

NATIONAL

Life stories

NATIONAL LIFE STORIES

ARTISTS' LIVES

Sheila Girling

Interviewed by Hester Westley

C466/296

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

Title Page

Ref. No.: C466/296**Wav files Refs.:** C466-0296-0001.WAV to 0013.WAV**Collection title:** Artists' Lives**Interviewee's surname:** Girling**Title:****Interviewee's forenames:** Sheila May**Sex:** F**Occupation:****Date of birth:** 1st July 1929**Mother's occupation:****Father's occupation:****Date(s) of recording and tracks (from – to):** 10/08/09: (track 1-5); 11/08/09: (track 6-9); 12/08/09: (track 10-13)**Location of interview:** Interviewee's studio, Camden Town, London**Name of interviewer:** Hester Westley**Type of recorder:** Marantz PMD660**Total no. of tracks:** 13**Reading Format:** Wav 16bit 48kHz**Mono or stereo:** Stereo**Burned to DVD:****Duration:****Additional material:****Copyright/Clearance:****Interviewer's comments:**

[Track 1]

This is Hester Westley talking to Sheila Girling in her studio in Camden Town, London on the tenth of August 2009. And Sheila, as a warm-up question, can you tell me where we are sitting and a little bit about the history of the studio space here?

Well, this is a whole, a pre-seat of old workshops.

Sorry, I'm just going to readjust your mic. Continue.

I mean Tony's ... well it was an old piano factory and this, where we're sitting now, was Dunhill Pipes. Do you remember pipes, smoking pipes? Well they had ... the men worked down here where we're sitting, which is a clean dining area, and upstairs in my studio the women worked, they weren't allowed to mix. So we took this over and it was just black and filthy with all little shelves here, little ... for different tools, you know. So we stripped it and made the whole thing, well as it is now, white. And it's a wonderful studio upstairs because of the light, you know, I have all these windows. Would you like to enlarge on that?

No, that's perfect, thank you.

[End of track 1]

[Track 2]

Sheila, can you tell me your full name?

Sheila May Caro Girling, well I mean Caro now, Girling when I was, you know, my painting name and my maiden name.

Do you know where the name came from – Sheila May?

May was my mother's name, second name for my ... Beatrice May was my mother and I think she just chose Sheila out of a hat. I don't like the name Sheila but ... [laughs]

Why not?

Well, you know, in Australia, when we were working at trying a workshop and a young man kept calling me Mrs Caro and I said, 'Please call me Sheila' and he said, 'I can't, I'm Australian'. So [laughs], I mean everything in Australia's a sheila, you know. And that's why I don't like it very much, but anyway, I've got it.

Can we start this morning by talking a little bit about your family background. And I wonder how far back do you know anything about the sort of history of your family on your mother's side?

[0:01:07]

Well my mother's ... her father was a very well known Midland painter and a very good one and there's a whole lot about him printed and ...

What was his name?

John Rabone Harvey. Now the Rabones had a big, big factories making precision instruments: rulers and everything to do with engineering really. And they did come from

a big engineering ... I know my grandfather's uncles went abroad doing bridges and big engineering jobs. We have ...

Sorry, I'm going to fiddle with your microphone. They're a bit tricky, these things.

[pause]

There we go.

Can you hear me?

Yes. I'm going to just ... Sorry, do continue. Oh! Actually ...

[End of track 2]

[Track 3]

Sorry, we're resuming.

Well I know, we have an armadillo - we have it in the cottage – shell that was brought home by one of these uncles and I remember my cousin had a huge frog in a bottle which I think they're all sort of relics of that past. But mostly it was art really. My grandfather, my sister's ... sister and brother were both very well known artists and ... I'm not allowed to read am I, no.

You're not supposed to. Do you remember your grandfather?

Yes.

What memories do you have of him, what was he like?

He was a lovely man actually and he thought that I should be the artist in the family, but I didn't know that then. But I loved to go up. He had a studio in the attic of an old Victorian house and that wonderful smell. That sort of - oil and turpentine I now know it to be – but then it was sort of magic to me. I remember, well I loved his palette with all those little blobs of paint all the way round. And I think ... now I've gone blank.

Can you remember the house he lived in, can you remember the address of the house?

Not very well because I was only about five or six. It was an old Victorian house, I know that, because it went up into the attics, you know. But I remember he was showing me Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson* and he was saying, you know, all the light, the way the light's falling on the body, and my mother came in and she was very angry because she said, 'You'll frighten her, you'll frighten this little girl'. But actually I wasn't frightened at all, I was just, you know, was so excited by what he was telling me and he wanted to tell me, you know. But they died when ... because my mother was the youngest but one of

nine children, they died really when I was quite young, I don't remember them, never as grandparents playing with me, as we play with our grandchildren, you know.

Do you remember your grandmother?

[0:02:31]

Hardly at all. She died when she was sixty-two or three I think. I remember she was a little very wide lady all dressed in black. That's ... I can remember. Because I should think after ... she was very short and I should think after nine children she would be very wide, wouldn't you? No, I don't. She was very strict, she was Scottish, very strict and, you know, she said, 'You'll spoil the child, you'll spoil the child' if I was sort of given anything really. And that's all I remember of her, I don't ... No, she died really too early and then my grandfather went to live with my mother's sister and used to stay with another sister in the country and they used to paint a lot there. This other sister had a wonderful old, well, Elizabethan farmhouse right in the middle of Eymore Wood on the banks of the River Severn, and he used to do a lot of landscape there, which I loved. He used to go out and just paint watercolours. And I learnt so much actually, about watercolour from him and that's why I love painting landscape watercolours when I'm on holiday, really. I know very little about my father's family because he lived in London, I mean before he came to Birmingham. He was an engineer and came as a young man to the Dunlop Rubber Company and I suppose he met my mother in Birmingham – I don't know how they met actually – but I know his father died before I was born and his mother lived for a long time in the south and she didn't like me very much. So I was dark, my sister was the blonde one and plump and blonde and very pretty. Although she's a lovely person, she's not a bit spoiled, but she was the sort of ... because my father was very blonde and all the side of his family was very sort of reddy-blondie, she didn't approve of dark children. Although my mother wasn't very dark, I'm a throwback I think. [laughs] So I knew very little really of my father's family, other than his father was an art dealer and quite a sort of, I think worldly man. My mother's father, the artist said, knew of him of course, it was the art world you see, and he said, they're very worldly people you're marrying into, you know, which he didn't approve. Sort of heavy gamblers and high livers rather. And ...

Do you know the name of your paternal grandfather?

Well Frank, I don't know his middle name, Frank Girling.

And what can you remember him being like, do you have any ...

He was dead before I was born, so I don't know. I can only tell you, you know.

Did your father tell you any stories about him?

No, not really. My father was quite a private person. He wasn't a ... he wasn't involved in us, with us. Well, he was involved with us but he was a sort of businessman who expected mother to do all that side of it, you know. Although he taught me a lot really, how to ... in subtle ways. Mother was very emotional and, you know, sort of, and he used to quietly – as he took us to school in the morning – say don't take too much notice of your mother, you know. [laughs] He quietly brought sanity into sort of ...

Do you have a sense of what his upbringing was like?

His upbringing? I should think very strict. He had a brother who I knew very little because he was in the south. I didn't know him. He visited sometimes but I don't know very much about him. And I think it was a very strict Victorian upbringing, because I think in a way my father was a very inhibited man. He couldn't express his emotions. I think he had a lot of withheld emotions, you know, he was very English in a sense really. Where my mother was much more volatile and artistic, you would say.

What do you think her upbringing was like with Rabone Harvey?

[0:07:37]

I think a lot of competitiveness. I always feel there was a lot of rivalry with the sisters.

Why do you think that?

My mother adored her brother, the artist, who was very kind to her apparently. She, being the youngest was rather sort of bossed about, the youngest girl anyway. I think probably very stable.

What sort of education did she have, your mother?

She went to a secondary school in Birmingham. They all went, but then she went to Birmingham Art School for a while, but she ... I don't know what happened, she dropped out and decided to be a secretary because she wanted to earn some money and I think money was very short because the old great grandmother, I mean my great grandmother, the old Rabone lady, when her husband died she came to live with the family and she really kept the family, she brought the money in because it was a big ... she owned a lot of land at that point in Birmingham, which has since disappeared. But I think he was a very lazy man and he did very little trying to do portraits and whatnot after she came to live with them.

What was your mother's full name?

Beatrice May Harvey. And my sister's Beatrice – Audrey Beatrice – and I'm Sheila May. But I mean the influence, I mean my mother's family predominated in our childhood really and my father sort of went along with it, you know. As long as he sort of ... everybody was sort of happy.

What was your father's full name?

[0:09:57]

Cyril Stanley Frank. What a horrible lot of names aren't they? Cyril Stanley Frank Girling.

And what sort of education did your father have?

I think he went to Westminster Grammar School, then I don't know what in engineering, some sort of engineering training, I don't know. He was very, very good at his job, I mean he opened the whole of Speke, you know, the northern Dunlop, in the end, you know, he was on the northern board of the Dunlop Rubber Company. He was ... although he didn't ever talk, he was very intelligent. You know, sort of his brain was very good but he could never really express it in the way my mother always could. Now I look back I realise that he was a very clever man, but he never told you that, you know. And my mother sort of said, oh you know, he doesn't know ... my mother rather sort of put him down, which was a pity really because he was ... you couldn't beat him at chess. No matter how hard you tried you could not beat my father at chess. [laughs] He had a very logical brain actually.

Do you have any sense of how your parents met?

Well I think mother went to ... I don't quite know. She went to work somewhere. She decided she wanted to earn money and she went to work, I suppose at the Dunlop, I don't know. No, I don't know, but they met I think at work. It's a pity mother didn't go on because she would have been good at art but she saw so much sort of ... people trying to make do, I think the children, you know. Uncle Herbert – Bertram actually, not Herbert, Bertram was very poor I think at Birmingham Art School and they had to do odd jobs and whatnot to earn, you know, and he didn't really, he was a very lazy father. Once his mother came to live with them my mother said he never really tried to paint another portrait, you know, he just painted what he liked and grandma kept them all. At Christmas apparently old Grandma Rabone bought a sort of a side of beef, it must have been an enormous joint, they had to do it on a spit it was so huge because you, don't forget, with nine children you probably ate it, but it was a ... even in those days it was extraordinary really to ... But my mother always used to say I'd never ... I always worked harder than my mother because she always had sort of old biddy, I know, as an old nanny or something and they used to have a sort of washerwoman that came in once a week. I suppose even as

they were not very well off, they still seemed to have servants, which are unheard of now. Of course we have washing machines.

And do you know how extensive your grandfather's reputation was as an artist when your mother was growing up?

[0:13:44]

You see it was good. It was good in the Midlands, which then of course life was much more insular. I mean the Midlands were a sort of world of their own. But I mean he exhibited in the Academy and ... can I just think about that for a moment. [pause] He was a member of the Royal Society in Birmingham and I think he was the president at one time. He went to the Slade you see, as a student in his younger days and then he had a weak chest and he was sent up north as a young man to ... for fresh air. I don't think ... it wasn't consumption, it's just he was very bronchial. He went to a boarding school and they had to have a cold bath every morning and my mother thought that was what gave him a weak chest, but I don't know. She had a weak chest too, but he chain-smoked, so I mean you know, really. I never saw my grandfather without a cigarette, so really you can expect them to have weak chests. And he was sent up to the north on the borders and met my grandmother, who was a little northern lady and I think she was very beautiful then I believe. But I can't remember really.

Do you have any memory of their family house?

My family house?

No, your grandparents' family house before ...

No, I don't actually, only that it was an old Victorian house that went up, up, up. That's all I can remember.

And can you remember seeing his paintings? Were there any of his ...

Can I remember what?

His paintings, can you remember as a little girl seeing his artwork?

I remember him painting, yes, I remember him doing ... well mostly I remember watercolour landscapes because I used to go and watch him. I don't remember him painting in oil very much but of course we have a lot of his paintings. Every painting in our house was either my grandfather's, my uncle's or my aunt's and that was my heritage, you know, I felt very much ... and my mother said, when you begin to paint, call yourself Harvey. And my father said no, no, no. And I said no, I shall call myself Girling, that's what I am. [laughs] And he was really pleased actually. Because funnily enough he could draw superbly too, my father, but it was technical. I remember I had to draw a boat for school for some reason or other and he drew it for me and it was superb actually. So that he was artistic too, so it must come out somewhere mustn't it.

What do you know of your parents' courtship or early days of marriage – do you know anything at all?

No, not really.

Do you know where they set themselves up or had their first home?

In Erdington - oh no, in ... oh I've forgotten, it was in the country. No, I can't remember the name, it'll come probably. Well I wasn't then, my sister was born then. I remember it was a lovely sort of cottagey type house, I remember going to see it, but I can't remember the name of the place, the village. It'll come. And then we moved to Erdington when I was young to be near the Dunlop really. And we lived in a Victorian house then, in Spring Lane, I remember it was called and I remember it backed on to Rookery Park, that's all I remember. And it was very happy times.

How much older is your sister?

Two and a half years. Three at some time of the year and two and a half. She was a very good sister. She was very protective. When we first went to nursery school, my mother said look after her and she stood with her arms out while I put my coat on so nobody could hurt me. She's very sweet actually. We're very good friends still, but she stayed in Sutton Coldfield, which we lived, when I was about eight we moved to Sutton Coldfield.

[0:18:46]

When were you born?

Well that is a ... you know, I've always kept my age private in a way, because it's sort of ... your age is so judged by age that I think it's objectionable, you know. And that's why I ... I am eighty, I must say so that ...

When's your birthday?

July the first.

And do you know anything about the circumstances of your birth?

Not really. I mean we were all born at home. I think it was fairly easy birth. I mean ... it was perfectly straightforward as far as I know. My mother never said anything else, you know, she had births at home. It was wonderful actually.

And do you have any first memories of that house, what is your first memory?

I think the garden. The garden used to lead out into Spring Lane I remember and you could cross the road and there was a little park called Rookery Park. And I think mother put a tent, or my father did, obviously, a tent in the garden all summer, which was our house, you know, we ... I mean I don't remember the house terribly well.

Can you remember any of the rooms inside the house?

We were in the third floor, I know, my parents were in the second floor and my sister and I were in the third floor and it had big, high windows. You could stand on a sort of little ledge I suppose and look out, which was ... my mother was a very relaxed mother with us as children. We were allowed to do what we wanted in the house, you know, she wasn't a very sort of ... I won't say she was clean, she was very clean but she didn't worry us too much, we could have friends, you know. I always remember that most of my friends came to our house, you know, and we used to have wonderful teas in the tent and whatnot all through the summer. She was a very good mother really. She let us be fairly free and yet, you know, she was a caring mother. So nowadays children are so terrified to go out, you're frightened to allow children to go out nowadays. I mean we used to wander miles really as children and no-one ever stopped us or ... we were warned never to speak to nasty men and all that sort of thing.

Can you describe your mother to me, how do you remember her?

[0:21:59]

Strong, physically strong woman, you know, she used to love to cycle with us to Tamworth. We lived in Sutton Coldfield most of my memory life and we would swim in Tamworth Pools, you know, they had a lovely open air swimming pool, she was a great swimmer. She was a very athletic woman really, she loved to do things with us. My father never did really. We used to go to Wales every summer holiday and I remember she always sort of bathed with us. She would be the one that would rush into the sea and bathe with us and my father would sort of rush in and say, 'It's too cold, too cold' and get out again. [laughs] So that really mother was the driving force in our lives. She was a wonderful cook and she was a very ... she was never bored. You know, if we had sort of time, you know, when it was raining, she'd say, 'Let's make something', you know, and she'd always make a hat or do something, you know, make something for us. She was very, very creative like that. Well, what else really?

How do you remember her dressing when you were a little girl? Can you describe any particular outfit that she would wear or how she wore her hair?

She had ... well her hair was just, you know, taken back sort of. She had very good taste in dress. She made a lot of her own clothes which she loved to do.

What like?

Mm?

What like, how did she dress?

Well I mean she loved colour, which inhibited me because she always wanted to put bright colours on me and I always wanted to be in sort of grey and go by completely unnoticed, you know. But she could dress my sister, my sister was ... it was very funny because at Birmingham Art School when I used to sort of, went for a time with bare feet, I refused to wear shoes, I must have been a pain in the neck, and she said look, the neighbours are saying I'm cruel to you, you know, because Audrey was always superbly dressed and I was going about in sort of dirty old macs with bare shoes. With bare feet, I mean. Well I think you all go through a time when you're really a pain to your parents. I know my eldest son used to drive us mad. [laughs]

And so how did her taste extend to the domestic sphere – how did she like to decorate your family house, who was responsible for it?

Well a lot of it, a lot of the furniture was from my, her father's home, I mean my grandparents' home, you know, from both grandparents. So most of the furniture was, well from family houses really. And the walls were covered in family pictures. I think my mother's taste was very good. My father's taste was abysmal. I mean he would like anything and I think, you know, he'd choose a picture that you couldn't stand, you know, and say there's a nice one, you know. He had ... but he left everything to my mother, everything so far as domestic life was ... and our upbringing really. He did insist that we

were ... our manners, he was very keen on manners which makes me think he must have gone through it as a young boy. We were, you know, told how to eat properly and we had to sit and use our sort of soup spoons in the right direction and he wanted us to be really little ladies, actually. Well, perhaps that was good.

Can you remember the sort of pattern of a day at home? Can you remember your bedroom, waking up in your bedroom and what that would be like? Can you sort of describe a day at home? Who would dress you or ...

Who would dress me?

And where was your bedroom, what was your bedroom like, can you recall?

Well we went to move to Sutton, we had a modern house which my mother hated actually, which was just being built as we bought it. My bedroom ... No, not very much about my bedroom except that you could see into the garden from there.

Did you share it with your sister or was it your own?

No. First of all I chose when it was first built, a house with a wonderful window ledge that you could sit on and I said, oh I want that for my bedroom. But actually it was cold, rather cold part of the ... we didn't have central heating then and so I moved it to a smaller bedroom over the kitchen. No, we never had bedrooms ... we had our own rooms because she was sort of older than me in a sense and she developed much more quickly than I did. I was a very late developer because I was a thin, miserable little creature. [laughs] Not really, but I was thin and she was sort of plump. I loved to go into my sister's bedroom while she was getting ready to go out, but that was later. She used to be very much in demand with the young men.

So can you describe that house to me in Sutton Coldfield? You said it was a new house.

[0:28:25]

Yes. Well it was not a very pretty house. My father bought it without telling my mother and well, I mean he said ... and she was very upset, she didn't like it. It was up a very long road and I think we had a bus once a day or twice a day to get into Sutton, so that it was not convenient. And my mother cycled a lot then to get into Sutton, but she didn't like it. It wasn't her type of house, she liked old houses.

Can you describe it as though you were approaching it from the outside?

Well, what can you say? I mean it was sort of built in the Charles Annesley Voysey style of pseudo timber stuff, you know, which I didn't like. You see my father thought it was lovely, but if you'd showed him probably an old farmhouse he would have said no, it's ... it was, well I mean what can I say, it was just a modern house.

How big was it? Can you remember how many rooms ...

Well it was sort of four bedroom type house, it had a big garden and we were opposite a golf course I think, it had a lot of trees, there were a lot of trees with a rookery in across the road, which we used to walk our dogs. We had two greyhounds which I adored. Actually mine died, but the other one was sort of like just totally like us, one of the family. Pretty well talked to us, you know.

