: I had to be under twenty.

BA: So that would have been around 1924 or 5 or something. That would have been before the Depression.

SBG: That's right, that's right, that's right.

BA: Just wanted to get the dates right.

SBG: You see the time I can't...

BA: I know. It's hard to remember. So that's how you helped to keep your brothers together...

SBG: That's right. Oh, oh, we were of course under the orphan's court.

BA: And how did that work?

SBG: Well, they took care of everything and when I was twenty-one, I was given my portion of what monies - the lawyers took most of everything I'm sure. My sister took

care of that so I don't know. She was the executor and when she was twenty-one she was given, I don't know what she was given.

BA: This was Belle you're speaking of?

SBG: She was given probably a thousand. You could buy a house for five thousand dollars.

End of Tape 1 (1 of 3) Side 2

Tape 2 (2 of 3) Side 1

SBG: By that time the boys were gone.

BA: Did they all go at the same time or different times?

SBG: Well, approximately. There wasn't that much between. At that time, you know what I did, I was working for... Wait a minute, I was working for Goldstein at that time and I got a check and decided I was free. I decided to go to Europe.

BA: And did you?

SBG: I did.

BA: And you were twenty-one at the time?

SBG: Twenty-one. I got a check.

BA: So, 1926. Where did you go? Tell me about the trip.

SBG: I went to Switzerland. I climbed the Jungfrau. I went to France. I went to Holland and had Swiss chocolate with me all the way. I went to England. I stayed as long as I could until all my money was gone.

BA: This was a few months?

SBG: Well, however long it was I can't remember and that was that. I felt free. I can't tell you how wonderful it was.

BA: You went by yourself?

SBG: I remember some incidents on the ship. There was a young man. He was an old man for me. I was twenty-one. He must have been twenty-eight or so who was very concerned. Are you alone? He said you must not go to France. You must not go to Paris. He was concerned. On the other hand there were two from New York. Two boys who just graduated and this was their trip to Europe. They took charge of me in a way. They were with me constantly and... oh, I can't tell you what happened... This is not of interest.

BA: Personal stuff.

SBG: It's personal stuff, you know. I will tell you that I traveled with them part of the way. In Switzerland the three of us climbed the Jungfrau and we parted in France at this part of the time. One of the boys – well, that's personal – never mind.

BA: Did you stay in touch with them after the trip?

SBG: At that point, I didn't mention this, I had decided that I was not going to marry. I was not going to have any children, that's for sure. I didn't want to marry and so on. It seems that I came to that very early, because I was almost a nervous breakdown during all that had happened. There was no one to talk to really, so it was all inward and that's when I decided I will not marry and I kept to that until...

BA: You met Joe.

SBG: But absolutely no children. I'd had it.

BA: Now at this point did you have any inclinations to being an artist?

SBG: Well that's when I had done a lot of reading and a lot of things were going on in my mind. I can't remember what, but there must have been something cooking there for a long time and it must have come out after I was alone.

BA: Did you look at any art when you were in Europe?

SBG: Oh, of course.

BA: Went to the Louvre?

SBG: Oh, of course, of course.

BA: Did that make a big impression on you?

SBG: I suppose. Oh sure, of course. And people – it was a new world. I loved it and that's when things really started to happen. So that money was well spent, I think.

BA: Oh yes. This was probably in the spring and summer time, around that time that you went over there.

SBG: Uh hum.

BA: So you got back to America. And at that point did you enter Carnegie Tech? Or is that later?

SBG: Let's see. The time is all mixed up. There are so many things that happened to me in the meantime. Personal things.

BA: What do you remember when you got back to America?

SBG: Oh sure, oh yeah. Yeah. I continued working briefly, and that's when I think I started to work. Then I went to night school. That was it.

BA: What were you studying there?

SBG: It was kind of a choppy experience because as I say I didn't... I'm trying to connect things there. See, I never used time. I never marked anything, so that time was sort of mixed up.

BA: Well that's ok, whatever you can remember. What I was curious about was how you actually got to Carnegie Tech? You were taking night classes, you said -- and how did you happen to enroll in Carnegie Tech?

SBG: How did I happen? I don't know.

BA: Did you go there to study art specifically?

SBG: Sure. But why, I don't know.

BA: You had been doing some art before that before you went to Carnegie Tech.

SBG: I don't know how it happened. It's all a mess. It's really all this...

BA: Well it was a while ago.

SBG: A lot of things happened.

BA: I know that when you did attend there you studied with Samuel Rosenberg. Is that correct?

SBG: Oh, he was a friend of mine.

BA: Did you take classes from him there?

SBG: No.

BA: OK. Did you meet him at that time or later?

SBG: Well, you know there was this YMWHA [Young Men and Women's Hebrew Association] on Bellefield Avenue, which now is owned by the University of Pittsburgh. At that time that was a cultural center. It was a marvelous, marvelous place. The men from Carnegie Tech would offer their services there. They would teach there. It was a

kind of a center for all sorts of dance, theater, anything you wanted. Socially we met the Rosenbergs. It hadn't anything to do with art.

BA: So this would have been later, though, it seems like.

SBG: No, this was during that whole period. Where are we? I don't know.

BA: Well, I'd like to go back when you were at Carnegie Tech, when you did go there.

Did you study art there? Did you take art classes there?

SBG: I took a few classes, not many, and I left.

BA: And they weren't particularly beneficial to you.

SBG: It hadn't anything to do with carving. It had to do with painting.

BA: Had you painted before that?

SBG: Not really. Well, I really don't know how I got to it. It must have been something. I don't remember that at all. I didn't paint at home. That I know. Perhaps I did. I don't remember really.

BA: Do you remember much about Carnegie Tech?

SBG: About the place? There was a Shakespeare theater there. Men from England would come and a well-known Shakespeare scholar would come every year and teach there. They would have wonderful plays there. That I remember. I remember going to an artists' dance. I remember going with a partner. I remember getting into Russian clothes. Oh, it was a costume. That's right, a costume thing, and I think I had photographs somewhere. I don't remember, really, it's a long time ago. And anyway in my life it was all, everything was so mixed up. Nothing was regular, you know?

BA: Were you still working at the time that you were going to school?

SBG: I must have been working. It was in the evening.

BA: You went to Carnegie Tech in the evening?

SBG: In the evening. And I wasn't there very long, as I say. I do remember the head of the sculpture department -- what's his name? When he saw one of my stone pieces that I exhibited, he came to me and shook my hand. He said something or other, something very, very complimentary, because they didn't teach it there. They had nothing there.

BA: Right. This wasn't when you were in school there. This was later.

SBG: Oh, what I wanted to tell you was the piece that I'm talking about, I think it was in '39 or '40, there was an International Show [possibly the 1939 World's Fair Exhibition of Contemporary Art, rather than the Carnegie International] with work from all over the world. I entered my stone piece called *The Young Dancer*. I was the only one in Pittsburgh to be accepted to be in the International.

BA: That must've been very flattering.

SBG: But you know what happened again, I get this notice that my piece was accepted and pretty soon the *Pittsburgh Press* or whatever, phone and they wanted the story. Everybody was excited about the thing. A telegram followed. Hold it, hold it. Letter will follow to tell me blah, blah, blah, blah. My piece was not accepted. What happened was that a Philadelphian who had political power and his piece was not accepted, wanted to be included. My piece was taken out. One of the people on the committee [Wharton Esherick] wrote me a letter immediately and said he is furious. This is how I know the story. He was furious. "I'm going to fight this absolutely." Well, he did and he didn't win of course. Then I got a letter from him saying, "Come to Philadelphia. I'm very much excited about your work. You'll do much better here than you will in Pittsburgh, blah, blah, blah." That was during the war, you see, and that was that.