What were they called, your dogs?

Penny and Myth. Myth died. I think she'd been raced too hard. They were both racing dogs and when the war came, when I was at school one of my best school friend's father had a big racing stable which was very popular in the Midlands then and he had to get rid of all the dogs and we said we'd take two, two white greyhounds. They were just lovely actually. But I think mine, they'd raced ... her heart was bad, you know, she'd raced too

hard really. But the other one lived for years, and died of old age I think. And I mean I was quite grown up the time she died.

Did you have any staff in the house, did your mother have any help?

A cleaner. A cleaner. No, because there wasn't much in the war you see. I mean this was before, well, no when we were young, yes. No, just a cleaner. Not a live-in staff, no.

And did your mother have anybody to help with you girls?

With what?

With looking after you girls?

No, no. We ... I don't think she would ever, because she saw very little of her mother, she never ... she was a very hands-on mother, I don't think she could have tolerated, you know, leaving us with anyone else. Any more than I could have done actually.

So returning to a sort of typical family day, can you remember, who would you eat breakfast with in the morning when you came downstairs?

[0:32:22]

My father possibly would have eaten before us, I suppose with my sister and I. I mean I don't recall very much breakfasts. We always had a very good breakfast. My mother was very insistent that we had what ... it's a proper breakfast, you know, with eggs, bacon and whatnot, you know, but my mother would have done it. And we had a big ... there was a sort of kitchen area and then a sort of breakfast room off the kitchen area with a fire, which we would have breakfast, you know, it wouldn't ... We wouldn't have had breakfast in the dining room, we'd have had breakfast in the breakfast room, as we ... But I don't really recall having breakfast very much. I was usually, I recall sometimes being very nervous, not wanting to eat breakfast because there was an exam or what have you at

school, and I would get all tense and frightened and feel sick and, you know, the rest of it. I was always sort of over-conscientious, but I also feel my childhood was one of trying to catch up. Because I was sort of put with my sister who was sort of ahead of me, although she was very kind and never beastly or competitive, but somehow I always seemed to be sort of fighting to catch up. I was the youngest of the cousins when we went to stay with my aunt and that was a big influence of my life actually, my aunt.

What was your aunt's name?

[0:34:03]

Nellie Blanche Tomlinson and she was a botanist. And she lived in this wonderful old Elizabethan farmhouse that I was telling you about, where my grandfather went to stay with her a lot. And she had us most of the holidays because she loved children and she never had any. She could ... well, her husband couldn't I presume. And she loved to teach us. I loved to learn about flowers and she taught me the time, I must have ... nobody was teaching me at home and she said, but you can't tell time? I must have been, oh I don't know how old, when do you start to learn the time? And she had a wonderful grandfather clock with a moon that moved backwards and forwards with the times of the month, and she taught me. I mean she taught me so much. She was a teacher actually, by ... I mean that's what she did before she married and I think it was a very unhappy marriage. She longed for children and didn't get any, so she lived through us really. But it was ... all she had ... my sister's children and us and another brother's children quite often all together. And I was always the youngest and I was always trying to keep up, somehow. I think it was probably anxiety, a lot of anxiety as a child, trying to catch up.

Can you remember any specific adventures or activities from those holidays with your aunt?

Well it was ... she had a big lake in the garden with a little boat. We used to get in the little boat. I remember the tadpoles were so black round the edges of that pool. It was just wonderful, we had the pool, the lake, the boat and just across the field the River Severn

and we bathed in that all the time, we could swim in there. And really just the house, you know, we thought it was haunted and we were quite convinced it was haunted and we daren't go up to bed, you know, because we would sort of wait for somebody. I daren't, you know, spend a penny. We were all in the garden once, I think it was Bonfire Night or something, and I daren't go back into the house to spend a penny, I was so terrified of being there alone. So it was a great adventure the house and there was supposed to be a secret passage up the back staircase, the servants' staircase, and we used to tap on the walls, on the panels all the way up thinking we'd find ... although of course there never was, but we believed there was a secret passage, you know. It was ... of course we had games and plays, we always had put on plays, all the cousins, for the grown-ups, so that was fun.

Can you remember any plays in particular that you performed?

No I can't actually. But I know Pat, who's only just died at the age of ninety-two I think, was the one who organised us and we all had to rig up bits of costumes for us, you know, bits of clothes my aunt would let us have. It was great fun, I mean we longed, we all got our torches ready for the evening when we went there and gathered all the things we needed.

What was your mother's relationship like with her sister, your aunt?

[0:38:02]

Well she was older. She was the eldest sister I think. She was more competitive with the sister above her. I think it was a very competitive family actually. I ... she didn't ... I think she sort of didn't terribly like the one up, Auntie Clare, the next one, who was the mother of Pat. There seemed to be a lot of sibling rivalry with the children. Mother was always boasting about how clever we were and they were all sort of competitive about how clever their children were. But I think with Auntie, the aunt that was the botanist, she was fine with because she had no children and she was being so wonderful taking us through the holiday, you know, I think she was very grateful. I think also that aunt wanted us to

help eat the produce in the garden because she had a very big old garden and this marvellous old gardener called Puck, Mr Puckeridge, we called him Puck. There was so much that came ripe let's say at that time, all the lettuces and whatnot. I remember sort of buckets of lettuces and I think she really wanted us to sort of eat up all the produce rather than let it go to waste. And she was always making incredible things like elderberry wine and all these wines she would make and her husband died of a peptic ulcer, I think it was the wine that did it. [laughs] It was too sour. Well, I mean she loved all these things, she loved doing things, which we loved of course. So really that was a very big influence in my childhood and she made me really look at nature in a way that I've loved always and passed on to Tim I think really. She was quite a guiding light in our lives, yes. What else could I say about her?

Well, let's return to the family home – what was the address of your home in Sutton Coldfield, can you remember the address?

[0:40:33]

Yes, 207 Tamworth Road. It was on the way to Tamworth.

And did your mother do any gardening?

No, my father was a passionate gardener, he loved the garden and was always trying to entice us to do some weeding which we never wanted to do very much. But he loved flowers and he loved the garden and he'd spend all the weekends in the garden pretty well, you know, he really ... I think that was the way he relaxed. He'd take a chair, always had a chair in the garden that he would sit and smoke his pipe, looking at things growing. I don't know why we're not ill through inhaling other people's smoke because my mother smoked all the time.

What brand of cigarettes did she prefer?

Craven A. I remember, Craven A. Which had a cat or something on the front. I don't remember that, but I know she smoked Craven A and my father smoked a pipe of course. We lived in smoke I imagine. But people did in those days. I know Tony's father was always with a cigarette.

So returning to the sort of family at home, how would you spend your weekends? You said your father would spend them in the garden, and can you remember how your weekends were organised?

I think we would go and see friends, you know, or meet friends. You know, we had the big Sutton Coldfield, the big park, you know, Sutton Park, which we would go either skiing or if there was snow we took sledges. In the summer we swam in Blackroot Pool. The park played a very big part of our lives actually. It was really like Hampstead Heath only wilder I suppose in those days. I know there are orchids. We were taken from school to collect orchids at one ... in our botany lesson and plants that ate insects. What do you call them – insectivorous plants, that grew actually round a boggy part of the park. I should think mostly with friends. We had lots and lots of school friends.

And were your parents sociable? Did they have a social life?

No, not really. Not very.

Can you remember ...

I mean neighbours, yes, but they didn't give parties. Mostly there were ... neighbours would drop in, really. But they didn't give big dinner parties and whatnot, no.

Did your mother have any friends that you remember in particular?

Neighbours, yes. But not ... she was rather private I think. I don't think ... No I don't remember any particular friends other than neighbours, you know, the neighbour next door who had a son who was rather keen on my sister I think at one time. But no, I think she

rather was a private person really. I mean the family were all her big ... well her life really. And I don't know about my father really, he'd had very few friends I think, but he was a really withdrawn person.

Can you remember – I'm trying to build up a picture of the family life – sort of family mealtimes at the weekend? Did you have ...

[0:45:004]

Always a big roast, you know, always a big, big Sunday lunch when, well we'd all sit down to a very big Sunday lunch. I remember feeling so full as a child, you know, I can't eat any more. [laughs]

And what was sort of conversation like? Would your parents talk extensively in front of you girls or can you remember the sort of rapport between your parents, did your father talk about his work for example?

My father would be correcting us with manners most of lunchtime. Don't do that, do this, do that, you know? And mother was saying, don't bother them, let them eat. And my father was very keen on astronomy and whatnot, he would talk very much about how the earth was moving and I remember going into the ... he shouted to us, 'Come out quickly, quickly' and we all rushed out into the garden and there was the Northern Lights, Aurora Borealis, just like a whole cloud above us. It must have been very ... it must have been cold and, you know, he started ... he was very scientific, he loved to explain to us what was happening and how the earth was moving and whatnot. He always did it with oranges, you know, this is ... which was interesting actually. I never remember any sort of great conversations over meals. It was very much a sort of business of eating.

And what about music – was there much music in the house?

No. My father played the piano, very well actually, and he insisted on our learning to play and I'm tone deaf like my mother and it was misery. And because I went in for these horrid exams at school, because I did the written test or the – I've forgotten the name of it.

Theory?

Mm?

Would it be music theory?

Yes. I came top. I got maximum marks and they thought I was a genius, but I didn't see those notes as a sound at all, I saw them as a pattern on the paper, so that I knew the pattern, and I never heard a sound. And then I went into the actual, the music – what do you call it? Not the theory, the ...

Practical.

Practical, and he'd say sing an E flat or something. He just laughed and said sort of go away. I couldn't, I didn't even know. I still can't hear if anything's in tune or not. And my mother was like that, so my father's music was rather looked down on by mother, my mother. Anything my father did she rather sneered at, which is terrible really, but you know, the Harveys were brilliant and anybody else was sort of a little bit lower in the scheme of things. And my mother – my sister is much more musical than I am because she's like my father. But there was not a lot of music. My father would quietly play, but he'd play sort of the old musical songs because his father opened the Gaiety Theatre in Birmingham and there was a lot of theatre activity. No, it couldn't have been in Birmingham. Yes. No, he's ... his mother's father. His mother came from Lichfield and her father opened the Gaiety Theatre and she was locked in a box as a young lady so young men couldn't get to her. But that was his mother, so that's his grandfather. And he knew all those songs because she knew them all.

Can you remember any of them?

[0:49:31]

[Sings] 'There was I waiting at the church.' [laughs] There were lots of them. But he used to play them and enjoy them. He played them by ear I suppose. He was very musical and sadly, we weren't really musical. My sister enjoyed it more than I did, but I hated every music lesson, partly because I loathed the music teacher.

And what about wireless, was there a radio or wireless in the house?

Oh yes, yes.

Where was it?

A wireless? Do you know, I can't remember.

Can you remember listening to it at a ...

I know my sister had a huge sort of record player in the sitting room that you had to wind up I think.

Can you remember what records she would listen to?

Yes. The Inkspots. I mean all pop, what were then pop songs of that period. My mother, everybody hated it because she would sit and listen to it for hours. But my parents were very tolerant really. My mother was very ... because my father was out most of the day and we really, mother brought us up actually, I mean she was a very tolerant, you know, things ... you were allowed to do what you wanted really. If you sort of kept on long enough wanting them she'd let you do them. [laughs]

And what about newspapers – can you remember if your family took newspapers?

I suppose it must have been *The Telegraph* and I know there was a *Birmingham Post* that arrived every evening. You know, you had two deliveries of papers a day, which you wouldn't have nowadays would you? I know the *Birmingham Post* always looked totally boring to me because they had no pictures in it hardly. But mother loved it because it came about teatime and she would sit down and read it. But I think they were very, very conservative type papers because my family was a very conservative – I mean no-one would ever have voted anything other than Conservative.

Was there much talk of politics?

None whatsoever, as far as I remember. I wouldn't have remembered who was the Prime Minister then at all. No, none whatsoever. Except of course when the war came. Then of course Churchill. But I never remember politics as a child at all.

What about religion, what were your parents' attitudes to religion?

[0:52:28]

Church of England. We went at Christmas, my father used to take us to Lichfield Cathedral for the choir, it had a wonderful choir and he used to enjoy going, not every Sunday, only so often, we would go to Lichfield to hear the choir. But we had very little religious ... we hardly ever went to church actually. But there was a tremendous feeling that the Sword of Damocles was about to strike if we did anything wrong. I mean my mother was very, very keen on prayers. You know, we always had to say our prayers and we always said grace before Sunday lunch, my father insisted on that. But ... and we were very much ... I think my mother sort of was rather ... I think her god was a very frightening god and, you know, that you'd got to do ... be a good girl or you'd ... well the Sword of Damocles would strike! [laughs]

Can you remember your prayers?

Yes. 'Gentle Jesus meek and mild, look upon a little child, pity my simplicity and suffer me to come unto me, and bless mummy and daddy and Audrey and everybody I love. Amen.' That was my prayer.

And so can you remember bedtimes ...

Yes.

... as a little girl?

Yes.

How was bedtime organised?

Well we would go upstairs and very soon we undressed and dressed ourselves, you know, and you cleaned your teeth and you did all the things you had to do and we were always tucked in by mother and then we would always call out for a glass of water so that they'd come back again. My father usually used to bring the water up and I used to be rather disappointed because it wasn't mother. [laughs]

Were they very tactile or sort of cuddly parents?

Madly. My mother madly tactile, I hardly ever remember my father cuddling us at all hardly. He'd kiss us, peck us, you know. But my mother was a terribly tactile person, you know, we were always being cuddled and, you know.

And what about bedtime stories, were there any ...

No, never read bedtime stories. No, never.

Do you remember ...

I don't remember any anyway.

What about reading books as a little girl – do you remember any particular favourites?

Yes. I mean I began to read pretty early actually because yes, mother did help us read, that's not true. I remember my first reading book, 'Tim and Tom sat on the elm of a big...' – no – 'on the bough of a big elm tree'. And I remember when I read that I thought life had changed. Yes, she did buy us a lot of reading books, that's not true, but she didn't read them with us. We had to sort of read them ourselves. You learn to read pretty quickly. I remember my first book, the most important book of my life I think, was *Little Women* because it was the first big book I'd ever read. I must have been about eight I think, or nine. And I thought it was wonderful, wonderful.

Why did you enjoy it so much?

Well (a) it was the first big book I'd ever read without pictures and the fact that you sort of ... well it was so wonderful to live in this family and this life and it just absorbed you. And for that, I mean really that started me loving reading and I've always loved reading. In fact, I spell incredibly badly and I think I would have been called dyslectic then. I know Paul is, you know. But at my nursery school you were in a line, every Friday you had to stand in a line and the really bad spellers were put at the top of the line and if you spelt a word wrong you were moved down a place. And I always started at the top and I always ended up at the bottom. You say about breakfast, because Friday at this day I would be sick, you know, I couldn't eat, I would be ill, I'd try not to go to school and of course my mother tumbled to that fairly quickly and sent me anyway. But it was misery, spelling, but because then they said, oh you read too quickly, that's why you can't spell. But no, I can't spell, I don't ... I mean I can spell now, but I still call to Tony, 'How do you spell so-and-so?' when I'm writing a letter. But poor old Paul is very dyslectic too and had problems. And of course he was, my grandfather, and my mother said she always remembered her father shouting to his wife, 'How do you spell ...?' whatever. So perhaps it goes through the artistic side.

Can you remember where your nursery school was?

Mm?

Where was your nursery school?

Sorry?

Where was the nursery school?

[0:58:06]

Oh that was in Erdington, but when we moved to Sutton it was Highclare College for Girls.

And can you remember being taken to nursery school for the first time?

Yes.

What was that like?

I cried and cried ... no, I couldn't sit by ... they let me the first day sit by my sister and the next day they wouldn't let me, I must have been about four I suppose, and I cried and cried. And they just picked me up and took me to another room altogether where the great big girls were dancing, and I was so shattered that I stopped crying immediately and I never cried again after that. But that was, I remember, my first days at school.

How old were you when you were sent to nursery school?

About four I suppose. I don't know. Perhaps four in those days.

And how long did you have to go for every day?

I can't remember.

And can you remember how your time at nursery was structured? What did they expect of you?

Oh, it was purely, first of all I remember you had to do loops before you learn ... and I thought this is barmy, doing all these loops, because you know, I could do loops very, very well indeed. [laughs] And I thought I want to get on to those letters, you know. I mean that was it really: teaching alphabet and arithmetic. I can't remember anything else really, you know, of interest. It was a very backward – nowadays we would call backward – nursery school insofar as you didn't have art lessons or anything like that, you purely had to learn to read and write. And then when I went to ... and I couldn't of course spell, which was, you know, murder, and that was the chief occupation so you were considered to be barmy. Well not barmy actually. And then when I went to Highclare we had all these wonderful subjects, which were a joy. And when I got to ... I was about eight or nine I suppose when I went – eight probably – I went to Highclare and they didn't worry about you not being able to spell. If you could – it was a very good school actually – if you could sort of say it or give you a dictionary and, you know, look it up. We did ... I mean that school then during the war divided and half went to the north of England to get out of the bombing, because Birmingham was quite a dangerous area, and I went up north to boarding school up there for ... well, until I left.

Before we get on to that stage, can you remember, was it a co-ed school or was it a single sex school?

[1:01:35]

The first little school was, yes.

And Highclare?

Girls only.

And did you have to wear a school uniform?

Oh very much so.

What was that?

We had a boater, which I loved. A kilt, navy kilt. Grey sweater with the colours, I think red and navy and gold. And, you know, the usual; white shirts. If you had ... the normal run of the school had poplin, cotton shirts I suppose, but if you were very posh you had silk shirts. They sold silk shirts at the school shop. And I never had silk shirts, which I thought would be wonderful, but mother thought it was a terrible extravagance and I know two of my friends who were only children who had silk shirts and I thought they were so lucky. [laughs]

And how did you get to school, how did you get to Highclare?

My father took us in the morning and I suppose bus in the evening.

What sort of car did your father have?

[pause] An Austin and a Standard and ... I can't remember. Perfectly ... family cars, you know. And of course [incomp]. We learnt to drive, yes, very early on actually.

Before we get on to that can you tell me a bit more about how the school day was organised? Can you remember arriving at school and when you went?

Yes, at Highclare we would be ... my father would drop us off at school and we would have classes, different classes all through the morning. I mean history, geography,

scripture, botany, reading, writing, French, German, Latin. And in the afternoon mostly it was games or sewing; we were taught to sew.

Which were your favourite subjects?

[1:04:33]

I loved botany and science, I loved it through my aunt. I loved scripture. I loved actually the New Testament, the stories. I loved history. I loved, I loved English. I was not so good at French but I liked the French mistress so I tolerated it. Latin, I dropped early on. German, I dropped early on because you could do science and I chose that rather. You had to do French, that was to get you through what ... it was School Certificate then.

Can you remember what books you read in English or what, well literature?

Well Shakespeare, all Shakespeare and ... Cranford. But mostly there was Shakespeare because of ... you had to do Shakespeare for School Certificate, you know, so ... I loved, I mean we loved it, we used to all be taken to Stratford, because we were near Stratford, every term to see a play. And we made The Roundhouse, I remember, and a whole, beautiful model of The Roundhouse and I made all the little Elizabethan men sitting around because I was good at that. So I think it was a very good school as far as teaching was concerned. Now it's got a wonderful reputation.