BA: You didn't go to Philadelphia?

SBG: I couldn't. I really couldn't.

BA: Yeah. Who was that in Philadelphia that invited you?

SBG: Look, I had all that. Material was lost when we moved here. I had all that and really what it did to me was such a shock if you could imagine. I don't think I could do any work after that for a long time.

BA: Do you know what happened to it?

SBG: Oh, he was very well known. In fact, I knew about him. He was always in the paper, the New York paper. In fact, when he died, I learned later, his wife set up a museum in his name and it's in a suburb of Philadelphia. One of the suburbs and that was that.

BA: Well, we can check on that. We can find that out. Well, one thing I do know is that you won a sculpture contest when you were in your mid-twenties sponsored by the Carnegie Museum. Is that right? You won a sculpture contest when you were twenty-five, twenty-six, something like that.

SBG: Yeah.

BA: Tell me about that.

SBG: Well, that was the head of Rom [Barsky's portrait bust of M. Rom won the New Sculpture Prize at the Art Association of Pittsburgh exhibition in 1934, the first year that award was given].

BA: That was the head of Rom and...

SBG: And then there was another one I was doing. But they wouldn't give it to me because their policy was not to give it two years in succession. That was for the... I don't know what it was for. Maybe it was for the stone piece called *The Dancer*.

BA: Right. Now was the head of Rom a very early piece by you? Was that one of the first sculptures you've done?

SBG: No. I had done, a friend of mine, Alice Jadot, I did a whole thing of her and also a drawing. A charcoal, a black and white. I did one of my aunt which was shown at one of the shows. I did also a head of her which one of her nieces, one of her grandchildren have. I did a, let's see, Sam [Filner], the sculptor. One of the artists had won a Prix de Rome. No, it was France. He went abroad for a year, kept in touch and when he came back I remember I was living in, what street? In back of the Y, one of the streets I had two rooms. He came to visit to tell me about, to say hello and so on and it was a very hot day and we sat on the floor. While he was talking I took a, I got a lump of clay, plasticine. I didn't have any tools with me at the time. I didn't get up to get any. I got a little paring knife and what I did was cut as though it were stone. And by the way it got a very splendid reaction at the museum. It was the head of Sam [Filner]. He had done a painting of me so, and I did this of him so we exchanged. I gave him the head and I kept the painting, which I have.

BA: This would have been around the time we're talking about in your mid-twenties, that period.

SBG: That's right.

BA: It sounds like you suddenly exploded with all this activity. All this creativity came out of you.

SBG: That's right.

BA: Did you think of yourself as an artist at that point? Did you consciously think you were?

SBG: I wasn't thinking of being an artist. I was just doing what I wanted to do. What helped was Mr. [Hyman] Blum. I met him socially. Do you know him?

BA: I know his son.

SBG: Oh, you know the son, Lou. [Louis Blum]

BA: Yes, yes.

SBG: Well did you know that Lou was always interested in music.

BA: Yes, played the cello, I think.

SBG: Yes, cello... Well, my sister was a musician. You know that.

BA: No. This was Belle you are speaking of.

SBG: That's right, piano.

BA: I didn't know that.

SBG: Sure, I did a head of her piano teacher.

BA: So you were just doing art for fun.

SBG: I did a drawing of her. I did a drawing of Lou Blum's father and I did a head of him.

BA: Yes, it's at the [Heinz History Center Library & Archives] museum.

SBG: I also did a drawing of him which the family has and I do too. I have a drawing of him here.

BA: So you were getting commercial work and commissions around this time?

SBG: Well, some. Oh yeah. My sister's husband is a physician and when he got into his own suite of --I don't know how many rooms--they needed decorating. In fact, the building was built by his father, the Nurse's Home in Pittsburgh.

BA: Do you know the name?

SBG: Rubenstein.

BA: OK.

SBG: They also had this medical building where my brother-in-law had his suite and other physicians had a group of offices that had to be decorated and they were sort of competing. You know they were getting decorators and so on. My brother-in-law came to me and told me that he would like me to do something there. Well, so I went to the library and started to think in terms of medical, something medical. I called the librarian and told her what I wanted. She had some books for me set aside and I started to do a triptych of ancient, middle and so on. I worked on that and about half way through I thought, how foolish. Who's going to sit in a doctor's office and look at something like that. So I went to the opposite of having something very pleasant and what I came up with was a scene, a picnic scene. And so I had three females, a picnic basket in the background and one with a towel or whatever, I don't remember. Anyway, and in the foreground I had a male there strumming on an instrument. I made a composition of that. It was quite large. I made that and I had one of the walls in his suite kept so I could insert it, not too much, just enough to give it perhaps an inch or inch and a half. I had cut that out and had it inserted. That was a commission. That was in the architectural magazine and was given quite a nice display.

BA: *Architectural Digest?*

SBG: I don't know which one it was.

BA: Was this a painting or a bas relief or...?

SBG: A sculpture.

BA: Was fairly early in your career or would it have been the '30s, '40s?

SBG: Middle, yeah.

BA: How did you make the transition of becoming a professional artist, do you think?

How did people know about you and ask you to do work?

SBG: Well, I showed. What I did was send to some museums.

BA: Around town, around Pittsburgh?

SBG: Um hum.

BA: Where was your work shown in those early days besides at the Carnegie Museum contest [The Associated Artists of Pittsburgh shows]?

SBG: Where was it, Connecticut? Massachusetts? I have a bunch of stuff there and there was a reporter-critic. I also did a head of George Seibel, the head librarian and critic. He was very well known.

BA: Oh I do know that name. What institution was he associated with? Where was he a librarian?

SBG: He was head librarian [at the Carnegie Free Library of Allegheny]. In Pittsburgh.

BA: Okay, I do know that name.

SBG: North Side, I believe.

BA: Okay.

SBG: I have pictures of that. He was shown. I have a picture of him, of the work and I think I was standing near there. I have a bunch of stuff. What do I do with it? Well, I

don't know what will happen to it. It will have to be thrown away. I have no one to give...

BA: We'll have to talk about that but I think your niece and nephew would certainly have something to say about that.

SBG: Yeah. Maybe you could use...

BA: Yeah. But you certainly shouldn't dispose of them. Of course not.

SBG: Well I have a lot of stuff here. As I say, a lot was lost. Too bad. In the moving I wasn't around.

BA: I'm sure some institution if nothing else would definitely want it and we certainly shouldn't let anything happen to it.

SBG: I don't know.

BA: In any case, back talking about when you were starting out, was it difficult to be a woman working in the arts when you were starting off? Did it matter that you were female particularly, do you think?

SBG: I never came across any problems. I do know it was also a period of Works Progress Administration.

BA: Yes.

SBG: When that was set up I can only guess. I don't know what the conditions were, whether it had to be a certain number who were artists and that for each city or... I don't know. In any case, [William] McDermott was head of this.

BA: Locally, in Pittsburgh?

SBG: Yeah, and he came to me to tell me that you had to apply for relief in order to be accepted for this thing. I said absolutely not. I will not, absolutely not. Well, apparently

I don't know what happened. Maybe there weren't enough artists applying. I don't know. In any case, he came back to me and he said, well, we'll just forget about that. So I became a part of the administration at ninety-five dollars a month which was wonderful at that time, for me especially.

BA: What did you do as part of the WPA?

SBG: I lived on thirty-two dollars a month. Rent and everything included.

BA: And what pieces of art did you create as part of that? Did they commission you to do any public works of art?

SBG: Oh no, you were on your own.

BA: Oh, I see.

SBG: Well, what happened was the group was comprised of mostly Italians and Irish. I was the only Jew there. Again there was a problem. McDermott called me into his office one day at the beginning and something happened.

BA: You got replaced by...

End of Tape 2 (2 of 3) Side 1

Tape 2 (2 of 3) Side 2

SBG: From then I had a very bad time there. They were sort of a clique together. I mean they were a group who knew each other.

BA: The WPA people?

SBG: The Irish and the Italians. I don't know. I was the loner. Well, I would do some work there, make small, whatever I was working on, whatever I wanted and put them on the shelf there. I'd come back the next day and everything was...

BA: Broken?

SBG: Thumb down.

BA: When you say thumb down you mean, what do you mean?

SBG: It's what they did.

BA: But, I'm sorry, you mean they were rejected? What does that mean when you say thumb down?

SBG: Nothing was said. They would just spoil, just destroy my things.

BA: Oh they would physically destroy them. I see, I see. Well that must have hurt. That must have made you mad.

SBG: I couldn't have cared less. At that point I saw what was going on, you see. They were all lovey-dovey, this little group. Whether it was because I was Jewish or what, I don't know. They did some pretty nasty things, like testing me. Giving me a casting job which no one else did, you see, and they'd stand on the balcony and watch me down below with a grin on their faces, you see. I just paid no attention to them and did my work and that was it. Unfortunately if I had known, a friend of ours, of mine who I knew, John Robb was an attorney in Pittsburgh. During that period he apparently had a job, something to do with the higher-ups in the same thing in Harrisburg. If I had known he was there, all I had to do was call John and I would have been rescued at that point. At that time I didn't know it, but later on I told John about it. He said you should have called me and so on. But anyway, I got a job there and then they folded or whatever, I don't know.

BA: About how long do you think you were involved with it? A couple years?

SBG: I don't know how long it was. And you know after that I was going through a starvation period. My sister had married and so on. My brothers, the three of them, sent me eight dollars a week and from then on I lived on thirty-two dollars a month. At that time I was living in... you know, the large, beautiful homes that had garages...

BA: Carriage houses?

SBG: ...For carriages, really, had rooms above and artists grabbed them. They were beautiful. Well, I just able to live. I was living at 4733 Bayard Street.

BA: What part of town is that?

SBG: And I lived in a little apartment above the garage -- there were two rooms and a lovely bathroom. I paid fifteen dollars a month.

BA: And that was your studio as well your home?

SBG: And that's where I worked until -- no, I didn't work there. Until at a social, some gathering, I met that Mr. Blum -- no, an attorney, what's his name? His daughter was a doctor [-----] and she has one of my pieces too. He introduced me to Mr. Blum. Mr. Blum was very, very pleasant and he said he did iron work and had a large place and said to come and work there if I needed a place to work.

BA: Oh really.

SBG: I took him up on that.

BA: Now you hadn't done his bust.

SBG: And that's where I worked.

BA: Is that where you created the bust of him?

SBG: Sure.

BA: So that would have been the thirties when you did that.

SBG: Sure.

BA: OK. I didn't know that you worked at his factory.

SBG: I didn't work for him. He gave me the space.

BA: Right, right. The space was there. I see.

SBG: That was during the War.

BA: We're talking about the forties then, this would have been, during the Second World War?

SBG: Then they moved to the pleasant place now, you know where they are.

BA: It's in Shadyside I think.

SBG: Oh no. It's in Oakland.

BA: Ok, yes.

SBG: He showed me the drawings and he said anywhere you want to work, it's absolutely... So I chose to work down in the lower basement with the men where the machines and so and so. Then there was a Mister Fonda who had a marble place on Washington Boulevard, I believe. Well, it seems that Mr., not Fonda, Mr., something close, it's something very close to that. It seems that he and Mr. Blum were two fine gentlemen who knew each other through business dealings, I'm sure. He gave me marble when I wanted it without paying for it.

BA: This was around the same time?

SBG: And to shine it and to do whatever with it and so on and so on. And then they became a problem later on. When I came into town, if I called Mr. Blum first the other one got angry. And if I called the other, Mr. Blum got angry and so on. They were both very, very helpful.

BA: They were sponsoring an artist, it sounded like.

SBG: It sounds like it.

BA: When did you start to meet other artists? Was it pretty early in your career that you became friends with others?

SBG: There were the artists who were connected with the [Associated Artists of Pittsburgh].

BA: Right. Tell me about that. When did you become associated with that?

SBG: I can't tell you the year.

BA: Were you pretty young at the time?

SBG: Well, I was living in Pittsburgh.

BA: So had you been an artist very long before you became associated with them do you think?

SBG: What was the first thing I showed? I think it was a round head, I'm not sure. I think it was the round head. The janitor... he wasn't a janitor. He was the one who repaired things in the museum, at the Carnegie Museum. A little Italian guy who had his place on the lower level there. We became very good friends. I was almost late and, wait a minute, no no, I think he cast that for me. I think he cast the round head for me. We became very good friends there.

BA: What was his name?

SBG: He was an Italian.

BA: Do you remember his first name?

SBG: Huh uh. As I say, he did the repair work wherever it needed, up on the sculptures on the first floor on the sculptures there. I don't know what his name was.

BA: Was he part of the Associated Artists?

SBG: No, no.

BA: He was just somebody....

SBG: No, huh uh.

BA: You say you exhibited with the Associated Artists. Did they have a gallery? Did they have a permanent place where they had exhibits of artists, do you recall?

SBG: They had a show every year and this is what they did.

BA: OK. Do you remember some of the people that you knew that were part of that group?

SBG: Well, you should know them. All you have to do is get the... the Art Alliance [Associated Artists of Pittsburgh] is still there.

BA: Sure.

SBG: Well why don't you get a list of the names? They're there.

BA: But were there people that you remember?

SBG: Yeah, but I wasn't too... There again, there were groups together, you know, and I was never part of any group. No, not really.

BA: You kind of kept to yourself.

SBG: Just a nodding acquaintance. That's why I say I don't know why you wanted to interview me. I can't give you much on the art exhibit there.

BA: Well your career itself is interesting and we wanted to know about that. But there might be somebody that...

SBG: Do you know Phillips' work?

BA: Esther Phillips? I know it by reputation. I've read about it but I've never actually seen it.

SBG: That's when she was living with me. [Mrs. Barsky Grucci looks up at a painting behind her.]

BA: That painting up there?

SBG: Interior. You know she did watercolors. She could not maintain a painting, her paintings. Her personality was such it was an instantaneous thing. In twenty minutes she could have a watercolor, but her paintings were not successful really.

BA: How did you meet her?

SBG: I don't know. I met her only after she was on her own. I've heard, I mean from her, just what her problems were and so on. She knocked on my door one day and I was living in two rooms in back of the Y on that street, I remember that, and she asked if she could live with me. I said sure, come and so she did. For how long I don't know.

BA: You had known her before that, though?

SBG: I knew her at the Y, and I knew her mutual friend Merle Hoyleman who was a...

BA: Writer.