Were there any teachers that you particularly liked, can you remember their names and what they were like?

Kay Hudson, who taught English and French and stayed a friend for a long time after we left. Miss Morgan was the dance teacher – I took dancing, which I loved too. And she did a lot of 'Health and Beauty' it was called then. It's funny isn't it? You had to do all these movements and how to walk and all that sort of thing. It's hard to remember. I should be able to remember.

And were there any particular friends from that time? Did you have any particular girlfriends?

Yes. Elizabeth Lister who went all through Birmingham Art School with me too, and Audrey Thompson who became Fanny Carby when she went on the sort of theatre, performing. And Clare Pollock whose father had all the dogs, you know, we got our dogs. I think we were four of us mostly: Clare, Audrey, Elizabeth and myself, we were a sort of little gang of four really. And Elizabeth and I – well she went to live in America – but we, you know, we wrote every Christmas and whatnot. Went to see each other actually. I think mostly ... they're all dead, it's terrible isn't it? They're all dead.

What would you get up to in playtimes and lunchtimes?

Well there were mostly organised games. You played tennis, netball, hockey, which I didn't enjoy because it was such a rough game. There was a ... two girls were so tough on that hockey pitch, you daren't get near them. Their father was the Master of the Hunt [laughs] and they rode and they were great big beefy girls and I was terrified. Your shins would get cracked, you know. No, I didn't enjoy hockey. I liked tennis, I was never very wonderful at it. I think mostly we were sort of organised into games really.

And what was your attitude to your school work?

My attitude?

Were you conscientious?

Sorry?

Were you a conscientious student?

Yes. I was. I worked ... yes, I was. I had one, I remember one exam, I hadn't prepared at all for it and I was in such misery because I couldn't answer the questions. I thought I'm

never going to let this happen to me again. Because I really was in total misery and panic situation, you know, and I thought no, this is wrong, I'm never going to do this again. So I always prepared and I was conscientious, yes. I didn't like to fail, let's put it like that. And I was mostly near the top of the class, you know. There was one brilliant girl who was, you never beat, you know. Patricia Heaton. She became a private secretary to the Duchess of Kent and went back and married a Sutton Coldfield boy, which is funny after all that incredible exposure to the world.

What were your parents' attitude to your education? Was there much encouragement at home for you to perform well at school or were they interested?

Yes. Mother always sort of said oh, you'll never be – rather in a derogatory sense – she said, oh you'll never be as good as your sister, my sisters or whatnot. She said, I remember, Auntie Nellie – this was the lady who had the house and had us for the holiday – used to study all night with a wet cloth round her head to pass her exams. And I said, suddenly, she must have been pretty stupid to have to stay up all night to ... [laughs] So that was that. Well, she always used to sort of urge us by saying, 'You'll never do it', which puts you in a sort of tension, rather. I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it, you know. I think my sister gave up. She never could pass an exam at all; she would just go dead and panic and fail, she couldn't pass exams, which was a worry to my ... well my mother worried, I don't know about my father. Anyway, I was conscientious, I mean I didn't work excessively but I kept up a good average, you know.

And can you remember your sort of self-image at the time – at what point did it become important to you how you looked or you had some sort of autonomy over your appearance?

[1:12:11]

I had very bad self-esteem I think, physical self-esteem because Audrey was really very beautiful as a young girl. I mean she was sort of exceptionally beautiful and she was the sort of toast of all the sort of young men of Sutton, you know. I mean she had this very

blonde gold hair and she was sort of Marilyn Monroe sort of type, was rather sort of plump, and I was flat and didn't develop until I was ... much later. And I think I had bad self-esteem, I wanted to hide, I sort of didn't want to be noticed really. That's why I wore these dreadful clothes and wore bare feet and things that worried my mother to death. I think you became conscious of yourself, well about ... well not very conscious, one just was, you know. I mean I had hair in plaits and not worried about it. I don't think I was very conscious of the way I looked and I don't think it was very fashionable then. Young ladies started to look like twenty-one going ... you know, I mean when they're twelve, you know, that wasn't ... I mean we weren't encouraged to wear ... we used to smuggle, at boarding school we used to smuggle – well we did – lipstick in, you know. We'd have one lipstick between us, the five of us. But I wasn't very conscious of looks, no, not until I reached art school really.

What was your idea of a sort of treat or a luxury when you were that age? What were the things that ...

Treat or luxury?

Yeah, something you could get excited about.

At what age?

Well, adolescence I suppose.

It was wartime then remember, so there was no treats or luxuries going. Possibly your one bar of chocolate once a week, you know, that you could get at the tuck shop, that's all you had.

Were there any comics or magazines circulating?

When I was young I used to have the Mickey Mouse comic. But of course that ended fairly ... No, I had no magazines or what have you, no. But everything was very austere,

you know, you had the minimum everything, really. For a long time after the war too we were still rationed.

[1:14:55]

Can you remember the outbreak of war? Can you remember the declaration of war?

Yes.

Where were you?

I was at home and my father, we all switched on the wireless and my mother screamed, 'It's war, it's war', started rushing round and I got in a panic, and my father said, 'Look, calm down, calm down, calm down'. And we all ... yes, it was a terrible moment; we thought we'd be bombed straightaway. We put stuff all over our windows, you know, so they wouldn't break. And I mean the bombing didn't start till later. We thought it would start that night, you know, we were all rushing round putting mattresses under stairs and things, you know. And next ... we had a neighbour who had this son, we had a joint air raid shelter, you know, it was dug into the ground with a bombproof roof and when the sirens went we would all rush down. I remember being mortified because I still had curlers in and the boy next door would see me. [laughs] Because I mean our parents wouldn't allow us to linger and get ourselves ready, you had to get down there quickly. That's really why, you know, I went up north to school.

Can you remember, had there been much discussion through your childhood of the First World War?

Yes. My father was one of the Old Contemptibles, you know? He was in the first batch to go out, you know, and he joined up, his brother joined at eighteen and he joined at seventeen because he wanted to get away from home I think and his mother. And it was a terrible time, I remember, you know, the whole regiment was wiped out two or three times and my father used to, said they used to fight for dead bodies to put their feet on so they

wouldn't get frostbite. But my father was very badly frostbitten, his feet. I mean he was only a young boy. When I think of my grandson of that age, he's still a young kid, you know. And he crawled, I remember, they had to crawl three miles, he couldn't walk, to get back behind the lines. You know, they told them to all get back and he couldn't walk. And he was in hospital – I mean he told us all this – he was in hospital of course with his feet when he got back and they said well, we'll cut his feet off tomorrow, he'll have to cut his feet out tomorrow. And an old – well I don't know about an old nurse, but a motherly nurse – said, oh he's such a handsome young boy, leave them on for a day. And that night the blood came back, so he got his feet back. Must have been agony when the ... you know.

So how openly did he talk about his wartime experience?

He did talk, I mean that's what he told us. I don't know any more really. But I know, I mean that regiment was wiped out again and again, I mean he really was lucky to have got frostbite, you know, otherwise he would have been wiped out as well.

Can you remember his attitude to the run-up of the Second World War?

[1:18:44]

I think ... I don't remember, no, but I think everybody felt it was inevitable or that Hitler was just across the Channel, you know. I mean we were all ... he bought us all bicycles. Well we had bikes before but he bought a new one for my mother and one for himself so that we could cycle. No petrol, remember, but there'd be no petrol, we could cycle up north to Scotland as the Germans advanced. I mean that's what we thought would happen really. I mean he was just ... if he'd invaded actually when he could have done, he would have wiped us out, you know, really.

Can you remember other preparations for the war – what happened at school?

Well Highclare went up north, started a school up in Staffordshire, at Maer Hall for those children who wanted to board, because it was quite dangerous at home. So I wanted to go because all my friends were going, so I went up there and was a boarder there.

And where was your sister at this time?

My sister stayed and she joined up, you know, she joined the ATS without telling my parents. She wanted to go to. But before that they wanted to send her to a finishing school in Belgium, which was all worked out. Because she couldn't pass exams and they wanted her to have some sort of education and learn a different language or something, you know, but of course she couldn't go, so that was cancelled. I don't know what she did, she ... oh, she went to a secretarial school and said, well my mother said, well you know, that's all you can do really. She's not a fool, my sister, she's very clever, she just panicked in exams. So she went and became ... well she learnt, I know what my father ... he wanted her to do that and be his secretary so that she'd be safe with him. And she thought that would be the last thing on earth she wanted to do. So she did the secretarial course and joined up, joined the ATS.

Can you remember your parents' reactions to her ...

Horror. Misery. My mother was just prostrate, she felt she would be killed and, you know, and she, I mean she was very brave, Audrey, really. She became ... in Montgomery's headquarters because they vetted all these girls to see if they'd talk and my sister, like my father, never talked about, she never gossiped about anything. She could keep a secret, you know, and they sort of vetted them and she was put in as one of the ones that would be reliable.

So how old was she?

Seventeen I suppose when she joined up. Probably just seventeen.

And so what was it like for you going up north?

[1:22:23]

Lovely. I loved boarding school.

What did you love about it?

I think independence. Yes, independence, having to think for yourself and not ever be told what to do or what not to do and having to rely on yourself, never being helped with your homework, having to do it yourself, you know. I thoroughly enjoyed it, I loved it.

What were your parents' reactions to your decision to go up north with the school?

Well I think they probably thought it would be safer. I mean, you know, mother bowed to the inevitable really I think. I mean she knew that ... mother always said, I always worry about Audrey and I never worry about you. And it's a terrible thing to say, but I almost can say it to my children too. I never worry about Tim, but I worry about Paul. It's an awful thing to say, but you know if one is like you, you know how they're going to behave, you know. So that mother knew that I would be sensible and she never knew if Audrey would come home with an illegitimate child or ... [laughs] So she didn't worry, no, and I mean they used to come and see me most weekends, you know.

What did you do when they came up to see you?

Oh we'd go and have a picnic I suppose and take another girl out to lunch perhaps if they hadn't got a parent there and we'd show them what we'd done round the school.

Because how old were you when you went to boarding school?

Fourteen I suppose when ... or thirteen when the war broke out to start with. And then I went on of course, it was still on when I went ... you know. But I think it was all sort of difficult years. Well no, they were rather exciting years, war really.

In what way?

Because you were down to basics and you had to make do. You know, the food was a problem, you know, you had an egg a week, a slab of cheese, so I mean each meal was an invention, you know. And everything was sort of basic and I think people were a lot happier really. They ate a lot better because there were so many more vegetables in the diet. I mean one day a week would always be a vegetable day; you'd have just a vegetable pie or whatever, and I think we were all a lot healthier probably.

How was boarding school organised – do you remember your dormitory?

Yes, I think we were three or four in a dormitory I think, as far as I remember. I don't remember it terribly well. I know we had to go down in the cellars and all lie on straw mattresses if there was an air raid. And I know Clare used to have terrible asthma and she always used to get terrible asthma down in the cellar and I used to give her my pillow to prop her up. I think three or four in a dormitory probably. Or, yes, I can't remember terribly clearly actually.

And what were your favourite subjects at that stage?

Well always anything ... botany, science I loved. I loved English.

Was there an art course?

Not as such. You did art, but I mean there wasn't ... sort of probably the mistress that was in charge would do it, you know, so that she'd say, oh do a picnic, do a wood, do a something, you know. It was not a serious art thing at all. We had elocution and the drama lessons were the most sort of exciting thing. So we always had to do the Leamington Festivals and the Cheltenham Festivals, we were always ... we would go in for them, you know, so you had to do your poem or your play or whatever.

Can you remember any particular performances that you gave?

I remember doing *Little Women* and I was Beth, which I remember that very vividly – we won. [laughs] We had a very good record of winning. It was very, it was a very sort of artistic school I think. They tried to develop you as sort of fledgling young ladies for the world, you know. It's co-ed now, I went and opened it about two years ago, three or four years ago, they asked me to go and do the prize-giving, which was rather nice, to see it now, all co-ed.

Can you remember going home for Christmastime for example? What was Christmas like in your family?

[1:28:09]

Big Christmas trees. Lots of food and my father's mother always came for Christmas and she was a bit of a damper. And mostly I think of Christmas as sort of food, food, food. I remember sort of great big boxes of tangerines and lots and lots of ... I mean we always, what's incredible, we always had a big turkey and a big joint of pork for Christmas lunch, which seems excessive now doesn't it? That was of course before the war. During the war you had half a turkey. You would have to order it and you only had half. We also had a pig, a farm would keep a pig for us so we kept all our potato peelings and lettuce leaves and everything would go for the pig. And then the poor pig would get slaughtered so then we would get some meat that way. Christmas was lots of presents, stockings always.

Can you remember any presents that you particularly enjoyed?

No I can't actually.

What sorts of things would you get for presents?

We didn't have huge presents. I mean we weren't ... those would probably come for birthdays, but I mean Christmas presents all went into a sort of a large sock or what have

you and there'd be something that you wanted; pencils or new scarf or gloves. Not huge presents. Because really there was too much else going on at Christmas really. And we would have, often we'd go to my other aunt, Auntie Clare, the sister above my mother, for Christmas, or just after Christmas and there'd be oh, party games, you know, we'd all have ridiculous party games.

And when you were at Highclare, at boarding school, when you used to come down for the holidays, what was that like, coming home? Did you enjoy it?

Yes. I enjoyed my childhood actually, it was very free. I mean we would all ... you see, girls that went up to the boarding school would all come back to Sutton Coldfield and we'd all meet up and take the dogs in the park and do what we wanted to do actually, we were never told what to do. I mean we weren't ... my mother never organised us unless we went swimming with her or anything. But mostly you had your friends around and we met every day and I would go and stay with friends; Elizabeth Lister or, you know, we'd go and stay in each other's houses, you know, it was very free and I don't ever remember being constrained as a child, you could do what you liked really. Nobody was worried about being killed or lost or ... in those days. If you didn't come home, nobody worried very much.

And what about cinema, did cinema play a part or ...

[1:32:02]

Oh I loved the cinema, yes, yes.

Where did you go to the cinema?

There is an Odeon in Sutton and oh ... I don't know what the other one was called. Everyman, I think it was called, but I'm not sure I'm not muddling that with Hampstead.

Are there any excursions to the cinema that you remember – were there any particular movies or films? What did you call it, pictures, the pictures?

Go to the pictures, yes.

Were there any pictures that you remember?

Oh gosh. Not really. Not really, no. I mean the old movie stars: Claudette Colbert and ... We didn't go excessively to the ... I mean it wasn't something I did a lot, you know, it wasn't every week, you know. It was when it was probably very wet or raining and nobody knew quite what to do, you know, but mostly we used to go of course once a year my father would take us to the pantomime. We used to go to the circus, which I never liked. I was frightened of the clowns, they used to sort of jump over into the audience and I didn't like them. They were mostly dwarfs, you know, poor creatures. And I hated the animals, of course there were animals being trained then that they don't do now so much. No, I didn't like the circus, I never liked the circus very much.

And as you moved into sort of adolescence and the early teenage years, how did your interests develop, what were your sort of main preoccupations then?

[0:33:58]

In my teenage years, well I'd be at art school then.

How old were you when you went to art school?

How – sorry?

How old were you when you went to art school?

I suppose seventeen. We didn't have a gap year then.

So when did you have to take the certificate at school?

When I was, at the end of school, you know, to get to Birmingham Art School you had to have five I think, which would be like A levels now, you know. So I got seven I think. That was easy really, it wasn't a ... that never was a worry, you know.

And were you still up north at that point, were you still at boarding school or had you returned?

I was ... the end of my schooling was up north and then I returned and spent a summer I suppose at home, and then I went to Birmingham Art School.

And how did you decide to go to art school?

Oh, I think my mother pretty well decided for me. I mean it was either that or science. My science teacher very much wanted me to go to Birmingham University and do science because I was very good at it, and mother said no, if you become a doctor you'll get all different diseases and no, no, no, no, you know, it's a terrible thing. No, art. I mean her father had said, this is the one, so that she felt that was written in stone.

So how much had you been encouraged to draw and paint as a little girl?

Oh all the time, all the time. I mean when you're ill, we always had sort of big sketchbooks and oh yes, all the time. It was like a language, art was a language for all of us really. Not my sister so much, although she's good, but for me and my mother and father really, it was just something that was ... like my grandchildren now, there's always paper and pencils and whatnot.

And through your school career, was there much time to be creative or to ...

It was a very creative school, yes, it was very, very creative. And I think they ... I mean we didn't have art classes but we made The Roundhouse and we modelled little people and

we did a lot of things like making garments, I remember making a skirt at school and a lot, a lot of plays, a lot of acting. We were encouraged to be artistic, let's put it like that, which was actually not always wise for girls that would have been much better, you know, doing other things. They had full sort of ... I mean both Clare and Audrey, my two friends, went in for theatre and they're not very good, you know, and they didn't get very far. So it would probably have been better if they'd done something quite different.

So what sort of preparations were necessary to go to Birmingham Art School, was ...

[1:37:25]

You had to get five, what would be called A levels now, to get there. And then that was it. I mean you had to make ... no, I don't think you even had to do a portfolio as far as I can remember. Perhaps you did. I don't remember that. But anyway, if you paid your fees you could go pretty well if you had the qualifications, you know. I mean I got a distinction in art so that would have qualified me to a certain extent, you know.

What did you like to draw or paint at that time?

We were told what to draw and paint at that time.

What were you instructed?

Well I mean the life room.

Was that at school, or was that at art ...

Art school.

At art school.

We had to do a bit of everything to start with to see what we would like to do. So you had to do a bit of metalwork, a bit of weaving and fabric design, a bit of life drawing, a bit of architectural drawing, a bit of pottery. You had to do it all, for a year and then you decided what you wanted to do and because there's an enormous metalwork, silversmith in Birmingham you know, there was then, it was a great big quarter of metalwork, silversmithing, you know, making jewellery and ... that a lot of people went in for that. I know quite a few people went into that for design and whatnot.

What was ... can you remember your sort of first impressions of Birmingham Art School, what was it like?

Oh I loved it. It was a lovely old – Margaret Street, it's still there – it's a lovely old art school and all the corridors and you all had a little cubby, you know, a little locker in your ... And we were, the life room was right at the top of two flights of stairs. It's a lovely old building and I loved it. Everything about it I loved.

And so how did you get into Birmingham every day?

Bus.

How far was it?

About an hour out of Birmingham. Sutton Coldfield was about an hour on the bus, which I mean I used to go ... at Ashfurlong Corner the bus would come – there were very few buses then you know and there was only one every hour later on – so I would go into Birmingham at eight o'clock I used to catch the bus and be there at nine and come home by bus. There were no trains that I could catch that would take me ... no, it was all bus.

And so can you remember who ... were you organised into a class group or a year group?

All the new people had to do a whole year of everything, all the new lot. And ...

And did you make friends with any of those first years?

Well Elizabeth Lister went with me. She was very good at art and we were both together so we sort of clung together, you know. But you soon made very good friends in the year you ... I mean after that year you had to choose whether to do fine art, silversmith, fabric, pottery, whatever. You know, you had to be sorted out and of course I chose painting. And then you made very good friends of – Eileen Cashmore who I still write to and talk to, and Elizabeth Horeg – no, Vera Horeg who was a refugee from ... she was a Jewish girl who'd been sent over, and Hans Schwartz who was a refugee who did a lot in London at the Camden Arts Centre. Who else?

What was the balance of, or the sort of ratio of male to female students?

There was one boy in our year, Alistair Grant – well he was Duncan Grant then but he changed it to Alistair Grant, who took over the printing at the Royal College for years. Because everybody was called up, you see, at seventeen. All the boys had to go.

So what was the atmosphere of Birmingham in the war? Can you remember, were there precautions you had to take or ... was it very affected by the war?

[1:42:28]

Well there were all precautions, I mean all the time the sirens would go, you know. But mostly at night actually. I remember coming out of the dugout and the whole sky was red and my father said, 'Coventry's got it'. You know, you could ... and of course Coventry was razed to the ground. But you could just see the whole sky was blazing, and that was a long way off actually. But ...

What sort of awareness did you have of what was really going on in the war?

Well all the time, I mean news, you stuck to the news, you rushed for the paper, you know. You ... and I mean the boy next door was killed. A lot of boys didn't come back, you know, which was frightful.

Was any of your family involved, any of your cousins or ...?

No. Because my ... Pat's brother Jim, he'd had rheumatic fever twice and it had enlarged his heart so he was exempt. And no, I don't know of any others. Daddy became, I know he instructed Air Force, he had to instruct them in his spare time in maths or whatever. Everybody did a bit, you know, everybody was doing something. We had to do maps at Birmingham Art School, for a day a week. We had to paint maps, you know, fill in maps of different parts of Birmingham I suppose, I don't know, but we had to do that. I mean everybody did something other than their job really.

Was your mother involved in any way?

She did a lot of sort of helping older people and whatnot, you know.

And what about Audrey, what stories did Audrey tell you about her time in the ATS?

Very little. Again, Audrey doesn't talk. She was very ... her nerves were in a shocking state when she came home one day and they'd been boated back from Dunkirk or somewhere I suppose and she'd seen all the bodies floating on the water and she was really, her nerves were in an awful state. But she didn't talk about what she'd done, no. She's like my father, you know, very much. She keeps it to herself, you know. I mean my mother would have been screaming it all over the place and so would I probably. [laughs]

And so what about the staff at Birmingham Art School – can you remember who the sort of important tutors were at that time when you first went?

[1:45:54]

Well there was Fleetwood-Walker, who was also teaching at the RA Schools. There was Mr Stubbington who taught me an incredible amount about colour. He really was a very ... taught me more than any other masters. There was Harold Smith who did mural decoration, we did mural ... who was good but Stubbington was the sensitive one that I learned from. You know, he'd make you look at a white wall and see that in the sun it would be pink and what colours to mix to make that and in the cool colours, you know, how it would be cool in a certain area. And in the flesh of the body, you know, the cast shadow would be cooler and that's, you know, it taught me so much about that sort of colour, how to mix colours, how to just look at colour really. You know, he was the biggest influence of my life I think really. I mean at the Academy, they taught you very little. You had to just do your own thing mostly. I think it's a bit like that nowadays at art school.

Who was the head of Birmingham Art School when you were there – can you remember?

Just let me think. [pause] Well I know it was, Rushbury was ... he took over the head of it, Rushbury, there was Fleetwood-Walker from Birmingham and there was Genge and Dring, and that's about all I remember actually.

And what were the sort of relations between students and tutors like at that time when you first sort of went?

What, at Birmingham or ...

Birmingham.

Good, we got to know them very well. Stubbington liked me, I think. Appreciated that I liked what I was learning from him really, you know, and we would talk quite intimately to them.

How did you address them, what did you call them?

Mr Stubbington, and we were called Girling, Lister – just by our surnames, Girling and ...

And did you have a particular studio where you worked or did you move?

No, we all worked together. The life room, you all had your easels together. Which was wonderful actually because you learnt a lot from each other, you know. Especially at the Academy where we were all more mature, you learnt a lot from each other.

How soon at Birmingham were you allowed to draw from life?

Straightaway. I mean the first year you had to do some life drawing.

And can you describe to me how a life class was organised. Where would you get your materials?

[1:49:14]

Well easels were supplied and chairs to sit on and all that sort of stuff, but in the hall there was a shop that you could buy paints, boards, everything you needed actually. You had to buy most of your materials, except the heavy stuff like easels and benches to sit on and that sort of thing. So I painted a lot in student's oil colour, which have fallen apart really, you know, they were poor. It's a pity really, but you know, I thought at the time if your red was half the price, you bought it. It meant you had another sandwich for lunch. [laughs]

So how many students roughly would there be in a life class at Birmingham?

About eight or nine. Probably about eight, eight-ish.

And who would be taking the life class?

Stubbington and Fleetwood-Walker.

And how would you go about tackling that piece of blank paper? Was there a particular way that you were taught to draw?

Well first of all you got the model to do something that you liked. I mean she'd move about and fall about until you'd say, oh that's lovely, you know, and all the class would agree or the master would agree. And then you would, mostly with pencil, you were drawing with a pencil rather than charcoal. I think most people had to draw with pencil because the drawing exam, you had to be in pencil, you know, so you had to learn how to use a pencil really. And you had to measure the model, you know, sort of sight-wise and you were taught in a very conventional way, which was not a bad thing, you learned to draw. And you'd do that, most days you'd be drawing or you would be doing ... no, the first year you drew solely – draw, draw, draw, draw.

And what would Stubbington be doing when you were drawing, would he circulate the class or would he ...

Yes, you know, sort of the head's, you've got the head too big, you know. Look at that leg, it's not foreshortened, you know, and then he'd draw a little bit perhaps on your ... to show you. And mostly proportion, shading perhaps, and that was it.

And how easy or difficult did you find it, learning to draw?

Well it was very difficult. You made an awful mess to start with, you know, and you were very dissatisfied with what you were drawing and you'd get the head too big, you know, or the feet wrong. I mean it wasn't a worry, you know, you'd just try again, you know. And they slowly weeded you out, if they were, people were no good at the drawing you'd be shifted away, you know. And a lot of people dropped out. It's surprising how many, I mean two girls went and joined up, you know, joined the Navy. But I mean slowly you get weeded out so that in the end for the degree course there were only two of us left: Eileen Cashmore and me.

What was the first year at Birmingham called? Was there a name for that preliminary year?

No, I ... I'm sure there was but I can't remember what it was.

And what did you expect at that time, what were your own expectations of yourself? How did you ...

To learn to paint. And I mean obviously you got a degree, teaching degree at the end of it so you could teach, you know, which my parents insisted on because they thought I would marry a legless artist [laughs] and have to keep him. My mother had awful experiences you see of her brother, people struggling in art really. So that was obligatory, I had to do the teaching ... well I had to go right through and get the degree and then you could teach, you know.

And in that first year were there any other subjects that you particularly enjoyed other than you obviously ...

Oh it was all a lark, I mean you enjoyed pottery, you know, sloshing clay around, you know, that was fun. You didn't take it seriously, I didn't anyway, and the pottery master was a lark too, he flirted with all the girls. [laughs] So it was quite fun. Weaving I didn't enjoy; it was fiddly and messy, I didn't enjoy that. Architectural drawing I enjoyed because, you know, you had to bring it all through the picture plane to make the elevations and things. I enjoyed that, that was fun, I liked it. What else? Silversmithing I loathed, beating bits of tin, you know, silver, you know, around a model, I hated that. And that's about all actually.

And have you kept examples of your work from that time?

Yes, I've got a very thick [laughs], a bowl and I think that's about all actually. I never finished my silversmithing, I don't know what happened to it, I never finished it. Probably went back and been re-melted I should think.

How soon did you decide in that first year that you would like to specialise in painting?

[1:55:45]

Oh I knew from the moment I walked through the door I wanted to be a painter. You know, I wanted to be like grandpa.

What was your sort of awareness of other artists and painters – had you visited galleries much as a child or museums?

Oh very much so, because all my family's paintings were in the Birmingham City Art Gallery so we used to be taken there. And of course one was really bombarded by the Pre-Raphaelites in the Birmingham Art Gallery because they had an enormous collection of them.

What did you think of their work?

Oh I thought it was wonderful. You know, when you're young you think it's, gosh, you know, marvellous.

Who would take you to the museums?

Mother would take us. And the Royal Society of British Artists always had shows and we would go there. Art was mother impregnating us with art, you know, she really loved it.

Were there any books at home that you remember, art books?

No, there was just the huge catalogue of the Birmingham Art Gallery which we looked at. No, those encyclopaedias, you know, we had. No, there weren't many art books, no. It was just round the walls you saw the art, you know. And, you know, you saw my ... self-

portraits, portraits of granny, portraits of, you know, all portraits and different landscapes and whatnot. I've got quite a few and they were going to do a show of the Harvey family and I got them all out and showed the man from Birmingham Art Gallery but he didn't follow it up, I don't know what happened to him. Pity really. Perhaps it'll still happen. Anyway.

[End of track 3]

[Track 4]

We're resuming after lunch and I wonder if we can pick up with Birmingham Art School. You were talking, you described the life class and I wonder how soon were you encouraged to use paints or allowed to use paints?

After the first year you mean? Well, Mr Stubbington just wrote my name down in the – without asking me – in the fine art. So I wanted to do it but I was surprised that he picked me anyway. So, well I wanted to paint obviously, you know, I didn't want to do other things, but a lot of people did go into this metalwork, which was of course the big thing in Birmingham. I think both my aunt and my uncle had learnt to do metalwork from their notes at Birmingham Art School. It was like learning to make wine in California, you know, it was the thing they did in Birmingham, big metalwork.

Were there exams at the end of the first year or ...

Yes. No, not the end of the first year. There was exams after the drawing year and before you went into the painting year and my, one of our best friends, Vera Horeg failed by one mark, her drawing, and she passed the next year by one mark and yet she was very good I thought.

So how did they organise exams – can you describe the procedure?

You had to go into an exam ... you took the exam in the art school, but you were segregated in your own spot, I mean you were all in one room, but you were given the pose, the model, there was a female and a male model and we'd done the male model all through the year so I very much wanted the male model and a friend of mine wanted the female model and she got the female, luckily, and I got the male. And you just had a time limit, you had to draw for a day, I don't know how long, I can't remember, and then you were judged on that drawing. I passed, luckily, and went into the painting.

[0:02:38]

Were you encouraged to keep sketchbooks at that time?

Oh yes, very much so. We used to go down into the Bullring, which was then all the big market stalls, and sketch. Yes, you were encouraged to. Everywhere you went you drew, you sketched, which was great actually.

Do you still have those sketchbooks?

Not all of them, no, but I mean some.

And when you look back at your work from that period, that very formative time, what do you see now?

When I was learning to draw? Well I think I was jolly good actually, when I look back on those drawings, some of them. You know, I don't think I could do them now. And I think some of the drawings I did of the dogs were very good actually. I think a year of solid drawing, you either can draw or you can't at the end of it and you might as well give up if you can't. But they were ... no, I think I'm pleased with them, you know, I'm happy with them. There's some of them in a book that Hannah Westley's done of me and I think some of the drawings are good, you know, when I look back.

And so how was your second year organised at Birmingham?

[0:04:13]

Well you went into the painting. Oh, the drawing you mean? Painting, then you went into painting. If you wanted to be a painter you went then into the life room.

And was the painting department separate from the other departments? How was the ...

Oh yes, yes. I mean for metalwork I think you went out of the building, went into ... a lot of things were happening at Bourneville too, which was part of the art school. Of course pottery was in another part. No, everything was separate and mostly it was right up in the life room in the top of the building. And then we had to do things like mural painting with Harold Smith, which I think we sort of were given – well we were given – Stanley Spencer as our great example and Diego Rivera. Then we were really left to our own devices actually.

Can you remember any of the works you produced, any of the murals?

Yes, I can.

Can you describe them?

Because it was ... I was told it was the best at that point, so you remember it. But I did a whole, a kind of, well idyllic scene of girls and I did all my friends lying around with trees and whatnot, like *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* [laughs], and that was the mural. And I was told, well it was held up as a very good example. But I think, I know for the exam we had to have figures in procession, which was a horrible subject actually, for the exam, and I did Crufts, a dog show, with everybody walking round with a dog, because I'd been drawing dogs so much at home, sketching them, that's what I did. Well I passed, but I don't think it was very wonderful.

Was it a painting?

Yes. A painting. It was the mural painting at that point, that was ...

And where did you paint your mural?

Oh just on huge paper, you know. Or big canvasses. Not on walls. We did paint a mural that year I think in a restaurant nearby, but it was pretty grotty I think, pretty awful.

[laughs]

Who were the models or the artists that you were encouraged to look at – you've mentioned Stanley Spencer and Diego Rivera, were there others who were sort of lauded and held up as great examples?

We had ... Augustus John was sort of pinned round the room I remember, but Stubbington felt he was a bit slick, and I think he was absolutely right. Who else did we look at? The old masters: Velázquez, Rembrandt. But with ... and a lot of wonderful draughtsmen like Holbein. I mean we were taught to look at history really rather than ... I mean in the mural class it was very modern to look at Stanley Spencer which is funny these days. I think we didn't ... I mean we weren't taught to look ... of course we had a history of art lectures.

Who gave the lectures?

Do you know, I can't for the life of me remember. I can't remember his name. He was ... I mean he took us all through the history of art, in a very monotonous way actually with slides, but you learnt by just looking at the slides, you know, but he droned on, you know. He'd been giving this same lecture for sort of hundreds of years and he just read it on and on. But I mean you did learn a lot about the history of art and I think I wrote my thesis on religion and art, you know, the role religion has played in art, which has been tremendous really up till recently, you know.

Can you remember, you described beautifully earlier, learning to draw and sizing up the model, can you remember the early painting classes – how did you go about learning the materials?

[0:09:18]

Well, with difficulty actually. You painted on sort of board to start with because you didn't want to wreck canvasses, you know. I'm going to sneeze.

Bless you. [End of track 4]

[Track 5]

What was the question, sorry?

Learning to paint, you said you painted on board.

Well you painted, mostly to start with you had a still life and you were taught how to put the paint on with a palette knife or a brush, really mixing your colours and really what, just learning what the paint did, you know. It wasn't ... there were no masterpieces, you just scrapped them or painted over them and scraped them. And you were slowly, in the life room it was much harder because painting flesh is much more difficult than painting a blue pot, say. And I think we were taught to glaze, you know, how you do all the shadows in a cool colour and then you glaze the warm colour, the flesh colour over it so that the shadows took on the warmth of the glaze as well as the cool under part, which was very helpful. We were taught generally the craft of your material, which is not taught now, you know, and it was invaluable actually. It was boring at times but I don't regret it at all because, you know, it's become your language really. It's like trying to learn music without knowing the notes and they're trying to teach it nowadays, I think. I mean my son didn't learn how to put paint on at all. He's learnt what he, you know, I've told him what I think really. So it was a very ... well academic, not so much academic but you learnt your craft and you did it day after day after day till in the end you knew it, you know.

So how much time would you spend in the life room and how much time would you spend painting other things?

Well I mean, say you did four days a week in the life room and a day a week in the ... mostly it was in the life room and then you did your mural, whatever, for one day a week and that was it. I mean it was five days and that's what you did.

And was your primary teacher still Mr Stubbington at this time?

Yes, Harold Smith was the mural, Holden and Fleetwood-Walker, those were the three main teachers of the painting.

And were their teaching practices ...

And there were other teachers doing drawing in the evening, young teacher, I've forgotten his name.

And were their teaching practices very different? You described how Stubbington would...

I think ... yes, very different.

Can you tell me a bit more?

Well I mean Stubbington was totally into using your eyes, analysing what you saw, never taking any colour for granted, you know. There's always something in the colour. Harold Smith for mural was into design, using a surface, a flat surface, not intruding into the space so much, you know, so that it was more of a pattern. Didn't teach you how to paint at all. Fleetwood-Walker didn't do very much teaching really, he didn't ... I mean he'd say that's too red, you know, you've got too much pink there, or the legs are too long or something like that, but he didn't actually make you look and think as Stubbington made me look and think. I hope he isn't dead now, he probably is. He wasn't very young then. That's about it really.

How much interaction was there between the painting students and the students of other disciplines?

[0:04:20]

Very little. Very, very little. Mostly the painters kept to the painters. The architect – there was a big architectural school and the ... because there were very few girls in the

architectural school, they were mostly men, they used to come a lot to the life classes to try and pick up the girls really. And I think you, yes we got to know a few. I had a boyfriend who was an architect, for a while.

What was his name?

Richard Wilmot. It wasn't a very serious, I didn't really like him very much but he persisted.

Because what had been your parents' attitude to boys and had you had much to do with boys?

Not a lot, I was terribly shy. My sister had masses to do with boys, there were sort of rivers of them, you know. My attitude was one of, perfectly healthy attitude I think, my parents. I think my mother was worried that I didn't have a boyfriend and I didn't go out in the evening, but you know, when I came back from the art school, and we always did an evening class as well, it used to be about eight o'clock, it was quite late, you know, and I was tired. You know, you'd been standing all day, you'd been ... But I didn't really have too many boyfriends till I was sort of twenty, you know, and then I started to get boyfriends. But I was a very slow developer I think.

And you talked a little bit earlier, but how was your sort of self-image developing at this time, how did you ...

[0:06:17]

I think I began to feel more happy with myself, you know. I mean when you say what are your boys ... we were working with, Hans Schwartz was very keen on me apparently, I didn't really, he told me later after we'd grown up. But I mean, you know, there were sort of, you were mingling with boys all the time so it was just sort of ... we all went out to coffee together, you know, and you'd go and be together all the time so it wasn't in a monastic situation at all.

Can you give me a self-portrait of you at that time?

There's one in my book - have you seen it?

I've seen it, but can you describe it for the machine? Can you ... how ...

Well to start with, which is not, we did a nude, we had to do a nude in the holiday. Well I did a nude of myself because where else would I get a nude? So I did a nude of myself – and I've still got it actually – that was a self-portrait, a very ... perhaps a bit too Fleetwoody-Walkery. I don't know if you know his work, but it was rather smooth and I think, you know ... But I know it was put in the room, a small room in a corridor, all the paintings for that year and I know all the architects heard and came and saw it. [laughs] I nearly died when I heard. [laughs] So well, you drew yourself all the time because there's no-one else around, you know. I mean I'd draw my sister and I'd draw my mother and my father wasn't there really while I could draw him, but you drew all the time. You tried to grab people to draw and ...

Where did you draw at home, where did you paint?

At home. In my bedroom. Yes, in my bedroom. Well out of the way of everybody, you know. I mean my mum was very good, she let us paint in different rooms and, you know, as long as we put paper down or didn't splash everything with paint. With oil paint you're more contained than acrylic, you know. No, she was a wonderful mother, she let us do almost ... she was very free, she let us do what we liked really, very much so. And really encouraging. She was always there with a sort of, a nice meal when we'd, you know, we needed it. No, she was ...

And what did you, how did you dress at that time at art school?

Well, I mean artistically is the only word one can think of. I mean I was very fond of full skirts and sandals and whatever I could get on top. I was very slim then so things worked

for me because I didn't really put on weight till I had my first child. I was very, very thin. Not thin, but in these days you'd be right, but in those days you were considered rather thin. Where I sort of developed my bust quite adequately. I think, you know, sort of, you know, you tried to look artistic, you know, you sort of had flowing locks which are fashionable now.