SBG: Well, an eccentric as you could ever meet and -- anyway, so was Esther.

BA: When you say eccentric, what do you mean?

SBG: Oh, Merle... Yes, she was a writer. She was sure that -- one of her works was the *Asp of the Age*.

BA: *Asp of the Age*?

SBG: I believe that was her masterpiece, she thought. She also believed that the government... who looked out for Communists and so on?

BA: The FBI

SBG: FBI. She also thought the FBI was after her. She moved from time to time, why I don't know.

BA: Was this Merle you're talking about?

SBG: Merle. She of course, had more to talk with my husband than she had with me, but she would sit there and would point to a tree two blocks away to tell me that bird had lice or whatever. I mean she was eccentric all together. Also a very good friend of Esther's, apparently. So that when Esther would send, when she was in an institution, they would send some of her drawings. Merle would bring them to me to price them, because Merle would try to sell them.

BA: I see.

SBG: And so on. Aside from that she was very good friends with my husband and there was a lot of...

BA: What was Esther like to live with? Was she ok to live with?

SBG: Who, Esther? Oh, she was ok to live with but she'd go to the Y and probably sell her watercolors for fifteen bucks. She walked to town from Oakland. She'd walk to town, buy herself a hat for fifteen dollars and walk back.

BA: Not very practical.

SBG: What would she do with a hat? I mean, stuff like that. She was always -- she was easy to live with, no problems at all except we took turns cooking. One week I cooked and the next one she cooked. When she cooked I had very little to eat. She was always hungry.

BA: Oh, I see.

SBG: Little things that didn't matter, you know. You asked about her eccentricity...

BA: Sure, sure.

SBG: That was it. A lot of activity happened at that Bellefield Y.

BA: What was going on there?

SBG: Everything, yeah.

BA: What do you remember happening there?

SBG: Well... For Esther, this was a haven for her. This is where she could sell the things. Merle would be there. Some, what's his name, some of the artists... what's his name. No use talking about him. It's too much personal stuff there. I don't know, it seemed to be a gathering for all kinds of people there.

BA: Kind of a haven for creative people.

SBG: That's right, that's right.

BA: And you had an apartment behind the Y, is that what you're saying. This was in an apartment building. This wasn't a carriage house.

SBG: No, this was a private home, on the second floor I remember.

BA: Ok, ok. Would you say at that time you were kind of a bohemian? Did that term apply to you in those days?

SBG: That didn't happen. I never thought in those terms.

BA: Kind of a free spirit? Would that fit?

SBG: Just being able to be on your own. Starving on your own, you know, trying this that and the other and so on. That thirty-some dollars a month really worked well. Of course I wasn't....

BA: It sounds a little tight.

SBG: Yeah, but somehow you manage. Then too I had a sister, of course. And that's when I did some music plaques. My sister's house was really a haven for musicians. When artists came like Bernstein, nationally known, came on concert tours they'd usually ended up at my sister's house. She had two grands, two pianos, two piano [-----] and chamber music groups -- usually Lou [Blum] was part of it. His wife Eve was a wonderful violinist...

BA: He's told me about that.

SBG: Do you know about that?

BA: I'd interviewed him and he told me about that.

SBG: During chamber music I was usually there and I'd do some sketching while listening.

BA: Did you sketch some of the artists?

SBG: I sketched whatever came to mind and I had a music - I did several, but I had one, a music plaque for musicians. It's at [Penn State] University in the west wing of the Pattee Library.

BA: I'll have to take a look at that.

SBG: I have a piece there and of course I did the [Fred Lewis] Pattee head.

BA: Right. I've heard about that.

SBG: Bronze. And I also have *The Dancer*. Somebody wanted to buy it years ago. I don't know what happened. I had it. I've endowed a poetry room in the English Department at [Penn State] University and this is where I placed *The Dancer*. So they have that too. They have three pieces of mine at the University.

BA: Yes, I want to take a look at that. Tell me about how you met your husband, Joe.

SBG: How what?

BA: How did you meet Joe Grucci?

SBG: How? It was at somebody's house, where was it?

BA: Did it have to do with *Lovers of Earth* magazine?

SBG: No. How did I meet him? Carmen's house?

BA: Carmen Carnevale?

SBG: I don't remember whose house it was.

BA: Who was Carmen, by the way?

SBG: He was an artist. I think he did some work for – he did some drawings for one of Joe's early poetry [Carmen R. Carnevale did woodcuts for *Lovers of Earth*, a book of Joseph Grucci's poems published in 1933]. Isn't that right? Somehow he's connected with him but I don't remember how. That's how I met Joe.

BA: Were you involved with a magazine together?

SBG: No. That was before I knew him. It was much later.

BA: Does the name *Lovers of Earth* sound familiar? Was that a publication he was involved with.

SBG: *Lovers of Earth*?

BA: Yeah.

SBG: No, I didn't know him at the time.

BA: Do you know anything about that publication?

SBG: Nothing. I knew nothing about it. I do have the books. Oh, you wanted to know about Phillips.

BA: Esther, yes.

SBG: I think you ought to see this. [BA: Went to see some paintings in Mrs. Barsky-Grucci's hallway.]

BA: Ok. So you said you met Joe through some friends at a house. Did you take to one another right away? Did you kind of hit it off?

SBG: Yeah. Remember, I wasn't going to marry. So it was very easy to meet friends and so on.

BA: What sort of things did you like to do together at the start?

SBG: Well, we had a lot in common. He was a very sensitive person and so was I. And so, we got along beautifully without a lot of words or, you know, explanations and things. I took a long time. I wouldn't marry but finally, of course I did. And it's been lovely ever since. He tried the University of Pittsburgh for awhile.

BA: Yes.

SBG: Then the opening was here for a poetry workshop. I never really much cared. I did for a year. I thought, "A small town, I'd read about small towns...lovely," and so it was and then, that's it. We'd go out when I'd had it, you know. I went out looking for a place to work but it was very difficult. There was nothing here. So far as the studio in the one room schoolhouse, we were driving past there when a bunch of kids got off a bus. So I stopped the car and said, "Why don't you go to school here?" And a little boy said no, we have a new school. Well, with that we went right back to town. I talked to the mayor or whoever in education here. He said yes, they had a number of school houses they were selling, auctioning. But he said the one you're interested in, we don't know whether we own the house and the grounds. We're looking into it and when we have the information you'll find it in the newspaper. So we did and sure enough it was in the

paper at a closed bid. How were we going to find – well, we just stumbled around and we gave a closed bid and we got it. Whether we paid or not we'll never know. That's how I was able to work.

BA: It seems like from the picture you showed me it was really a good place to work. Did you do good work there?

SBG: Oh sure, sure. I didn't do much work... Well...

BA: I wanted to ask you a bit about you and Joe when you first got together. I know it's hard to remember the dates, but would you tend to think it was the early 1930s, the mid 1930s.

SBG: It has to be. We were married 1940.

BA: Right.

SBG: It would have to be the middle '30s, I guess.

BA: Ok. That sounds about right.

You taught at the Irene Kaufman Settlement House, is that correct?