Well what was your model for artistic, who were the people that the art students sort of aspired to or looked up to?

I don't think we knew. I think we just wore what we liked, you know, and borrowed each other's clothes perhaps and ... I don't think we were so conscious about dress as people are today. Again, it was austerity, you know. But I would ask my mother, could I alter this, would you make me a full skirt, and she would do it. You know, she was wonderful at sewing, she could make anything, you know, which was part of her creativity really. So I'd borrow some of my sister's clothes, probably. I mean we tried to look artistic. Doleria ... Doleria?

Dorelia.

Whatever. Yeah, Dor ... in Augustus John's painting. So that was sort of the image you'd like to create if you could, but with a limited clothing coupon, wasn't easy.

Were there trips to London to see galleries?

Yes, every year we had a trip to London and one of my very good friends who I still keep in touch with wasn't allowed to go. She was an only child but they thought it was too dangerous in case there was bombing, you know. But we came every year to see the Academy and any show that was going, so that was the big trip of the year, yes.

Can you remember seeing any particular works or any particular shows?

[0:11:31]

Not then. It was not until I came to London that I became more conscious. One was almost more excited about being in London, you know. And I mean obviously the Academy was the big draw then because Fleetwood-Walker would always be showing in it and he would tell us what to look at. But I don't remember a single museum or ... no, I don't actually. Not until I got to the Academy.

And up to this point had you ever had the opportunity to travel abroad?

No, never. No. It wasn't ... oh, we tried to get to France, the family. My mother hated going abroad, she thought everything, every disease you could pick up would be ... the moment she put a foot on French soil. [laughs] And you know, I mean my aunt went abroad, they all went abroad, and she picked up some terrible disease which are in her notes. We started to go to France and the boat went straight into the pier and crashed and my sister nearly went overboard, she was sitting on the rail posing, you know, in her way and she nearly fell over. And that was the end of the trip abroad and mother said, never again, never. So we didn't go abroad very much, no. And then of course as things got ... the war started to come towards, you know, then of course nothing would go, nothing would happen.

I wondered if the sort of reputation of Paris as a centre for great artistic activity had sort of filtered through at that stage when you were at Birmingham. Were there French artists of interest then or did that come later?

No, not to my knowledge. I mean, you know, there was Cezanne, I mean the older artists, yes, one was looking at but ... My aunt went to Paris but we ... the artists we were looking at were English really. Camden Town artists I thought were wonderful, I thought I must get to London. Where is this Camden Town, I must get there, you know. [laughs] There used to be these little Penguin books that came out on different artists which we used to collect, and I really, those were well, the artists I looked at really, not modern French artists. I don't know who would be painting then. I mean Picasso was alive of

course, but I wasn't really conscious of it. We weren't allowed to look at them – but I say we weren't allowed – we weren't encouraged to look at them, nobody told us about them and unless you were told about things you didn't know.

Were there any art journals or periodicals that circulated at that stage?

No, only these Penguin books that were very cheap little paper versions of different ... like the Camden group, or Stanley Spencer maybe, probably a Nicholson. But no, there weren't many periodicals at all. Or there may have been but we weren't conscious of them.

You've mentioned your aunt and uncle's art practice – can you tell me a little bit more about them? What was your uncle's name?

[0:15:25]

Herbert Johnson Harvey I think.

Did you see much of him?

I never saw him, he died before I was ... probably just after I was born, but I never saw him.

And your aunt?

He lived in London you see. And my aunt, yes we saw quite a bit of her.

What was her name?

Hilda Mary Harvey I think. Hilda Harvey of course. She had one son who is now ... my sister hears quite a bit of, he's of course an elderly man now. She didn't marry till she was quite late, she didn't have the child till she was forty-one, but she'd been quite a girl I

think, she'd been around the world a lot with, well different, dare I say, men. She was quite a girl. And they lived, in the end she bought a chapel in Cornwall after the war and it had a studio and living quarters. It was lovely actually.

And what did you think at that stage in your life of the work, the artwork that she produced and the artwork that your uncle had produced? What did you think of it?

I thought my uncle was a far better artist. I mean I thought her work was hard.

Why?

But now I think it was probably, she was going into modernism before my uncle. At the Birmingham Art Gallery they wanted to put a show on of grandpa and aunt and uncle, but they mostly wanted Hilda Harvey. So now it must have more resonance for the public today, her work. But they're rather brilliant colours and rather hard I thought. But then I think I was used to the more sort of painterly painting of my uncle really. But they're all very good painters.

How much did their sort of reputation sort of impinge on your time at Birmingham Art School?

I wouldn't say I was a Harvey, but when somebody let it out in the end, they all went mad because apparently ... Oh no, what let it out was that Fleetwood-Walker said ... we'd visited this wonderful painter, this woman in Cornwall, he'd visited her, and he said they were all laughing because ... was it Rushbury or ... because she said, 'I'm so glad, I've just tidied ...' 'I'm so glad you've come now, I've just tidied the studio', and they said it was chaos. [laughs] And somebody said, 'But it's Sheila's aunt'. And everybody stopped and sort of ... then it was let out, you know, and so all the family history and Stubbington had worked with my uncle and ... they were very well known in Birmingham actually. But, you know, England was much more insular then. You know, the Midlands were probably the Midlands, Norfolk was probably, you know, different parts had different art groups. Now it's become so open. I mean Liverpool's a step away and everything really.

But they did have a very good reputation in Birmingham, but that's why I didn't want to say I was a Harvey because I thought it would, you know, I'd like to keep it private and do my own success or failure as it came.

And so how soon were you developing a sort of personal idiom or style? When you look back at those works now do you think they're very academic studies or are they recognisably Sheila's, do you see ...?

[0:19:53]

I think they're recognisable as me. I don't think you can alter yourself. I mean what you paint is you, you know. I mean obviously what I do has changed enormously but what, how it was done has developed, hopefully, but I still think you're you, whatever you do, if you're honest and I hope I am, touch wood.

Were there exams at the end of the second year?

Exams at the drawing year, the painting year and then there was your degree at the end, then you had to do a year's, after the painting, if you passed the painting, you had a year, do a year of teaching practice – this was to get your teaching degree – normal and abnormal psychology and ... I can't remember what else you did. Mostly, I mean teaching in the classes at Birmingham. You'd go round with a teacher, you'd be assigned to a teacher so that you'd go into his class and watch him teach. Or you would go to a grammar school and teach or another school, you know, we used to call them council schools then, they're now ... I don't know what they're called now. But I mean public, you know, for ... And you had to do all that every day.

Can you remember what your painting examinations consisted of?

Yes, one was the procession, figures in procession and I did a Crufts sort of dog show. And then you had to do a life painting and you had to probably do, yes, you had to do a mural and I can't ... well that was ... that was it. And if you ...

And then how were the paintings assessed? Were they assessed by ...

I don't know, by outside assessor.

And how did you do?

Very well actually. I passed okay.

And what was the degree called at that time?

Art teacher's diploma – ATD - which you could later change to an MA, which would have been nice, but I never bothered.

And what was your attitude to having to do the final year of sort of practical teaching?

It's something I had to do to get the ... I didn't enjoy it at all. I enjoyed the psychology and very much the lectures and the reading we had to do. I didn't enjoy teaching at all. I did ... we did anatomy too – did I ever say that? Anatomy, we had to do anatomy.

[0:23:11]

What were the anatomy classes like?

Well you had to learn every muscle in the body and every bone and I was asked to stay on and teach it, but I didn't want to. I wanted to get to London really, you know, I just felt I hadn't done enough painting and I didn't want to teach. I didn't enjoy that teaching year. I caught scarlet fever from one school and was frightfully ill. No, I didn't enjoy the teaching. I knew I didn't want to really be a teacher.

So how did you go about making this dream to go to London, to go to the Royal Academy come about – who did you talk to about your ...

My parents really. And I talked to Fleetwood-Walker.

And how encouraging were they?

Most of them didn't want me to go.

Why?

They wanted me to stay and teach at Birmingham Art School. But they thought too that I would ... I think they all thought girls would get lost in London and whatnot. Fleetwood-Walker taught at the RA Schools and he said well if you want to go, I'll write you a very good recommendation. So I came up to London and my parents didn't want me to go at all really. They were all worried. My mother thought London was a sort of, again, you would get lost. She always thought we were going to have ten illegitimate children, I don't know why. [laughs] I can't imagine why. Anyway, she was worried, she didn't want us to leave home I suppose, she didn't want me to go, she'd rather I stayed. And I went up to London with a friend and we went round, I went to the Royal College. Or was I by myself then? Royal College and The Slade and the RA Schools. Actually Duncan Grant, Alistair Grant was at the Royal College. He'd come up and he took me round and I liked it, I liked The Slade and I got to the Academy, but you know it was free paying at the Academy, it was a scholarship school. If you won a scholarship you didn't ... it was free. And I loved the Academy actually, it had such a sort of a romance; the wonderful old drawing school and I knew that I should get in if Fleetwood-Walker recommended me. I mean I was there, you know, I didn't have to get an exam, he got me in, so I said I'll go to the Academy and that's how it started. And my mother insisted that I stayed in a girls' church army hostel, which was wonderful actually. It was full of students and you all had your own little room and the nuns were marvellous, wonderful women. I feel I'd like to leave some money to that place when I hop the twig. They were wonderful women.

How old were you when you came to London to study at the Royal Academy?

[0:26:32]

Twenty-one I think, about that.

So when had the war ended? I'm trying to make a chronology.

Just not long before, hadn't it? I don't know. Of course there was still another war going on with Japan, you know. I haven't got the dates so I can't tell you. But it had ended by the time I got to London, although we were still rationed, you know.

So what did London feel like then – can you describe the landscape of London?

Oh, amazing for me. I mean I don't know what it would have felt like before, but for me it was wonderful. I mean so exciting; all the museums and the ... oh, galleries and the ... I mean it was really, really terribly exciting.

[End of track 5]

[Track 6]

This is Hester Westley talking to Sheila Girling in her studio in Camden Town, London on the eleventh of August 2009 and a warm-up question, when I check the sound levels
Sheila, what did you have for breakfast today?

I had a muffin and some cold ham. I usually cook a piece of ham at the beginning of the week and it lasts. And a cup of tea.

Are you a creature of habit?

Breakfast-wise, yes. Yes, very much so. For time as well. Usually breakfast is done fairly quickly so it's not an elaborate affair as it would have been when the children were young. But Tony gets up at about half past five usually and has breakfast and then goes back to sleep. And I get up at about seven and have mine. So we eat separately for breakfast and he usually just has toast. Though he had ham this morning.

And what time do you tend to come into the studio?

It varies. I mean I would like to get here by ten, but often I don't because things happen at home or, you know, there's a lot of household chores to be done and basically I would like - my best time to work is in the morning - so basically I would like to have a few hours before lunch because after lunch I tend to have a downer. I mean I'd like to have a nap after lunch and we do sometimes have a quick nap and then I can start again.

A postprandial dip.

[End of track 6]

[Track 7]

I wonder if we can resume this morning where we left off yesterday, which was your move to London to go to the Royal Academy Schools when you were about twenty-one. Can you remember your first impression of the Royal Academy School or going there on your first day - can you cast your mind back?

Well it was really magic. The drawing schools are in two tiers like a theatre and the model was in the centre of course, on a dais which they could turn, but the corridors were full of casts of Greek figures and skeletons in cupboards and all sort of extraordinary ... it was like going into a museum for me. I loved it, it was very, very exciting.

And did you have any anxieties? It was quite a big move from home to London.

Not ... nervous. I mean not anxieties in so much as I was so happy to be there and resuming painting, which I couldn't do of course, they made you draw again for a year which was rather a surprise actually, to have to go back and do another drawing year.

So what did you sign up for when you came to the Royal Academy?

Oh, painting.

And how long ... was that classed as a postgraduate degree?

Yes, yes.

And how many years did you sign up for?

Well of course I didn't finish all of them because I got ... you know, we married as students and then I got pregnant with Tim, so of course I left when he was born in '51.

What date did I go to the Academy?

Was it nineteen forty ... I'm not sure.

Hold on a moment.

We'll check a bibliography. Not to worry then.

Well a portrait, 1948 was ... and the portrait, Return of Ulysses '49-'50, so I suppose Tim was born in '51, I was pregnant. I must have left probably at the end of '51.

So how long had you been for?

Three years I think, about.

And what was the landscape of London like at that time after the war? Can you remember what your sort of impressions of ...

[0:02:58]

It was very much as it is now, I think. I can't really recall, but I was in a students' hostel on – a church army hostel on the Marylebone Road and, you know, at first I thought how do I get to the centre of London from here, you know. But of course you soon found out which buses were going, where your buses were going, so it was mostly bussing to the Academy every day, which was very simple. But you soon learnt your way about, you know. And I loved the hostel actually. It sounds primitive, church army hostel, but it wasn't, it was wonderful. You each had your own little room with your gas fire and these wonderful nuns fed you superbly and were so sweet and friendly and it was a very happy time because there were mostly students there and one of my best friends at the Academy, Joy Walker, was there too. So we always met up in the big sitting room in the evening and all went out together and went to dances and whatnot. We all did this sort of night thing, which you'd call clubbing now, but which was really much more stately I imagine.

[laughs] What was it? I can't remember the dance place. Never mind. It was a big sort

of dancehall that everybody went to and you'd get picked up and it was a whole laugh, you know.

And what sort of music did they play?

Oh dance music. I mean we were doing ballroom dancing, you know, as such. I don't think even they were doing the twist then really. But I don't remember too much about that.

And what about, on those social occasions, alcohol, did that feature at that time?

Not at all. Not at all. I don't think we ever drank or smoked.

What would you drink at the dances?

I don't remember drinking at all. Probably lemonade. But no alcohol really, none.

And was there a curfew at the hostel?

Yes. You had to be in by, oh probably eleven or twelve I think. But I think you could get permission if you were a reliable person, to stay out later. And I was fairly ... they thought I was reliable. [laughs]

And how many sort of evenings a week did you go out socialising?

Oh ... I mean a lot of the time we were just ... go down to the big sitting room and just laugh and chatter and whatnot. I suppose two or three times a week, probably at the weekends and ... but that I'm not clear about really.

Can you tell me a bit about your friends at the time, your social group?

My friends were, well Joy Walker was a great friend. We met at the first day at the Academy and became good friends. Bryan Kneale was at the Academy, who was a friend too. Most of the people ... actually the friends that I had were not so much at the Academy but the other students in the hostel who were ... two from Scotland and they were doing music I think, a lot of music students there. But mostly you worked all day and you were tired, you know, I was quite exhausted by the time I got back really. But I think ... I'm trying to think of the other students. Oh, Julia Rushbury was a good friend, Rushbury's daughter, because Rushbury had known my aunt and I think they'd had a little affair at one point. So she was a good friend.

Can you explain who Rushbury is for the machine?

Mm?

Can you explain who Rushbury was?

Well he was an artist, a very well known etcher at that time and he was head of the Academy Schools. He took over from someone, I can't remember, but yes, he was ... I mean I know some other people that I knew at the Academy. There was the Brokenshaws; two brothers, Bryan Kneale and Peter Lowe, he was our best man and he was a wonderful painter actually. And someone called Neville Mann. But ... I think really they were mostly, the real friends were the girls at the hostel because we were living together, you know, and they were lovely people, lovely people.

And how did you subsist at that time financially? Were you given an allowance from your parents?

[0:08:36]

Yes, from my parents, were very generous. I mean as far as my education was concerned they were very, very wonderful really and I thank them for that because I mean obviously the RA Schools were free and also I mean they gave me an allowance but when I got to

London it was less than I thought it would ... I mean it didn't go as far, I was amazed. Well, I went into Fortnum and Mason's and oh, this is a lovely grocer, right opposite the Academy, and bought, I don't know, a dozen oranges or something, and the price of them shook me rigid, having come from a country town where, you know, they were quite cheap. And I went again, he did all the finances at the Academy and said look, I think I shall have to teach for a half a day a week because I don't think my allowance ... and I don't want to ask my parents for any more, I don't think my allowance is going to keep me sufficiently well. And he said, oh don't do that Miss Girling, there's been a fund that's been - for destitute women - that's been building up all through the war, nobody's claimed it, I think we could call you destitute don't you? And I had this fabulous allowance at the Academy, which helped enormously so I didn't have to teach. But it was rather nice to be classified ... There were wonderful grants at the Academy, you could really exist on grants at the Academy. Generous benefactors had left money for destitute women or, you know, drawing prizes and all that sort of thing really.

Because it's something we didn't really touch on in our earlier sessions, but what was, in your family what had attitudes to money been - had you had sort of much exposure to financial matters?

[0:10:34]

No, we weren't ... I mean my father had a very good job and we had everything we wanted, but you know, in the Midlands it's not ... we always call, my mother always called Londoners, you know, all kippers and curtains because everything was put on show and they were eating kippers. But I mean we had everything we wanted as children really. We had all the things like bicycles and everything we wanted. But not in excess. Nowadays I think my grandchildren have too much really. I mean our presents were at Christmas and our birthdays and they weren't excessive presents. You know, you had something probably that you wanted. But we never wanted, let's put it like that. We were comfortably off, but not excessively rich.

And what do you think your parents wanted for you at that stage in your life? You talked about your mother's sort of ambitions for you as the sort of creative daughter and with her familial legacy of artists. What were her sort of expectations and aspirations perhaps for you?

I think that I should become a good artist really. And be happy. I mean I don't think she forced expectations on us really. I mean I think she hoped we would marry. I think she would be sorry if we hadn't married, but I mean there was no pressure to marry. There was pressure really, wasn't there, there was no pressures. I mean she wanted us to do what we had to do really. There was always the expectations that you would pass your exams and do well with what you're doing. But really no, they were very good parents actually like that.

So I'm trying to build up a picture of your daily life in London at that stage and can you describe your sort of daily routine – where would you breakfast in the hostel?

[0:13:06]

We would eat breakfast in the big dining room and they were always very good breakfasts, I mean herrings and things like that, you know, were wonderful. We would have breakfast, then the sort of clocking in times at the Academy were much stricter than they are. You had ... there was a wonderful old doorkeeper who would write your name in, you would sort of clock in rather like a factory, you know. So you got there at nine and went into the life room and did what you had to do, I mean mostly it was drawing then, the first year.

And can you describe the life drawing studio for me?

The what?

The studio space that you worked in?

Well the drawing studio was like a theatre, like an amphitheatre with two circular tiers looking over each other and the model was in the middle and you always put your boards – you had your own boards, I mean my own board – we stacked them round the wall behind the circular lot of chairs. And really that's how I met Tony. He came in from the sculpture school and took my board. [laughs] But then you wandered around a lot. When you were sort of, you know, in the break times and whatnot, I would go down and look into the painting school and look into the sculpture school and thought there are only two really good artists in this sculpture school and that's that one and that one. And one was Tony and the one was Frank Martin. So I didn't even know Tony then at all, but I think I had much more confidence then. I wasn't shy, so you know, I wasn't inhibited so much by shyness, I was very much more in control of my life I think at that point.

Who would teach you in the life drawing classes in the first year?

[0:15:25]

Dring and Genge. Hardly any teaching at all. I mean really they would look at your work and ... I started to try and simplify the model, I started to try and I suppose get into some sort of abstraction and I was told if you're going to draw like that you leave the school. So I had to go back and draw what I saw.

Who told you that?

Dring I think.

How did you respond to that kind of feedback?

I said, yes sir, and went on and ... I didn't want to leave the school. [laughs]

What do you think ... why do you think you had tried to make that development in your own work at that stage?

Well I mean, you know, I was a sort of a senior student in the sense that we were all senior students, but I suppose in London you became conscious of all the futurism, all the things that were going on and you wanted to try and ... cubism, you wanted to try and analyse the figure in a different way, but obviously the Academy wasn't into that. And perhaps they were right. I mean you learnt your craft, you know.

And how much discussion was there between fellow students about the ...

Much more, much more. I think we learnt more, all of us learnt more from fellow students. I mean Peter Lowe was a very wonderful painter and he was older, I mean he was a married man when he was there. I suppose they'd done war service you see and they came back. And I learnt a lot from him, watching his painting. And we all learnt from each other actually, much more than we ever did from the tutors.

Can you explain a little bit more what you saw in Peter Lowe's painting, why you admired it?

[0:17:50]

Application of paint, colour. And really he was looking at Poussin, I realised, you know, he was organising his paintings quite ... a structure. I think really mostly the way he was putting on the paint.

What was special about that?

He was putting it on, simplifying, you know. He was simplifying the figures. We've got a lovely picture of his at our cottage, I think it was his wedding present to us, women in Italy holding a cloth, and the whole thing has been simplified. I think modernism in a way is simplification of the body. And he was making an effort to get there with, well really I suppose an academic structure, and that impressed me enormously, you know, to see the way he was going about it. And he told Tony to look at my work, which is funny, because they were friends, so he obviously thought my work was okay too. And well, it's just

being in an environment where everybody was sort of getting in a more mature way and trying to feel their way into something different, and that was the exciting thing really.

Can you talk to me a little bit about the drawings you were producing at the time and what techniques you were using? Were they the techniques you'd been taught at Birmingham about sizing up the model, or how had your drawings developed?

[0:19:46]

I think pencil, we had to use pencil, everybody was using pencil. You weren't using wash or anything, you had to use pencil. I think they were just, you were just developing your own skills of looking at the model and drawing really. It was just drawing practice in a way, and I mean the more you do something the better you get at it, you know.

How long would you spend on a particular pose or a particular drawing?

We didn't have quick poses then, we'd spend probably two or three days on the same pose and who is the model we had then? That very gay chap – what was ... Quentin Crisp was the model then and he was a wonderful model. He could stand just like a statue for hours. And he wouldn't recognise you in the street because we'd be talking to him in the life room and if we met him in the street he would just ignore you. Rather shook me actually. But I think he didn't ever acknowledge anyone in the street because he got so teased, you know, with his make-up and ...

Did you have a preference for drawing the male form or the female figure?

We mostly had male models then. I preferred male models because I was used to drawing male models. But there were female models. Some were clothed, we had a lot of clothed female models, and we had one black girl who would only undress to the waist, she wouldn't undress any further. But we had Quentin Crisp almost every day and a boxer that was punch drunk, so that when the bell rang for their rest he would come out fighting, you know, poor man, he was completely gone really, he was battered, you know. But he had a

wonderful physique and he posed well. I preferred, at that point I think I preferred male models because I'd done so much more of them. I'm going to have a cup of coffee. But I mean whichever model was there, you did it, quite, you know, it was a job really, it was a problem. So one didn't really have too many preferences, one just said, well there's the model for today and you got on with it, you know.

And was it five days a week ...

Yeah.

... all day every day?

Yeah, yeah.

And did you make time to go round galleries or museums?

Oh yes, yes.

Do you remember any exhibitions or shows in particular, is there anything that stands out in your memory?

[0:22:55]

Well I remember Prunella Clough influenced me a lot. We walked down Cork Street, we came out of the back of the Academy always, the Academy Schools, so you were in ... opposite Cork Street, pretty well, and she had a show I should think probably at the Redfern Gallery and I was terribly impressed by it. It was I think the fisherman period, the workman period.

What impressed you about her painting?

[0:23:25]

Because it looked modern to me. It doesn't look so modern now, but it looked as though she was really doing something with colour, composition. I just thought gosh, she's a good painter. You know, I'd like to paint like that, you're thinking. And she influenced ... I'd already painted my sister for the ... well there was Portrait of a Woman in Evening Dress, which was a silver medal and my sister sat for me all through the summer holidays when you had to do it and I won the silver medal, which was very nice. And then for the gold medal it was the Return of Ulysses and that was the subject. And I looked at Prunella Clough and thought that's what I want to do, I want to do fishermen, and that was my subject actually. And I didn't win the gold medal, I got the *approxime accessit* because well, I don't know, I was very pregnant then and I think probably to send me off to Italy wasn't a very good idea. But I mean Julia Rushbury got it and she was very good too, so it's probably not fair, she won it.

So at the end of your first year you had a year ...

Of drawing.

... of drawing. Were there any exams or final projects that you can remember?

No I don't think so. You just said, now you can go and paint.

How many students pursued the course through to the second year, how many dropped out?

[0:25:08]

Oh, that's hard and I can't remember totally. Well, Bryan Kneale went through. He won, he went to ... won the Prix de Rome, so he went off to Rome. The Brokenshaws were painting. Julia Rushbury was. I think Joy Walker dropped out I think, she got married. Quite a few, I can't really tell you how many – four or five, six went through.

And what was the sort of gender split like at that time, because at Birmingham you described there were ...

Both about boys and girls equally I think. A lot had come back you see from doing service, so there were a lot of more mature men around, you know. I mean I thought Frank Martin was a master for ages and he was a mature student.

And can you remember the summer holidays between the first and the second year – what did you do with yourself in the ...

In the holidays? Well possibly ... well I mean one always drew and painted. I did a painting ... ah yes, you had to do a street scene and I know I, in Sutton, I went and sat high up in the churchyard overlooking Sutton Coldfield main shopping centre and I did that most of the summer, I think. It wasn't wonderful, but I did it. Of course it's a big picture then, you know, it was ... But mostly just being at home with the dogs and seeing old friends and, you know, being quite lazy actually.

And what was motivating you with your art practice? At this stage it sounds as though you were very committed.

What motivated me? Well mostly you had things to do like, Portrait of a Lady in Evening Dress, and this sort of big street scene and whatnot. What motivated ... it's just I loved doing it, you know. You would always sit, if the dog was lying down, you'd sit and draw it, you know. It's something that I wish I still did more really, but you do it all the time and you like your sketchbook and you'd be drawing your mother if she was sleeping or ... it would just be drawing.

And how did you sort of ... what was your own self-perception at that age? Did you regard yourself as an artist or ... at what point do you think you started to really assume that identity for yourself?

Oh quite early on I think one was ... yes, I mean you were an artist, you were a budding artist, but I mean you had no doubt that you were going to be an artist, whether ... one thought one was going to be a good artist, which was at least ... As you say my ... well, as I said, my self-confidence had grown then really and I felt much more sure of myself because, you know, you'd won prizes and you were looked upon as a good student and the whole thing was falling into place more, there was less sort of anxieties about things; you knew your job and you wanted to do it.

And what did that mean to be an artist in that social milieu where you had grown up when you went back to see your friends – what did it mean to be an artist then?

[0:29:19]

Well we'd all ... it had been ... we'd all been to a very sort of artistic school so my friends ... actually I think the first – well no, it wasn't ... I saw a lot of my Birmingham Art School friends when I went back really. Elizabeth Lister who had got married, and Eileen Cashmore. I know we went to stay in her - she had a funny little house on the river - to look after her dogs while she and her husband went away somewhere. You know, we still all saw each other, a lot of each other really. But what did we do, I mean what did my children do, my grandchildren do, they'd just meet their friends and get up late, you know, and my parents let us sleep, they didn't mind. The first thing we did actually at Birmingham Art School, which I forgot, we all went away to Amersham Repertory and did scenic design there and they were doing Noah's Ark, I seem to remember, and we all took part as an animal in the theatre, which was great fun. And we just painted the back ... I mean all that was happening in the holidays, so I mean I always had a group of friends, a lot of friends that we'd do things with. Very good friends, I mean I still see, well I hear from Eileen Cashmore, but poor old Elizabeth died last year or the year before I think.

So when you returned to London for the start of the second year, were you still living in the same place, in your hostel?

Yes. Right up till the time I left to get married.

And where was the painting studio at the Royal Academy and how was that different to the drawing studio?

Well there were big, just big rooms. The first area was the drawing school and as you went on down the long corridor there were big rooms and really you could be almost alone in a room painting, or just two of you. There was lots and lots of space. And there was very little tuition, hardly any. I mean most of the paintings that you did were at home or in the holidays.

How often were you going in during that second year? Were you still maintaining the daily routine of ...

Sorry, how often ...

To the RA Schools – was it every day?

I mean you'd go in every day. It was much stricter, you had to go in. I mean they'd want to know why if you missed a day or came in late really. It was like being at school almost, you had to be there on time.

And how did you get started in terms of subject matter in that second year in the Royal Academy? Were you encouraged to paint certain types of pictures or ...

[0:32:40]

No. Nothing at all. I mean you were given complete freedom really to do what you liked. It was rather ... I mean I did a lot of sort of fishermen after that because I started drawing boats and things when I went away on holiday. It was difficult really to know what to paint at that point. You were given almost too much freedom. But of course the portrait and these things were given you as subjects so that you got on with those things really, but I mean almost I would like to have probably painted from a subject more really.

Can you describe ...

I mean I painted from life. That's, yes I forgot that. I remember painting from life as well, and heads, a lot of heads. Yes, that's something I'd quite forgotten. You know, that we did quite a lot of painting from the model.

And what was that like?

A clothed model mostly. Old men, and I know an old tramp came in and everybody said what a character and I remember Fleetwood-Walker said, 'That's not character, that man's got no character at all'. [laughs] Which was quite true. But you know, anything that was sort of with it and different was wonderful to paint. Which probably people do now. Yes, we did from the model quite a bit of painting and then you could go into the other studios and do your free compositions. We had very little tuition, nobody was telling you what to do at all.

So was the painting from life, was that at Birmingham or at the Royal Academy School?

Both. Both.

And so can you ... are there any pictures that you remember painting and can you describe some for me, or one of them?

I remember painting, which is in the book that I have, my book, a very very thin woman who had a wonderful face really. I remember her because she was, mostly because she was eating dry bread and she was thin I was upset to think that's all she had. And just figures. I don't remember terribly the models.

Can you remember the portrait you did of your sister in evening dress?

Yes.

Can you describe that for the tape?

She had, well she was in the dining room I think we started because my mother said, you know, keep it out of the way from everything. She was sitting in a chair in a light blue, well her evening dress, with sort of net and whatnot, you know. And she was wonderful, she sat for hours for me. She was a really good sister.

And can you describe the process of painting such a portrait? How do you actually start?

[0:36:10]

Well you started by drawing it in, I mean on the canvas. By then I was sort of painting on stretched canvas. You drew it in and I'd drawn her a lot, I knew her face very well, and till you got the proportions alright with the drawing, and then you would block it in with colour. And the net was rather nice to paint because you'd have to scumble a very light paint over an under colour of green, er blue, so that you got that feeling of sort of an overlay of net, which was interesting because it was another problem and well, her face one just painted as best one could, with oil paints of course. So it must have been okay because I won the prize. But she was a wonderful sitter, she was very sweet. She was ... and I gave it her for her wedding present. It's still in her sitting room.

And can you describe the sort of trials and pleasures of painting with oil paint – what do you like about using them and what do you find tricky?

Well I love oil paint so far as it has a marvellous depth and a resonance. The only minus is that it takes so long to dry. So really if you wanted to paint over a painting you had to scrape the whole thing down again, you tended to, and then start again, building it up again. Why I love acrylic is that it dries so quickly and you can go on the next day, you know.

And the young Sheila who's painting her sister's portrait, how would you describe her sort of approach to the painting? Were you very bold, were you sort of tentative? Can you talk a little bit more about ...

It's difficult to say because you had no concept of the way you were painting. I mean you didn't try to paint bold or ... you just tried to paint her, really. And I think I always thought I was being terribly sensitive with the paint, but I think my paintings have always been quite assertive in a way, which surprises me when I look back on them. That's really when you asked yesterday if you recognised your paintings, early paintings, they're always you. You thought you'd been terribly sensitive and whatnot and you [laughs] ... they're still you really, you can't escape your own way of doing things. And by that time I think I was painting in a much more assertive way because I was much more confident. So really I can't, you know, that's about ...

And were you very conscious at that time of developing your personal kind of style or idiom?

I think in the Return of Ulysses I was. Again, I think I was trying to break through and be a little more adventurous rather than just painting a sort of scene, you know, of Ulysses returning. And the way I constructed the painting I see now is sort of really ... it could be, you know, influenced by the way I'm doing things now really.

Can you explain that a bit more?

Well I'm looking down on the boat so that it's sort of tilted up, the boat is tilted up and really so that you get the shape of the boat with the figures looking up and reaching out and I did a lot of glazing of the sea to make it a very resonant blue-green. I think, you know, one was trying also to simplify, to get through to kind of more of an abstract way of looking at patterns and shapes on the canvas. They allowed me to do that, it's a wonder they did actually, but by that time I think they thought, you know, you'd got to develop to a certain extent. And it was hung in the Academy and so was my sister, they were both, you know, I sent them in and they were both hung in the Academy. And they looked good, I

mean I was quite pleased with them, you know, I wasn't ashamed of them. So I think that was the beginning, but then of course that was sort of ... then I had a baby, but that's while I was at the ... well, you know, I had to leave to have the baby. And of course that put paid a lot to my painting fulltime really.

So during the second year, you were concentrating very much on just painting sort of self-motivated work. Were there particular artists or contemporary artists that you were aware of and that you were encouraged to look at or admire?

[0:41:41]

We weren't encouraged to look at anything. Nobody told us to go and look at anything. I mean it was very poor teaching at the Academy. I mean they'd come and say, oh you could put a bit of red there, or something, you know, but I mean there was no general being told to go ... I think Prunella Clough influenced, really influenced me and then we saw a Bacon show of Van Gogh going along the road – do you know the one I mean? Van Gogh portrait, Bacon did a portrait of Van Gogh going ... I can't remember the name, he was going somewhere, to Arles I think. That influenced me, I mean Bacon I thought was the colour, the boldness of the application, that was exciting. And of course one was looking then at all the wonderful things in the National Gallery. You know, one had all that, wonderful things to look at: old masters, the way Velázquez put on lace. All these things influenced probably when I was painting Audrey, my sister. You know, her dress, the material, you know, Gainsborough, the way they put a sort of layer of lace over satin and it would shine through. All these thing ... I was looking, looking, looking, you know, so that I can't say one, at that point one artist really I wanted to sort of totally imitate or what have you, I just learnt from everything at that time. You were eating it all, you know. And it was a wonderful time. To have that exposure after Birmingham where you saw only really the Pre-Raphaelites.

Can you remember which commercial art galleries were interesting to visit at the time?

Only the one down Cork Street, the ones in Cork Street. And I don't remember the names of them. I mean of course one wasn't even interested in names, you just looked and see what they'd got.

And what about the Tate, what kind of reputation did the Tate Gallery have at that stage?

It was fairly academic really. Well, when you say academic, sort of who ... Nicholson and Hepworth and of course Henry Moore was doing things, one was very conscious of Henry Moore then, especially for Tony.

And did Paris or the sort of reputation of Paris feature at all at that time?

Not for me. I mean you knew that ... I knew my aunt had been there and it was all sort of ... that was the place, but not for me, no not at all. I mean I thought that London at that point for me was big and good enough, you know. And people like the Camden Town group I think influenced me.

Who in particular?

I'm trying to think and I can't remember. No, it's gone. But they were painting interiors with light and figures rather ... Sargent ... Sing ... he wasn't, but Sargent certainly. Sickert. I think the English painters were influencing me more when I was looking at them, much more than thinking of Paris at all.

You mentioned the ...

I don't think Paris was very good at that point anyway. It had had its day. I mentioned what?

The significance of seeing Prunella Clough's work, and I wondered, did you actually meet her?

Not till much later. And then she became a good friend. But no, not till very much later.

At what stage during your career at the RA did you meet Tony?

[0:45:58]

Well, it was in the drawing school. I mean we were in the drawing school because I went to get my board and it wasn't there. I mean no-one touched your board, you know, because you had your name on it and it was yours. And I looked down to the second tier and there was this sculptor with my board and I thought, what a terrible cheek these wretched little creatures have, they come in here and ... So at the break I said, look, you have my board. And he said oh I didn't know, I thought everybody could take them, you know. And we began ... he made some outrageous remark about art and ...

Like what?

I can't remember, but I said you can't say that, and we argued. And he said then, come out, let's go out to lunch and ... so that was it. [laughs]

Where did you go for lunch on that first date?

We always went down, (a) the Kardomah which was opposite or ...

What was that?

It was a Kardomah, it was like a sort of a Lyons Corner House thing. You know, it's like coffee and salad or a roll or ... Or we would go down Cork Street to a very good little Italian place that you could get a plate of spaghetti for a shilling I remember.

What was it called?

I can't remember. I can't remember. But it was very easy to get there and you would go and ... I mean we used to go there a lot with my girlfriends before I met Tony.

What were your first impressions of Tony when you got chatting after he had ...

[laughs] Very voluble, very sort of ... a lot of sort of sparks coming out of him, you know. Because I remember seeing him in the Kardomah actually and I was sitting with Joy Walker I think, my friend, and he came in and sat at another table and everything started to be sort of buzz, somehow, he started to sort of ... everything. And I thought, he's interesting. [laughs] And we just gelled really, we thought the same.

Why? Why did you, in what way did you gel?

We were both interested in pushing art further and we could both talk about it because we were on ... we wanted to ... I mean we were trying to get it the same way really, and also we had the same sense of humour, we could laugh a lot, you know. And it just, we just got on. You know, you knew that it was right somehow. And I think, you know, I found him very attractive, which is the right thing, you know. I mean I had the boyfriends that pursued me that I didn't find attractive so that would have been no good.

So how often, after that initial lunch together, how often did you start getting together?

Can you remember?

We met, I mean we met a lot then and he had a studio on the Fulham Road. There were artists' studios, just a room, a big downstairs room and you went up on to a little mezzanine where you had your kitchen and your living space and he lived there. And he, I used to go round there in the evenings and ... or he'd come and pick me up at the hostel and we saw, we began to see much more of each other all the time as, you know, we knew we were getting to like each other really.

How soon did you realise it was getting serious?

Well we got engaged after six months. I suppose after a few months, you know, we knew that, you know, we wanted to be together and then Tony wanted to get married which worried me. You know, I said, not yet, not yet, you know, and of course there was the problem that he was Jewish, you know, I was having to tell my parents. But he wasn't a practising Jew so it didn't worry me to that extent. Well it never worried me at all actually, it worried my parents.

What did they, how did they react to the news that you were being pursued?

Don't do anything till we meet him. You know, because I phoned and said I think I'm getting engaged and they were sort of, stop where you are, freeze, don't do anything till we see him, you know. [laughs]

And so can you ...

So I took him home and I know my father was walking in between I think broad ... no, runner bean canes, you know, he was walking in between looking at them very carefully. My father was sort of quite methodical and slow, he'd been seeing how the pods were going, and Tony was following him trying to brace the subject of ... [laughs] But then he asked if, you know, he could marry me and by that time my father sort of vaguely ... I'd prepared them all that I was going to, so ... And they liked him, they really liked him. I think he behaved very well and ...