SBG: Just the one summer. What happened was, it must have been Samuel Rosenberg who mentioned my name to the director, because one day I get a phone call and he asks if I would take the summer course. I said I wouldn't think so. I hesitated. He pressed the issue. I said well, in a way it's appealing, but if I take it, it will be on condition I would have no interference. I would teach it the way I want to teach it. Anything you say [he said], and so I did, and it was a very worthwhile summer. I enjoyed it for many reasons and for what I was able to do for the kids. The ages, a good age from nine years to what is it, thirteen, thirteen or fourteen. And I had some very interesting experiences there and so on and so that was that. He phoned the autumn when school began again. He said the

kids were asking for you. Won't you come again? This time I had to be very firm. I said I can't do both. I really can't.

BA: You said you can't do both.

SBG: I can't do both my own work and teach, because what I teach I put everything into it, I really do. I couldn't. And so that was that.

BA: You were teaching sculpture?

SBG: Well in a way -- I showed them. A little bit of casting delighted them. It was summer and the kids did their hands and I showed them little things that would attract them. And they were. They loved it. There was an exhibit at the end and it was very, very interesting for me too.

BA: Was this after the WPA days, do you think?

SBG: Yeah, it was later. It had to be. As for Sam, we were very good friends. We spent the weekend with him. They had a place in the mountains. They had a lovely building that had been built by an architect from Mellon Institute and he was fixing something on the roof and fell down and he died because of that. Sam and Libby took that for the, I guess for some, I don't know how long and then because we spent a long weekend with them there at their country place.

BA: Where was that?

SBG: I don't...

End of Tape 2 (2 of 3) Side 2

Tape 3 (3 of 3) Side 1

SBG: [of Sam Rosenberg] He's a very gentle person. Of course there was Libby who was interested in literature and she had a lot in common with my husband so it was there.

BA: Oh speaking of literature just to go back a second, you mentioned that book that magnum opus by Merle, *Asp of the Age*. Was that published?

SBG: I don't know. She was in touch with... You know I was in touch with Junior Kaufmann of the Kaufmann Department Store...

BA: Yes, yes.

SBG: Apparently he was curious about me and he called one day and wanted to meet me. You know he aspired to being an artist. You know that?

BA: I think so. I know that the Kaufmann family had an interest in art.

SBG: He was sent to Europe. He studied with Victor Chill (sp?), a famous master in Europe [Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. studied with Victor Hammer in Florence from 1930-1933], but when he came back he decided that, he must have decided that he wouldn't pursue it because he couldn't be a good artist, a great artist. In any case, he was very kind and subsidizing some of the boys, artists in Pittsburgh. He had an apartment at the William Penn Hotel, rather than going to his home, you know. From there he went on to the Museum of Modern Art. Did you know that?

BA: No I didn't.

SBG: Yes, he was in charge, I think, of the design. I'm not sure. But before that he phoned me and he came over and we talked a lot and when I heard him say, "Oh painting, that's a thing of the past. The camera does it much better." I of course had objection to that and there we were arguing back and forth and back and forth. By the time, it was lunchtime so we went out, had lunch and we continued and this is how we parted. Back and forth and that was it. I never saw him again.

BA: Not on bad terms, I hope.

SBG: Oh no. No, pleasant but that was it. Then I know that he died about seven years ago, five years ago, I don't know. I don't remember when he died. He was an only child, you know.

BA: Were there other artists in the Pittsburgh artist community that you knew during this time? You knew Samuel Rosenberg. You knew Mr. Kaufmann who was involved with the arts.

SBG: There were about four and they were gay. One was a decorator at Kaufmann's, but one was the governor's son, I can't remember his name. I don't remember which one. There were about three or four of them that I was friends with, but they weren't artists. I mean they were outside of the thing. I do know that Schwartz, I think his name was Schwartz, the decorator of Kaufmann's eventually went to New York and evidently he was doing very well. I would see his name in the New York Times.

BA: But he started here or started in Pittsburgh.

SBG: Um hum. But as for the others, a good friend of mine was Harry Shake.

BA: How was his last name spelled? Did you have an idea?

SBG: Harry Shake?

BA: How would that be, S-c-h...

SBG: Scheuch, something like that. [Harry William Scheuch (1906-1978) studied at Carnegie Tech, exhibited at the Associated Artists of Pittsburgh, and worked for the Federal Art Project in Pittsburgh]

BA: Ok.

SBG: Let's see, Harry, who else? Of course there was Sam, the one I'm telling you about. Do you want to know his name? Sam, you know, I never remember names, faces,

yes. I used to say [-----] when we were going somewhere social, she had a great memory for names. I was always at her side because I couldn't remember people I knew. I'd always give her a nudge and so she knew so she'd supply the name. Sam, I have it on my painting there. I have to look at it. Sam...

BA: You not talking of Sam Rosenberg. You're talking about another Sam.

SBG: It bothers me. That's the one I had done a very, very good head of. Filner.

BA: Sam Filner. And which artist was he that you were speaking of?

SBG: Sam...

BA: Was he the window decorator?

SBG: No, Sam was an artist. He was the one who won the prize when he went to France.

BA: Was Pittsburgh a good place to be an artist in the '30s and '40s?

SBG: Well, at that time that center was wonderful.

BA: When you say that center, which are you referring to.

SBG: The one I'm talking about. The YMWHA.

BA: The YMWHA.

SBG: Wonderful, yeah. Are you familiar with the Ninety-Second Street Y in New York?

BA: No.

SBG: Well, that's a cultural center. There's nothing like it. Well, the one in Pittsburgh was the same thing on a smaller scale. As a matter fact, William Colodny who directed it was then taken to Ninety-Second and he's the one now at Ninety-Second Street. Not he, he's probably dead, but his son. The Ninety-Second Street Y is marvelous for all the arts

BA: The next time I'm in New York...

SBG: And you don't know that. Do you ever go to New York?

BA: Every few years I do, yes.

SBG: Well by all means...

BA: I will have to go there.

SBG: Oh yes. I knew of course Colodny very well.

BA: He was involved with helping to get artists work this way.

SBG: Look, Arthur Rubinstein the pianist, the Y[MWHA Music Series] was the first place in America that he played.

BA: The Y in Pittsburgh or in New York?

SBG: The Y in Pittsburgh.

BA: Really.

SBG: That's right.

BA: I didn't know that.

SBG: The one who played a mouth organ, Adler? [Larry Adler was a harmonica player who toured with the dancer Paul Draper. Both were later blacklisted as communists.] We had the top people at – my sister was head of the committee.

BA: Oh really.

SBG: Yeah. It was a wonderful center for music besides, you know. Absolutely. Wonderful pianists, a German pianist who unfortunately was a Nazi. No one like him and the Russian cellist. Menuhin was there. All the top men were brought to the Y.

BA: Are you speaking particularly before the Second World War or in the '40s also? Did this continue into the '40s?

SBG: Until they sold it and my sister was furious when they sold it. The place had run down I guess. Anyway, the University of Pittsburgh bought it. Mellon bought it really.

BA: But it was this active art center until then.

SBG: It absolutely was. I can't imagine Pittsburgh. There wouldn't have been anything there. It drew people from all over. First-rate theater, first-rate concerts of all kinds and the arts.

BA: Were you actively involved with the programs there or did you just go and attend?

SBG: Well I knew about them because my sister was involved and my brother-in-law and I knew Vladimir Bakaleinikoff and Lorin Maazel. I suppose you know who he is.

BA: The name sounds familiar.

SBG: He's now director of the New York Philharmonic.

BA: Ok.

SBG: Oh year. Mellon, I think Mellon brought Fritz Reiner the conductor.