How did they sort of respond to the idea that you might marry an artist?

Well I think by that time, I mean my mother sent me to ... when I first went to Birmingham Art School she said, you can go if you promise you won't marry an artist because it's a very cruel life really, you know, it's not easy. Knowing her father and her brother and whatnot had had to worry about it. And I said, of course I shan't marry an artist, I want ... but then you do and ... I think they could see the potential in Tony, they could see that he was not one of these layabouts, he was always sort of doing things and I think they were happy, they were happy, they were very happy really.

Can you remember when Tony proposed to you? Was there a formal proposition or had it been something that you had discussed?

Do you know, I can't remember. Isn't that terrible? But I think it was something that just sort of became, you know, when shall we do it, sort of rather than, you know, will you marry me. Really it was, you know, more a general understanding that this is what we wanted to do. And I never felt any sort of apprehension that it wouldn't be right. To me, you know, it just seemed right. Everything that we had between us seemed right, which, that was a nice thing to happen really. So we got engaged after six months and then I kept putting off the wedding because, you know, things like trousseaus in those days, you know, ridiculous things. [laughs]

Can you talk a little bit more about the preparations for the wedding?

Well, like things like getting clothes and whatnot, absurd these days, I don't think you'd think about it.

Can you explain what you mean by trousseau?

[0:53:45]

Well, you had to have your sort of your bridal dress and your going away clothes and going to Italy clothes and all the linen, you know, my mother supplied things like linen, bed linen. This is kind of antique now, but these things, what happened then. And ... But they didn't ... my parents-in-law - oh, my leg's going to sleep - my parents-in-law wanted the wedding in London because my father wasn't at all, my father-in-law wasn't well and they didn't want to go all up to Birmingham. My brother-in-law was very sick, you know, so yes, we said fine, in London. My parents just said, do what you have to do, you know, it doesn't worry us. So we had the wedding in London really.

Can you remember the first time you met Tony's family?

Yes.

Can you describe that?

We met I think at Simpson's in the Strand was it, or Simpson's. No Simpson's – you don't remember Simpson's at the end of Piccadilly? Well it was, had a big restaurant and we met, our parents, Tony's mother came and his father and we were all on sort of tenterhooks trying to ...

What were they like? What were your impressions of them?

I thought Tony's mother was a very masculine woman with very little sense of dress I remember, thinking she looked a very country type of woman. You know, she had tweeds and a sort of a hat and she looked exactly like Tony in drag. And his father was a very nice man, a very sort of intense man with sort of, not at all well then, he sort of had had ... well he had a bad heart, you know, and I talked to him mostly actually. And he wanted to know a lot of questions really, you know, what we did. And I think I passed anyway.

And what do you think the issue was for them about your non-Jewishness? Do you think that was a question?

They ... all Tony's girlfriends had been Christian and they'd come to it. I mean they weren't worried, they weren't worried. Tony's sister was much more worried I think. She wanted him to marry one of her friends. But they were a very un-Jewish family. I mean they never ... I think they put the ham on the sideboard to cut rather than on the table, I think that was the one thing that they objected to, when the ham was on the table. But everybody was ... I mean they ate lobster, everything. I mean they were not a ... Jewish family that followed all the rules or anything, it was just one day a week, one day a year I think they went to a synagogue and Tony's father was always terribly bad tempered on that day because he had to find hats and things. So it wasn't a problem at all I don't think.

And so where did you plan the wedding itself?

We thought let's find a nice pretty little church. And we found one in Knightsbridge or something, we didn't realise it was the most fashionable church. [laughs]

What church is it?

I can't remember. Tony'll remember but I can't. Then we had the reception at Brown's Hotel.

So what ... was it a Christian, a Church of England ceremony?

Yes, yes. Tony had become Christian at Cambridge to – I don't know if his parents knew that – but he'd been baptised so we could be married in a Christian church, which my family wanted me to be.

And what did you wear for the ceremony?

I wore, I didn't wear white and I wish now I had. But it was very sort of ... we were still rationed then you know, it was still very austere. I wore a very beautiful silk, a little silk suit, a sort of pinky-grey and I still have it. I must have been terribly slim, I couldn't dream of getting into it now.

Why do you wish you'd worn white?

Well I think we were sort of being, I think you know, we've got to sort of do this in the austere way, we mustn't make a fuss, you know. But now, you know, fusses are rather nice when I see white weddings. My sister had a white wedding and it was very nice and I wish I had actually. But there, you can't look back and wish, you know, what you didn't do. But anyway, we got married, we had the reception at Brown's, then we went off to Italy, which, the first time I'd been abroad. So for me it was the most wonderful experience. We went across the Channel and went on the train, Train Bleu I think it was,

all the way to Italy. And we bought all the coupons for our food and we forgot to buy ... anything, we had nothing to drink, no water or anything, so we'd forgotten to buy coupons for drink. And one sort of rather strange foreign man offered to buy us some water [laughs] which we were very grateful for. And I mean Italy for me was the most wonderful experience and that's where I started drawing a lot of boats too, at Ravello. Because we were still both, you see, I hadn't painted Ulysses then so I had endless paintings of boats; old boats drawn up and nets, fishing nets and all the paraphernalia that went with fishing. So that really inspired me too to do Return of Ulysses as I did it.

What was so magical about Italy for you – can you remember your first impressions?

[1:00:40]

Well just being abroad for the first time in my life, you know, and hearing different languages, hearing food, different food. And Ravello was wonderful then, it was right up on the mountain with Amalfi down below and the water and you could ... it was just exciting really, the different ... the dear little villages and the whole thing was wonderful and ... Well, we stayed at a marvellous hotel too, run by a family. We went back to it on our fiftieth wedding anniversary and it had gone down terribly. The son had taken it over so the whole thing had collapsed. But then we went back to the art school, I mean we went back to the RA after we were married and I went on painting, the Return of Ulysses and whatnot, and then I became pregnant and went on painting but as I got bigger - I still signed myself Sheila Girling, not to confuse everybody really – and as I got larger they got very worried and I think one of the keepers said, is Miss Girling married? [laughs] Because I got very big with Tim, he was a very big baby. So ...

Had Tony travelled abroad before your Italian trip?

Yes, he had. His parents went to the South of France, I think mostly because (a) they loved the sun and I think because my father-in-law wasn't too well, but they went abroad much more than we did.

So what was it like travelling with him, what sort of traveller was he?

[1:02:33]

Who, with ...

Tony.

Oh, it was great. I mean we were both excited like children together, you know, look at that, look at that, you know, can you hear that, you know.

And what was it like as you were both working, what was your sort of attitude to drawing and your art practice at that time? Did you work together, did you work separately?

Well, we took the ... we went to live in this one room on the Fulham Road and there was another studio next door that was going so we took that as well and kept the first one as our studio. And Tony worked downstairs then and I worked what was the little living part on the mezzanine floor. So, and then we lived next door, which was one room, big room with a little kitchen and the little bedroom at the top. You know, you went up a ladder to get to the bedroom. And I loved it actually. I would have loved to have stayed there but of course when Tim started to be born, you know, it was ... I fell down the stairs while I was pregnant and Tony said this is no good, we'll have to find somewhere more ...

What was it like cohabiting for the first time, because you had so relished your independence at the hostel, and so what was it like setting up home? Was that something you enjoyed?

[1:04:00]

I think I found it very tiring to start with, terribly tiring because immediately I took over the cooking, which I didn't know how to do, really. And, you know, you'd work all day at the Academy and come home, instead of just hanging out with the girls and having all the

food given you, you know, I had to start housekeeping, laundry, you know, and I found it all quite a strain. I did find it very tiring to start with. And I'd ring up my mother and say, look I've got a fish here with stripes, what do I do with it, you know. [laughs] She'd say, well how big is it? [laughs] She said, I think you've got a mackerel. And, you know, I would be ringing up my mother all the time to sort of ask how to do things really. I did find, I think for the first six months I found it really tiring.

Was it just assumed that as the woman in the marriage you would take responsibility for the sort of domestic set-up?

Yes I think so.

And what did you feel about that?

I felt it was what I did. I didn't feel ... I mean I felt that's what women did, really, and Tony had cooked for me before and he just stopped absolutely the moment he was married. [laughs] He's never cooked anything since. No, it was the woman's job really but, you know, I found it was hard work going to the Academy all day and then having to think of food, which I was unused to doing.

Had you thought about the impact that marriage might have on your career as an artist at that stage?

No, I didn't think that at all. I thought we'd be working together as a partnership, you know. I didn't think of it at all. It's only when I had a child it hit me, because I wasn't, you know, Tim was a terribly big baby and I was terribly ripped about, you know, and had to have all operations to tie everything back, you know, so that I could have another child, you know. And I was very ... well I mean I was in pain and I didn't feel at all well for a long time after Tim.

[1:06:30]

So how soon after getting married did you get pregnant?

Well, the Return of Ulysses, which was the date, I was pregnant then, I started to be pregnant.

And what did you feel about being pregnant?

Terribly frightened, in a way. I mean we wanted the baby and we'd sort of, well stopped taking preventatives actually, we wanted a child because Tony's parents wanted one so desperately. But I was very nervous, I mean I didn't even know what a baby wore. I'd never seen a baby, I'd never held a baby in my arms I don't think and I didn't know what clothes they had. I mean I was very nervous about it really.

And who did you talk to about those sorts of things?

My mother of course, and my sister had her baby just before Tim and I remember going home. I used to go home quite a bit, you know, for the weekend to see my parents. No, my mother would say, well look, they've got to have this, that, you know, and ... and then you had nappies that washed, you didn't have disposable nappies so that was a business.

And at that stage as well, how were women prepared for childbirth, what were you told about it, how were you told to prepare for it, what kind of ...

I thought you just had a baby because my mother had both hers at home and because I was so much like my mother I thought you just had it, you know.

Was it explained to you, what was involved, did your mother talk to you about that?

No, not at all. I mean, you know, you just had them as far as I know, knew and then of course that wasn't the case with me really.

So what happened when Tim was due, were you planning to have him at home or did you

...

No, I was going into a sort of private nursing home and the doctor, I was going to the doctor, you know. They'd say, come back to me in six months, you know, no care before. I mean I could have been, you know ... and I was sort of well all through the pregnancy so that you didn't ... you thought oh well, this is what happened and you just went to bed and there was the baby. But then I went to this nursing home and the doctor never arrived and I was in labour for two days trying to get rid of this huge baby, it was nine pounds, and then of course when, you know, there was hardly anyone there when the baby came. A nurse was rushing in and out trying to find a doctor.

Were there any drugs or ...

Nothing at all, I had nothing whatsoever. I had, I mean just ripped me to pieces really. It was, you know, it's not something I even want to remember really. But there was this marvellous baby at the end of it. He was a lovely baby and that was a great compensation, but I was in a lot of pain and misery for a long time after, till I was ... because the first gynaecologist I went to, I mean they left afterbirth in you as well you see and then I had the most appalling haemorrhage when ... I mean the whole thing was a horrible nightmare really.

Is that because of the ... was that common practice then or was that because of the particular doctors that you ...

Oh I think lack of doctors, lack of attention during childbirth at all. I should have gone to a proper hospital but I thought a private would be so nice and cosy, you know.

So how soon were you able to return home after Tim was born?

I can't ... well they returned you home because they didn't know there was afterbirth left in or anything and they kept saying, you know, you shouldn't be so ... you know, of course you're in pain, everybody's in pain, you know. They didn't sort of ... And then I had a tremendous ... we went ... by then we'd taken a house at Hampton Court, the first house from the studios, and Tony was leaving, staying with Henry Moore then I think, you know, he'd started working with Henry Moore, and I had a haemorrhage there in that ... when I came out of hospital with Paul – Tim I mean – then I had a haemorrhage and was rushed to hospital. They wanted to leave me until I'd had another baby without operating, but then I went to a wonderful gynaecologist and he said you'll never have a baby the way you are because you're all out of position. So he did a wonderful operation and put me all together again and I was able to have Paul. Which was, I mean I wanted another child, I didn't want just one.

And so how long did those medical complications last after the birth of Tim? Did that sort of overshadow the first months of his infancy?

[1:11:47]

No he was, I mean ... oh no, once I had the haemorrhage and been and had all the rest of the afterbirth taken out I felt better but I was in pain a lot of the time, you know, and it was a pity really. Although I mean it didn't worry us, you know, I mean it didn't spoil our married life, but you know, walking with a heavy baby would put me in pain because everything was sort of ... Anyway, I don't want to talk about this really, it's a horrid thing.

Did you have any ... were there any support groups at that time, midwives or ...

Nothing at all, nothing at all. I mean after Hampton Court and while I was so ill, I said look, I just can't be left alone with the baby all through the week, so we moved to Much Hadham where we had a gorgeous little cottage and then I had to sort of ... I can't remember, I was put back in place anyway and they said go ahead and, you know, have

another baby if you want. I had to wait two years after the operation for the scar tissue to soften and that's why we have a big gap between our children actually.

What was life like in Much Hadham, can you ...

[1:13:00]

Lovely actually. I mean Tony was working at Henry Moore's. We'd said much earlier on, what should he do. You know, he wanted to get a job and I remember I said go to the top, go to Henry Moore's, don't loiter about with, you know, if you want to help someone, go to the top. So he went to Henry Moore and said can I help you and Henry said, well you should have let me know, you know, you shouldn't just come, but come back in so many months' time and I may have something for you. And he did and he took him on and Tony was still going to the Academy two days a week then I think. And then we had this little cottage and it was idyllic really. It was country life, I loved it, and I adored the baby, you know, my ... And I thought I can't ... it was hard to begin painting. I did some very cubist paintings of the baby, but not many. I think, you know, just having to look after the baby, I thought this life is more important than anything I can do at the moment so I just want to look after this baby.

And how had you felt about leaving the RA?

[1:14:27]

Oh ... inevitable. I think I'd got what I wanted out of the RA anyway. I don't think, you know, I could paint as well at home or by myself, which I was doing anyway at the RA, you know. No, I think it was ... I was ready to leave. I'd had enough of art schools.

And what about Tony, how much was he getting out of the RA and how much did you talk about your sort of experiences?

He was drawing, and drawing from the model, and modelling from the model. I think going to Henry of course opened his eyes enormously and Henry would be so good, he'd help him with the drawing, where the light came from and he'd draw little drawings on Tony's, show him. He was very wonderful, Henry, actually.

What was he like?

[1:15:20]

A lovely man. A natural man, you know, and he liked Tony. And I didn't see so much of him really because he was in Perry Green. Tony used to go up there every day and I used to be left with the baby and the people next door had a baby exactly the same time as Tim and they were ... he was an accountant and she was a vet and they were awfully nice and we made tremendous friends of them. We used to go out every Sunday to the pub next door that did a marvellous lunch and every Sunday we'd take our babies in a carrycot and have our lunch there. It was a very nice life. Reg Lloyd was another artist that lived a little way away, who had a child, had a little girl the same age as Tim as well and they used to come very often and she used to bring the little baby down and we'd have tea together. It was a very happy time.

Were you ... what did you feel about leaving your girlfriends behind as well?

Well by that time they'd all dispersed rather, you know, some had got married. I mean your husband becomes your best friend really after that, you know, and you all disperse. I ... no, you make new friends, you know. I mean I still kept in touch with a lot of them and still have really.

And what about leaving London?

I didn't mind that at all really. I loved ... as long as we were together, you know, I felt I wouldn't mind ... I never minded where we were as long as we were together and then, you know, we had this lovely little cottage and I loved Much Hadham. We used to sort of

... there was a stream round the corner, you could go and paddle and there were fields, we could picnic and we had a nice little garden too.

Who did the gardening?

And put the pram out. I mean it was very happy times, Much Hadham, and I adored the baby of course, the baby for me was the most fantastic thing on earth [laughs], which babies are.

Can you describe the cottage to me – at this stage had you acquired furniture of your own?

[1:17:49]

No, hardly any. No, almost none. It was a furnished cottage, it was, I suppose it was a very ... almost Tudor, little cottages all along the village. And it had been ... an old lady was renting to us. I don't know where she went, she was a very nice old lady and she had very nice furniture, which I put away all the sort of good things in one bedroom and we still had the cat, which was incredible. Tony ... I married the cat – Shuska, Tony's cat – and poor animal used to ... it was so frightened of being moved again it used to follow me all up the village like a dog. It's amazing really.

What about pictures on the wall?

Mm?

Did you hang pictures on the wall?

No. Nothing. We had all her furniture mostly and I can't remember ... the ceilings were so low you could just touch them. It was a very tiny little cottage. And my ... actually, after that my mother-in-law paid for a nurse to be with us because I'd had this operation, so she paid for Miss Pett, I think she was called, who we had to make a little room for her,

it was very tiny, we all lived together and she was a wonderful woman actually. She was ... I cried when she left. [laughs]

How much did she help you with Tim?

She was very good. I mean she would help with the cooking and clearing away. She lived as one of the family. She was a very nice woman and she was very good and helped me bath Tim and let me actually do most of it, you know, she would oversee it. But she was a good nurse. I had one after Paul, who again, my mother-in-law paid for her, was perfectly awful, she wouldn't let me see Paul. She said, oh no, you'll give him infection, you know. I was so glad when she left.

How were you subsisting financially at this stage in your early married life?

Well Tony was ... his father had left him some money or put some money in trust I think.

Because had Tony's father died by this stage?

He died before Tim was born, a few months after we were married. I'm so sorry, he so wanted a grandchild and he was a lovely man, but ...

And how was that for you and Tony, was that ...

Well it was a terrible shock, I think for Tony and I mean it was also a shock for Tony's, well it was difficult sort of for Tony's mother because she had a very big house and Rachel took most of the sort of organising things over and moving her to another big house, but smaller. But then Tony's father at that point had left money for all the children in a trust so we had some cushion, not a lot, but a cushion and Tony was then earning something from Henry Moore. Not a lot again, but I mean we never ... we always said, who's got the pound, you know. [laughs] We weren't extravagant. I never wanted a lot of things, I mean I was happy, I could always make do with what was there, you know. We lived very comfort ... I mean when I say comfortably, we just lived happily really in a small way.

And how much were you and Tony still continuing your conversations about art?

[1:21:49]

All the time, never, never stopped.

And what was the nature of those conversations at that stage in your life?

How to get into abstraction, really. How ... what was happening now. Now we were very conscious of what was happening. *Anatomy of Fear* was happening and it had influenced Tony quite a bit then. Of course Henry Moore influenced Tony. And finding stones and whatnot, and found objects influenced Tony tremendously. And all the time one was discussing where we were, where it was going. It was an ongoing, and still is, dialogue. Which kept me, although I was sort of being a mother and whatnot, it kept me very much in touch with art and the art world and what was happening really. And then after Much Hadham ...

How long were you at Much Hadham for?

About two years I think. We went back and lived in York Lodge, which was another house, which wasn't so nice actually, it was rather a gloomy old Victorian house. We thought of living there and staying there, but then we thought well, it's too near Henry Moore really, it's too much of the influence, we ought to break away. Tony would be associated forever with Henry Moore. So we looked around London then looking for a house and found the one we've got, the stabling block and the old smithy to the big Flitcroft house; Flitcroft built the church in Church Row and built himself the big house to live in while he was building the church I suppose.