Bakaleinikoff [Bakaleinikoff served as Musical Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony from 1948-1952] came, his wife Julia, who was an opera diva in Russia, came with him. They were able to get out and with them came several music students. All to Pittsburgh and that's how I knew them all, naturally they all....

BA: They spent time with your sister and with you.

SBG: Certainly. In fact Lorin's father Lincoln is still living. He's a hundred and two years old and we went to – Mark [Rubenstein] and a few of us went to see him on his hundredth birthday.

BA: Where does he live?

SBG: In Virginia. He has a marvelous estate there. Animals... well of course, Lorin is on his third marriage. Oh, it was a great center.

BA: It sounds like a wonderful time to be around there.

SBG: It was a great center, just wonderful. You were very fortunate to have been a part that because my second love, maybe second or third I'm not sure which [-----] there too and music, certainly music first of all.

BA: Were most of the people participating Jewish or did it serve a lot...

SBG: Mostly, well it was... Of course.

BA: It sounds like a lot of European people who came through town appeared there. Do you think it was known in the larger community particularly?

SBG: It had to be because I think eventually there was something stirring musically in Mt. Lebanon. I think they had, something was stirring, but there was nothing like that center.

BA: It sounds like a wonderful place.

SBG: Marvelous.

BA: In general was Pittsburgh the kind of place that was stimulating to an artist?

SBG: I do know that artists from New York used to come to Pittsburgh to paint.

BA: Really. Any you recall?

SBG: Oh no. I wouldn't know them. I know about them.

BA: Some did come.

SBG: Um hum.

BA: There was actually a quote Samuel Rosenberg made about Pittsburgh that I thought was interesting and was going to read it to you if I can find it. He said in 1937, "Pittsburgh is not the most pleasant place in the world..."

SBG: Who said that?

BA: Samuel Rosenberg did. But from an artist's standpoint I contend it is one of the most interesting cities in the United States. Would you agree?

SBG: I would.

BA: In the 1930s were you and Joe involved in any political or social movements as a poet and an artist? Were you part of anything?

SBG: No really, some how most of our activities seemed to be within the musical circle.

BA: The musical circle specifically.

SBG: Yeah. He had his friends of course. He had a group of friends around him who were all very good friends and I think poetry was... I also think, no I don't think, he told me that there was a poet in his background. I think, I don't know what relationship, but someone in the family who was a poet in Italy. I think he said Naples, but I'm not sure and I know nothing about his family except what I was told. I didn't meet... I understand his father because of his height was part of the guard of the king of Italy at the time. He and his brother and when they came to America... His father came to America and the brother went to South America and from what I've been told, his father was probably the first Italian – their home was a haven for Italians coming to America – to Pittsburgh.

BA: Right.

SBG: This is what he told me.

BA: Do you know anything or being in touch with the wing of the family that went to South America?

SBG: I'm in touch with the niece Nicki who adored her uncle.

BA: Right. I've spoken to her.

SBG: And who was very helpful in publishing *Pivot* and I'm still in touch with her, but she's the only one that I'm in touch with.

BA: I was curious as to whether you or Joe used your art for any kind, you know, of political causes or anything like that in the '30s? The only reason I ask is if some...

SBG: Political?

BA: Well so many people were involved with politics in the 1930s during the Depression, you know on behalf of poor people or the working people. I was wondering if you or Joe were involved in any way with anything that was considered political.

SBG: Politically we were very much aware. We were reading the Communist papers and magazines. As a matter of fact, you know what happened to me? A FBI agent came to us to interview me about one of the professors at Carnegie Tech who was an artist. For all I know they could very well have been interviewing me, and I was aware of it because I was reading the Communist papers.

BA: Do you think they knew that?

SBG: They must have, I don't know. Anyway, all I know is they came, a nice guy came to ask questions about so and so and so about Ernie Wright who was teaching at Pitt [J. Ernest Wright was the major compiler (1936-1939) for the WPA project that was finally published in 2004, with Laurence Glasco as editor, as *The WPA History of the Negro in*

Pittsburgh] and about the artist here eventually went to New York, he and his wife who was a sculptor. I would see his name occasionally in the *New York Times*.

BA: Don't recall his name?

SBG: At the moment I can't. I gave them wrong information naturally. They were in a safe place and I knew very well. I was thinking they probably were interviewing me which is very possible and that was it.

BA: But you and Joe really weren't very politically involved?

SBG: Oh Joe was right up there.

BA: He was?

SBG: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I still am very political, very.

BA: Did that extend to like publishing writings that Joe did on politics?

SBG: I can't answer that really but so far as personally, absolutely. I still am and I still think what a tragedy this is that Bush is in. And I still think the country is you know not to [-----], before I was, I would get so depressed thinking how many poor people there are and what the state of things are. I'd like to get this country, I'd like to move and then I'd stop. Where will I go? And that stops me every time. That stops me every time. Where will I go?

BA: I understand. Did World War II affect you and Joe particularly?

SBG: What?

BA: Did the Second World War have an impact on your lives? Did it affect...

SBG: What happened was he had volunteered and he was turned down. His eyes weren't good enough. That's when he told me that he volunteered.

BA: Did that surprise you?

SBG: I didn't know. He said they'll just have to wait and get me and that's what they did.

BA: Oh they did draft him?

SBG: Oh absolutely. He was there for years and about the time of the Bulge which was in the ...

BA: The Battle of the Bulge?

SBG: You can't know anything about it, you're too young.

BA: I've talked to people who fought in it though.

SBG: That's when they needed men and he, logically, he was told it was because of his background. He was slated for something else but because of the Bulge he went into the infantry. He was stationed in one of the southern bases, in a horrible place. He wouldn't let me come down there. He said absolutely not. It's a hell-hole.

BA: He was stationed in the American South.

SBG: Yeah and then he was shipped overseas. He did a history of his, whatever it is called, what branches?

BA: His division, his...

SBG: Whatever. He did a history of it.

BA: Was that published?

SBG: And then while he was there he was sent to France for something or other for a week and then he was sent to teach at Shugenham.

BA: Shugenham?

SBG: No, in England. And then he was shipped home. Then there was talk about the Japanese war was still on. How was it -- anyway, he taught at Shugenham and from there he came home.

BA: That was part of his military service, teaching?

SBG: Yes.

BA: When he was overseas he wasn't harmed or anything?

SBG: He went through the Bulge. He went through all the whatever. What he did in the states, he was in charge of a room that was set up to teach, to interpret what was going on in the war for the soldiers. What you call information, something or other.

BA: Intelligence?

SBG: He was in charge of supplying the information, political battles and so on, and for that he was honored by a parade and the general came because of his work, in other words. He was honored with a however. But in spite of that, he was sent overseas. They needed men but he didn't use a gun. He did the history of the whatever. [Joe Grucci also was a correspondent for *The Stars and Stripes*, the military newspaper during WWII.]

BA: I see, I see. You say you two were married in 1940. Was that a hard decision considering that you said you'd never get married?

SBG: I guess not.

BA: You had been living together for a while prior to that. Is that right?

SBG: As a matter of fact, he had an apartment. Do you know Pittsburgh? You know where Bayard Street is?

BA: Yes.

SBG: Do you know where Center Avenue is?

SBG: Center and Craig?

BA: Sure.

SBG: He had a room at a house at Craig and Center.

BA: Ok.

SBG: This is where he stayed and I lived here and very often he would come. Well, he saved my life. What happened was, I had a stove in my little two-room place. I didn't know very much about making fires in stoves and things. One winter morning it was below zero, I get up and I'm not feeling right and don't know what's wrong. I feel as though my head is being separated from my body. He never did this before, this is mid-morning, he comes in and sees that there's something wrong with me and calls my brother-in-law who's a physician. Right away he was alarmed -- his name is Myer [Rubenstein] and Lou [Louis Kochin, the physician who shared Myer Rubenstein's office] and another physician come storming up. They take me, put a coat on me and each one by the arm start walking me back and forth and back and forth and finally they put me in the car and off to the hospital I went. In the Emergency Room they put blankets on me. I hear someone above in the back of me and I know who it was, another physician we knew very well. He said oh she's full of it. Gas. They shipped me up to a room and put me to bed and this is wonderful. A few hours later the door opened and a hospital employee comes pulling a tank.

BA: Oxygen tank?

SBG: Oxygen tank. Puts it at the side of my bed, looks at me and slowly starts walking out. He comes to the door, he turns to me and says what did you want to go and do it for?

BA: So he thought you were committing suicide.

SBG: I remember the exact words. "What did you want to go and do it for?" and walks out. From there I stayed a day or so there too and then I went to my sister's house and stayed there for a week or so and then I went back to my place.

BA: You were lucky he came when he did.

SBG: But if Joe hadn't come that would have been it. I didn't know what was wrong with me. If it ever happens I'd know exactly what happens. It hits you right here and you feel as though your head is being taken.

BA: This was before you two were married and he was coming up to visit you.

SBG: That's right.

BA: While he was away in service -- I should have asked, was he part of the University of Pittsburgh when he was drafted or was this before his academic career?

SBG: He was drafted part of Pittsburgh.

BA: Was he at the University when he was drafted?

SBG: He had applied for a state something or other.

End of Tape 3 (3 of 3) Side 1

Tape 3 (3 of 3) Side 2

SBG: I don't know what. He had to take a test and he came out very high and he was offered a job a day after he got notice. One day, if he had received that notice the day before, he would never have had to go.

BA: Another close call.

SBG: Uh huh.

BA: Prior to that how was he making his living? Was he teaching somewhere else?

SBG: He was teaching, yeah, at the Settlement.

BA: The Irene Kaufmann Settlement.

SBG: Uh huh.

BA: Did he teach writing there?

SBG: Uh huh.

BA: I see. You just taught there one summer but he taught there all the way through.

SBG: This is where he was teaching.

BA: OK. During this time you were actively sculpting and taking commissions and that sort of thing.

SBG: Um hum.

BA: There's a point you were doing some abstract work. Is that right?

SBG: Doing what?

BA: Doing abstract art?

SBG: That's right.

BA: How did you get into doing that?

SBG: Just to please myself. What I like to do most of all is to do what I wanted to do. I didn't like commissions because they tied you. Oh let me tell you, when I did the Mr. Frank of the Frank and Seder Department Store, that's before your time, the attorney who got me the commission, can't remember his name. When I was ready and finished with it Mrs. Frank and her two children I think came to view it, accept it or not. The attorney said, "Don't you, hope you don't mind, let me do all the..." So Mrs. Frank came and there it was for her to view it and to approve. She said "Oh, that's our dear daddy." She liked it but and she turned to me, "But, dear, couldn't you make him smile a little?"

When I heard that, I tell you the anger started at my ankles and went right up to my head.

Fortunately I said the right thing.

BA: Which was?

SBG: I don't remember how I said it but it had to do with dignity and that was right.

BA: That surely was.

SBG: How I ever came out with that, I was so angry. But couldn't you make him smile a little.

BA: So that's the sort of thing an artist has to put up with to make a living. You were doing this sort of work during the '40s when you were still in Pittsburgh.

SBG: If I wouldn't have had to do so much talking I should have brought out some photographs.

BA: That's ok. We can do that another time.

SBG: Anything more?

BA: Let's see, maybe a couple of other things if I can ask.

SBG: Oh I did the Prothonotary [David B. Roberts] too.

BA: Yes, I heard about that. Do you know his name? Who that was?

SBG: It was a bronze plaque of the Prothonotary.

BA: I heard about that. It's in one of the government buildings in Pittsburgh.

SBG: How did you hear about it?

BA: I think that Mark told me.

SBG: How did he know?

BA: Well, he did somehow. He did know about that.

SBG: That Mark.

BA: I wanted to ask you if you had met maybe through Sam, Andy Warhol when he was young? Did you ever meet him?

SBG: Don't mention his name please.

BA: May I ask why?

SBG: He was a student of Sam's. Sam told me that he was a marvelous draftsman. He was in his class and this guy was a very good draftsman. Well that's good. I don't think much of him. Did you know that his brother-in-law, I don't know if he still is, started to call himself an artist?

BA: I didn't know that.

SBG: Oh.

BA: Did you meet Andy Warhol when he was young?

SBG: No, no, no.

BA: You just heard about him from Sam.

SBG: That's the first time I heard his name and forgot about it until he went to New York and got into with a bunch of stupes. I shouldn't say that, should I? I didn't think much of... I think he would have probably done better... I don't know. I shouldn't say.

BA: That's OK.

SBG: Certain things I shouldn't say.

BA: I was just curious if you might have known him.

SBG: I think that he got in with the wrong bunch. I think they were way beyond him and he should have gone in another direction. I think he would have done much better. I don't think he was up to that group in New York.

BA: Well...

SBG: So he became famous through them anyway.

BA: Yeah.

SBG: But I had this very strong feeling that he should not have been there.

BA: Were you ever tempted to go to New York or go somewhere else to improve your artistic career?

SBG: Yes I was but I wasn't able. I didn't have the, I wasn't free to. I wanted to go, sure. I wanted to go where what's his name was teaching. The Polish um, he did marvelous work. I did at the time and I still do but at the time he was teaching there I wasn't free to go. I would have gone there just as an apprentice. By the way, this is where I think artists belong, not at universities. The apprentice system is the most wonderful thing. That works. The stuff they get at ...

BA: Well, you've had time to see that I'm sure.

SBG: Oh absolutely, absolutely. So the renaissance was right in having apprentices.

BA: That's something you would have liked to have done if you could.

SBG: Absolutely. Not a school.

BA: Of course, you really developed your own methods from what you said.

SBG: Well I just sort of, not thinking, just doing.

BA: Yes.

SBG: Really not thinking. If I look back in a way I was fortunate by not being influenced by what happens very often at universities the students all start doing the kind of work that their professor does. To get away from it is very, very difficult. Today with children who are taught mechanically, I still think the apprentice system is the best because you learn doing, not reading.

BA: You never really identified with any particular school of art I take it.

SBG: Huh um.

BA: There weren't any artistic movements you see yourself as part of.

SBG: No, huh um, the apprentice system absolutely. The girl who bought my studio is an artist. Well she wants to be an artist. Girl – woman really. She had some training at a university, I could tell. She has no imagination at all. I helped her over the years and I could see she's absolutely nothing unless you showed her, which I would try to stimulate her. She'll do what you tell her to do, but she doesn't go beyond that.

BA: That's too bad. It sounds like when you said you never really had anybody show you at all. You never mentioned a sculpture teacher or anything like that. This is all things you figured out yourself.

SBG: In Pittsburgh one of our friends who was a social worker, her husband was a very well know lawyer, a very good one. She had a daughter who was interested in art, so she said. Would I take her as a student? This is in Pittsburgh.

BA: This is before you moved to State College.

SBG: So I did. She was doing very well until she came to the part she wanted to do a mural in her bedroom on the wall. Great! Everything was, I let her show her way, you know. Her mother wouldn't allow her to put anything on the wall. At that point, I quit. I said, that's it.

BA: That's the closest you've come to having an apprentice?

SBG: This happened twice. It happened here, too. A friend, Mitch Morse, who is a Jewish scholar...

BA: Mitch Morse?

SBG: Morse, m o r s e. Oh, he's written very often for magazines and things. In fact, I read of him before we came here. His wife was a New York, – he's from the south – he still has his southern accent. His father was a professor. "Yes ma'am, yes ma'am..." And so the daughter says, "I want to be..." and her mother at a party talked me into it. I said uh, um hum, eh, ok. You would think that this teacher would have a little more sense, but when you went to their home for dinner or whatever, she'd bring out all this stuff in front of her daughter and say isn't this wonderful. Some of those things she should never have said. Well that didn't work out either. This kid was reading *New York Times* when she was fourteen years old and you know what I suspected later, she was a lesbian.

BA: The young girl?

SBG: Yeah. She was smart before I knew that, but when she came back later and once I saw her I knew she was lesbian. I'd see what she was doing. Nothing in the arts world at all. She was all... and I could tell from the way she was dressed and that was that. But that's the only time.

BA: Do you think that people...

SBG: You would think, you know, it depends on the, not on the education background, it's on the individual, how much they've absorbed -- not what they are.

BA: When you think of the artists that you knew when you were young and you think of the artists today...

SBG: Today the art world is dead.

BA: That's a pretty strong statement.

SBG: I know. I'm only judging from what I read in the New York paper, the art section. Have you ever had the occasion to look at it? Have you seen it recently? There isn't anything there. Movies, TV, in the art section. Theater, not the way it was. At one time you knew what was going on. It was thriving, it was moving and so on. Many of them are doing designs commercially, but the old gang, nothing has come up. Some of them went back to just plain painting, you know. Some, of course, are going. As a matter of fact, I can get today's paper and there's nothing there. I can't find anything there. It's at a dead still, you know.

BA: After you moved to State College with your husband, did you continue to be as active making art as you always were?

SBG: I wasn't active here at all.

BA: No.

SBG: I never even showed here.

BA: Were you creating on your own?

SBG: That's right.

BA: You were?

SBG: I didn't think there was enough interest and to put up a show takes a lot of energy and a lot of work and I wasn't about to do it.

BA: What kind of work were you doing? Was it more busts...

SBG: Do you want to see one? I had one. Do you want to see it?

BA: Sure. You were just saying you didn't exhibit up here in State College

SBG: No.

BA: But you kept working on your own. Was any of the work displayed anywhere outside of town or not really?

SBG: Do I have any work outside of town?

BA: Was any of the work you created in State College displayed anywhere?

SBG: It was sold, yeah. It was sold to some of the English Departments. Some of the pieces were sold here to who knew me.

BA: Right. How did it come about that you did the Fred ^{Lewis} Pattee head?

SBG: I don't know. For example, how did it come? Somebody recommended me I guess, I don't know. By the way, my husband was poet-in-residence at the university in Indiana [Hanover College, Hanover, IN].

BA: Oh, he was. Was this during his years at State College?

SBG: Yeah.

BA: I see.

SBG: But the same university wrote and asked me to be artist-in-residence at the same time and I refused.

BA: Because?

SBG: Because I didn't like the idea of two people... I didn't like the idea but I did answer. I said I would be very happy to any other time and I told them I was busy with work and couldn't possibly and that was it.

BA: They didn't reconsider.

SBG: What happened was that was where he had his heart attack.

BA: So he was away when that happened.

SBG: That hasn't anything to do with you. That's it.

BA: I see.

SBG: He recovered and so on.

BA: Oh I see.

SBG: Then, let me see. I also did a cover for the [Pennsylvania] Library Association for one of their magazines.

BA: Do you remember about when that was?

SBG: Again, I have examples.

BA: Ok.

SBG: I did the cover.

BA: Right, right.

SBG: I designed the cover. I did something in Pittsburgh, speaking of that, for I think it was the Montefiore Hospital a foot, a particular foot with a particular disease they wanted and I did a drawing of that for them. That's it, you know, it was a commercial thing really, I thought.

BA: Drawing was kind of a secondary...

SBG: It was a drawing of a diseased foot.

BA: Drawing all along was kind of a secondary form to you not as important to you as sculpting. Did you tend to approach drawing differently? Were there sorts of subjects or things that interested you when you drew for yourself? Was it different than what you'd sculpt?

SBG: No. I have done drawings, line drawings, black and white. I've done that but that's for my own amusement. I've done some, of course, black and whites and charcoals.

BA: Were you involved with the *Pivot* magazine directly?

SBG: No. *

BA: That was all Joe's doing. So his creative work and your creative work were kind of separate?

SBG: Um hum, um hum.

BA: On the whole when you think back of your times here in State College, were there certain things that stand out.? Good times you spent with Joe or other people or things that were satisfying?

SBG: Well you see it was interesting here for me. We brought the poets here and we were host and hostess to the poets. For example, I can give you so many of them, the artists would come to us. I would have dinner for them because they had a reading at eight o'clock.

BA: Right.

SBG: So they'd come and I'd have a dinner for them and then we'd all go to the reading and we met a good many of them from England.

BA: Who really comes to mind when you think about them? Who were some of your favorites?

*Although Sibyl didn't write for *Pivot*, she designed (I think) all the covers. And after Uncle Joe died in 1982, she was responsible for keeping it going. She and Nicki did all the mailings as well. The apartment next to hers which she paid for was the *Pivot* office until five years or so ago. *Pivot* for many years held the reputation of being the only publication on Penn State's campus that was completely self-supporting, pretty remarkable for a poetry magazine. The poetry came out of the poetry class that Uncle Joe taught as well as from outside contributors such as Eugene McCarthy who became a good friend of Uncle Joe and Aunt Sib. Joseph Heller was also in their crowd....note from Mark Rubenstein.

SBG: Oh that's a whole area there. I can't give you the names because there are so many I'd have to look at my notes and so on.... This is interesting. Each individual, I remember one poet Kennedy was his name. What I had were little quail eggs that I saved for the day at the university into a salad and he was you know he was so involved in that. Well he reacted in such a positive way and I had so much that I said here you take these, he had a little daughter. I said you take this to your daughter. And, oh, he thanked me profusely and he said that will probably bring up a poem and if it did I'll write and let you know.

BA: And did it?

SBG: I don't think so but he was so pleased to get the little things for his daughter. Oh, I can't go into too much.

BA: I know we mentioned before we started taping that Eugene McCarthy, that you enjoyed having him over.

SBG: Oh they're all names now. You don't hear them anymore. Today, even the poetry style was changed. The poetry written today is half prose and half poetry.

BA: It doesn't have the form that it once did.

SBG: No form at all. You know *Pivot* is still alive.

BA: It's mostly an on-line on the Internet journal I think.

SBG: That's right. I have to call them, come to think of it. He publishes it. It's not only *Pivot*, but *Pivot Publishing* too.

BA: So they do other things as well.....

Well, thank you for spending so much time today....

End of Tape 3 (3 of 3) Side 2

Minor emendations to eliminate repetition in the transcription, to add explanatory material, in square brackets [], etc., were made by Martha L. Berg, November 27, 2005.