Can you describe your house as it was then when you first saw it?

[1:23:57]

Well it was a stable really. It had been, I think two or three rooms had been made over for a gardener probably. So there was a bit of the beginnings of a habitation but we loved the position and it also had a courtyard, Tony said I can put my sculpture out, and it had a big garden actually, which was lovely for Tim. I mean it was ideal because it was five minutes from the centre of Hampstead, it looked ... I mean we had this little country lane right in ... it looked like country. For me it was just being in country still, in those days. Well it still is quite really. What was your question?

Just what it looked like at that stage.

Well it looked ideal, but then of course the inside was ... were haylofts and just rubble, a lot of it. And the Smithsons, who'd been students at the Academy – well Peter had, not Alison – I didn't know them. Tony knew them, they must have left before I came because Tony was there before me. They altered it for us. I mean they made it into a house for us and Alison, in the partnership, was really the inventive one. She had all the ideas of organising the kitchen. The kitchen was the other end of the house. It's altered now, but all the way through they've come back and altered it for us. When we had Paul they built on bedrooms and altered the kitchen and even just before Alison died they put in a new bathroom for us. It had a little room over the garage with a door into the garden, into the back garden on a higher level, there was a kind of piece of earth over which was for years the playroom. Well it started off as my studio but it became the playroom, then the ping-pong room and the train room, so all the kids, mostly from next door, always lived in that room with mine. Which was another happy situation, the neighbours had children the same age as mine so there was always this sort of running between houses for the children, which was very nice.

What appealed to you about the Smithsons' design?

[1:26:29]

Well really I didn't choose them, Tony said let's get the Smithsons, at that point were very avant-garde and, you know, they were friends of Paolozzi's and there were all these sort of

group of people together. I mean Paolozzi was just down the road living with the Morlands; Dorothy Morland ran the ICA years ago, and he had a studio with her, so we saw quite a bit of him. There was Turnbull in Hampstead. And Tony said I want the Smithsons. Tony always knew what was going on much more than I did in a way. I mean he could smell the air, he could smell what was happening, you know, what was exciting and I found that very good because I didn't so much, I tend to be just myself, you know. So he asked the Smithsons to do it and when you think, we were lucky to get that house for so little and we asked if we could just have it even for less and not have the back garden, which is a big garden, and they said no, everybody has to have a quarter of an acre.

Can you remember how much you paid for it then?

Yes I do. 5,000, which seems crazy now doesn't it. But that was a lot for us then. And the Smithsons made a wonderful home really, you know, it's very liveable in and still tiny, it's a cottage, but it's what we've always loved.

What was the specific catalyst for your departure from Much Hadham, why did you both decide that it was time?

Because I suppose ... are you cold?

[End of track 7]

[Track 8]

We're just resuming after a little break. The catalyst for the move back to London – what really made your minds up, what was the ...?

Well, Tony wanted to be ... we thought we'd get back into London for our life really, not to be too influenced or live too near Henry Moore, but Tony was still working with Henry Moore so we wanted to be north London, somewhere in the radius of north London so he could ... We had a funny little Morris, open Morris Minor then, and we looked all round north London and we loved Highgate and we said we'd like to live there and we saw a house which wouldn't have been suitable, and then we heard of this house, that it was being sold up. And the wife of the buyer, who was actually a big property developer, liked us, she was an artist and she liked ... and she said yes, you know, get in there and buy it, so really that's how it worked.

And what do you think Tony had taken away from his time at Henry Moore's – how important had that been?

[0:01:14]

Was incredibly important for him when he was young.

Why?

I think, well just being suddenly ... well, not subjected, but introduced to Henry who was really, I mean then pushing sculpture forward. The simplicity, holes, all the sort of things, and talking to Henry, Henry was terribly generous and I think seeing casting done; they cast bronzes. Just the general atmosphere of new art really, which ... and it was very new for us then. And well, I mean it influenced Tony a lot to begin with. You know, the Woman Waking Up was stone, you know, in the torso and he'd find things like Henry did and of course *The Anatomy of Fear* was going on at the same time. Clatworthy, Meadows, they were doing sort of animals, you know, claws and crabs and things and he was

influenced by that too and did a lot of little balls to start with. I mean Tony was trying to find his way too then really. And it wasn't till ... I mean he was doing a lot of figurative things then. Man Holding His Foot. Mostly very much in the manner – not the manner really – but in the way Henry found things, found objects and ... And I think Henry was very encouraging and helped him.

And what about holidays at that period in your life? Do you remember any significant little breaks you had away as a family?

Well a lot, we went to stay with Tony's mother who had a big house in the country. I mean she moved to another big house which was ... she couldn't condense all the furniture immediately, you know, it was difficult.

And what was that like for you?

Very nice. She adored Tim, I mean she ... I mean if I'd never done anything before that she would have loved me for having Tim. I mean Tim was a lovely baby, he was a very big sort of rosy baby and a very happy baby and of course she wanted to get her hands on him as much as she could, which was very nice actually. I've always got on very well with my mother-in-law. You know, she had a great sense of humour and she's very like Tony actually.

And at that stage was Tony involved at all with the baby and with child rearing or was that very much your job?

No, he ... he didn't ... he didn't change the baby very much. I mean he would ... he was very much with the baby, I mean he'd be nursing the baby and feeding the baby and I mean we were always sort of all together so that the baby was laughing at Tony as much as he was laughing at me really. I don't think he ... he certainly didn't wash nappies. But he was very much there as a father. I mean my father was never there because he was out all day, but when you're home a lot of the day, you know ... I mean Tim used to work in the studio a lot with Tony; lifting things, you know, sticking bits of wood under things and

making little sculptures with him. He always used to go and have a lump of clay in the studio and I used to put an old apron round him and he loved that, he loved being with Tony, which was nice.

And so with your move back to London, how was ... was Tony intending to start work or ...

[0:05:35]

Tony worked in the garage. It was a long, you know, we have a long, low building which of course was a long line of stables and I mean they had the carriages in there in the olden days and the end part was a garage and Tony worked in that garage for ages, he made *Early One Morning*. And at that time Tony was really trying to break away from Henry, rethink art. He'd been ... I think he'd been to America by that time.

Before we get to that point, when had Tony's involvement at St Martins begun – can you remember if he started teaching ...

Very soon, very soon after he stopped working at Henry's, because Frank Martin had taken over the sculpture department and of course Frank knew Tony at the Academy, you know, they worked together, and he asked Tony to come and work there.

Can you describe Frank Martin to me, what was he like?

He was, well he was a wonderful man really. He'd done a wonderful war service and been terribly brave, you know, and I always thought, you know, we all sort of asked him his advice about things, you know, we thought he was ... I mean he was a generation older than us and was going bald and looked very mature, you know, he looked ... And he had four children and ... I think he was like a father figure a little bit for us, which ... he was a very nice man. Although he turned out not to be such a good father, funnily enough. But that's another story. But anyway, he was very good at organising. I mean he could organise the sculpture department and cope with all the ghastliness of being a head of

department, which Tony didn't have to do. I mean he was wonderful with that. So Tony could go in and do his thing, teaching.

And when you returned to London at that time in the late fifties, were you getting involved in the social life in London? You've mentioned the artists living in Hampstead.

[0:08:11]

Yes, because very quickly we found out Paolozzi was down the road at the Morlands and we knew the Morlands, her son. When did we come and live in Hampstead? We came in 1954 I think. And the Smithsons and Nigel Henderson – have you heard of him?

Can you explain who he was?

He was a photographer. And they did the Festival of Britain: Paolozzi, Alison and Peter, Nigel Henderson were in a little group and because Alison and Peter were doing – and Tony had known them at the Academy, well Peter anyway – because they were doing our house a lot and Paolozzi would come up, he was just a little way down Froggnal, and we'd all meet up really. So we got to know, very quickly you got to know the artists and through Dorothy Morland you went to the ICA, which was very exciting for us in those days.

What was that like?

Well you had fights there and people would scream from the audience and Ivon Hitchens would sort of rush down and punch somebody. It was all [laughs], all for us it was all, you know, very, this was life really.

What was Dorothy Morland like?

She was a lovely woman. Very sort of sexy woman in a way, even in an older woman she ... it sort of just, it came out of her somehow. I think all the men adored her, I think that's

why Paolozzi worked there really. And she ran the ICA with Julie Lawson who was very much in, well in the swim of things then.

And what was Paolozzi like?

[0:10:19]

Paolozzi? Well he was great fun then. He had an enormous sense of humour and he would imitate everybody and he was great fun. He got a little ... he left ... he got slightly bitter after Tony became well known. He became, I think jealous of Tony and they fell away then, people like Paolozzi and Turnbull, we didn't see so much of them. Then you made new friends. I mean our great friends really were our next door neighbours who had their children the same time. We've just been up to see them in Scotland, which is very nice, we still keep in touch.

Because how much at that stage were there rivalries that you were ...

There were ...?

Rivalries or a sense of competition?

I think there was always rivalries in art, you know, there's always jealousies. I'm sure there still is. I think it's just human nature. I think probably in every walk of life, I don't think it's just art really.

And so when did you become pregnant again with Paul?

[0:11:33]

1958 I had him, so it was probably '57 when I became pregnant. I had to wait a long time, I mean it was a nuisance really because 1958 Paul was born, well I mean all these things, they waited three years saying try and have a baby before we operate, and I didn't, then

they operated and they said wait two years before ... to let the scar tissue soften, in those days. Then we tried for two years and said we're not going to have another baby so we'll buy a big dog for Tim and we bought a big Labrador and the same month we started Paul. I think I relaxed and sort of said, well we're not having a baby. And then I had a Caesarean with Paul, which was much better because he said if you're going to have big babies it could be the baby the next time and not you, you know, and sort of deform his head or something. So I had a Caesarean which was peanuts after having, you know, one felt well as soon as the scars healed really, one felt well, you know.

So who did you have advising you?

Peel.

Who was Peel?

He was the Queen's gynaecologist then, who was well, a wonderful gynaecologist actually.

How did you find him?

By asking which was the best from the doctor in Much Hadham actually, we said which is the best gynaecologist, Tony said in England, and he said well Peel is the best, so we went to him. And he did a good job on me because after Paul I was, you know, really very well after I'd had Paul.

And how did you cope having two little ones at home?

Well, because there was a fairly big gap you see, seven years, Tim was at school a lot of the time.

Where was Tim going to school?

He went ... well first of all he went to a little Montessori school until he was five and then he went to the Hall School.

Why did you choose a Montessori school for him?

It just had a reputation I heard from someone and I went and saw the school and liked the woman who was running it, so it was easy really. It was just a little way, a little walk away and I think my neighbours' children followed suit and sent their children and then we went to the Hall, which was quite a big, well prep school in London, a day school.

How did you choose that school?

Because of the very good reputation. I mean you have to ask around, you know, just as my sons are doing now, you know, you ask everybody and find out what's happening. And it was a very good school and then you see it wasn't so difficult having a baby with a child, you know, that was sensible and could ...

And how different was it second time round?

Much easier, much, much easier. I mean we were settled then in the house and you knew what was happening, you know, it was ... you knew, you were an experienced mother let's say. And they were both easy babies I must say, I both had two fairly easy babies. And ...

And at this stage were you completely consumed with mothering or was there any time ... you mentioned that you had done some work.

[0:15:28]

Well you see I was doing a lot ... because Tony was working in the house and in the garage which was part of the house, I used to choose his colours. He'd got into the steel stuff then and I would choose his colours and I would paint them by hand, I mean physically paint them then, you know, which I wouldn't do now.

How did you do that with the baby?

The baby was in the pram or, you know, be watching you, sitting in a, well mostly in the pram in the garden or, you know, staggering around. I mean you'd do it when he was asleep or when he could, you know, be put in some place.

And what was that like working on Tony's pieces instead of your own?

Well it was great. I mean I knew, I knew that I couldn't hand my children over to someone to look after them, I didn't want to do that. I mean for me the most important thing really is human life, I felt at that time – well I still do – and I felt I had to give all my creativity to Tony. I thought one of us has got to get there so it had better be Tony at the moment. And I mean we talked a lot, I gave him a lot of ideas then, you know.

Like what – what did you talk about?

Well I said look at music, why is music such an abstraction, how can they get into abstraction, you know. And we thought of the timescale in music and he started doing Early One Morning then, going along the whole pole with intervals. And then we said, you know, you get two different themes blending in music and he did Month of May then with different themes going, you know, this all talking about this, you know and ... I mean I had lots of ideas that I could give him and he had lots of ideas to add to it, you know, and we fed each other all the time, you know, we would talk about why we could do this and no, I didn't ever have any regrets. I didn't feel jealous at all actually, we felt I wanted children and that was my job really to ... It's very hard, I find it's very, very hard for women. When I see our secretary with a little boy and knowing she's going to send him to school with a cold, you know, because she's got to come to work and ... you know, and having to rush back and trying to fit two lives, it's a great strain on women I think really, to have to cope. Because children are not just things you can put down and put away, I mean they have a ... they're little people and they're determined to live and they're

going to demand from you. They're amazing, the sort of force of life really. So I was very happy to be then a carer.

At the end of the fifties you and Tony travelled to the United States for the first time, how did that come about?

[0:18:52]

Tony won some sort of ... I think he won some ... I can't remember, what did he do? I don't remember. Did he have a show or did he win something? I know in 1959 we first crossed the Atlantic.

Well can you remember, if you can't remember why, can you remember what sorts of discussions preceded the trip – what did you think about the prospect of going to America?

We knew then that Paris was dead and all the good art was coming out of New York, America.

Well what had you heard about America and what had you seen? Can you remember?

Well I think Tony had been by himself and had met Kenneth Noland in America and got on incredibly well with him, better ... he could talk about art to Ken in a way he'd never been able to talk to people in England.

What was that? In what way? Can you describe that?

I think just the sheer expansion of the canvas, the canvas's surface, colour, simplicity and of course Helen was revolutionising painting then by painting on un-primed canvas for the first time.

Helen Frankenthaler?

Yes. And she was pouring and using it like watercolour on ... And that was again, I mean Morris Louis took from her and poured ... I mean everything was happening, you know, people were using materials in a completely different way and the whole thing was open, it was really open in New York and Tony found that terribly exciting. And I think it must have ... I can't remember why we went together, whether Tony had a show. I don't think he had a show. Well anyway ...

Can you remember what your ... what you felt about going and taking your little boys to America, what did that feel like?

I didn't, I left them at home and I hated doing that, but I'd had by then a cleaner who was very good and brought her little girl a lot. She came and she said - she knew the children, they knew her very well because she came often - and she said she would live in the house and take care of the children. I hated leaving Paul because he was only a little baby and I mean I really loathed doing it, but Tony begged me to go and it was - well I'm glad I did in a way - and I think she was very reliable, this woman.

So how long did you go for, your first trip - can you remember?

Oh, three weeks.

And so, what was that like, arriving in New York? Can you remember your first impressions?

Oh, amazing. I mean, you know, all the skyscrapers, the noise, drains were blowing up and ... [laughs] This extraordinary heating in New York and, you know, the drains steam and one blew up. I thought, oh my God, this is a dangerous city. But apparently it's the only one that had ever blown up. And we met Clement Greenberg.

What was he like?

[0:22:27]

A bit scary.

Why?

Well he was, (a) he was very pedantic. I mean what he said was law and he didn't like me.

Why?

Because he wanted to be, as Tony said, an artist's wife manqué. He didn't like the artists' wives and he thought I was very English and tight. Actually, I was desperately shy and didn't say a word.

What did you think of him? What did you think of ...

Bit scary, I mean you know, I thought well, you know, he's ... well not so much scary, but I was careful, you know, with what I said.

What did you think of his ideas at that stage?

Well you know, he was, really I didn't know his ideas so much, but I knew that he was the guru of the whole of the New York art scene at that point so that one was rather sort of worshipping in a way. I didn't really know what his ideas were, I mean I learnt that later.

Can you remember where you met him for the first time?

At his apartment I think.

What was that like?

Lovely apartment, a gorgeous apartment with wonderful pictures on the walls. And he was married then with Jenny, Jenny Greenberg, and his son was there I think and his son was schizophrenic actually, his son by his first wife, and his son was very rude to me and I thought there's something wrong with this boy so I didn't bite, you know. And Jenny was very upset and she apologised to me and I said, look that's alright, you know, don't worry, he's got a problem, you know. And he had of course. But ...

What was Jenny Greenberg like?

Nice, we're still friends with her, she's very American for me then.

What does that mean?

Well she was rather mannered and she was a writer, she wrote I think, she wrote plays. And she seemed very confident, which I now know she isn't at all, but she seemed so for me then. Of course I was sort of slightly sort of shy really with all these sort of new happenings. Clement was quite a sort of a, what do you say, what do you mean, you know, why aren't you talking? That kind of thing, you know, which was rather terrifying really. So the first meeting didn't go down terribly well, I mean he didn't like me and never terribly liked me.

How did you know he didn't like you?

Because he told other friends and they told me, which was ...

And what did you think of that?

I thought well, tough luck, you know, if you don't like me that's your problem and not mine, I'm not going to worry about it really. And he did actually always ask me my opinion if he did anything, which was funny. I mean, should I come and give that lecture, should I come to England? And I was always trying to tell him the truth, you know, that he should or he shouldn't. And it's funny that he should always turn to me to get advice

and yet he would like to have got rid of me out of Tony's life because he thought ... they were all in Reikian therapy in New York.

Can you explain what that is?

[0:26:25]

Well, it was a sort of a group of analysts who believed that you shouldn't have intimate relationships, you should break all marriages, you should have as many affairs as you could possibly have and all children should leave home and go and live in his dormitories, you know. It was really a very sick group of analysts who became ... I mean they were had up in the end I think, you know, they were stopped. But Clem went to them and believed that all marriages should be broken, that they were unhealthy, human relationships of that sort were unhealthy.

Who else of that crowd was involved?

They were Noland, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, I don't think Helen went to there, but ... I don't know if Louis did.

And how openly did they talk about these sorts of issues?

Well Clem did a lot, really. And I mean Jules sent his children to this therapist and so did Ken and they broke away from their parents and lived ... I think it was the most appalling situation really.

And can you remember how you responded to sort of Clem's discussions at the time?

I ... well, you know, what could you say, I didn't say much actually because he would have argued with me and, you know, he thought ... I mean he did this much more to other people about me rather than to me, you know. So ...

And how did Tony cope with this?

Well he didn't believe in it, you know, he just thought this was a fairly sick situation. And I think we were so happily married that it wouldn't have altered his take really, and I think Clem really was sort of very nervous about wives, that they were having too much influence on the artist when he wanted to be that influence, so that he was sort of, wanted to be the only person in the artist's life. He was quite a sick man really. And we all got along, I mean he had to put up with me, I was there. And we got on terribly well with Ken, I mean ...

Can you tell me who you're referring to?

Ken Noland.

And can you tell me about ... can you remember meeting him for the first time – what was he like?

[0:29:18]

He was a charmer. He was ... and had an enormous sense of humour and he soon broke through my, what they all thought was terribly English because we all got on so well and used to laugh ourselves silly. And when we, of course by this time, this is when we went to live in Bennington, we took the children – I don't exactly ... wait a minute, I think ... 1963. Well Ken had met Tony and had really got on with Tony and Tony with him, they really gelled. And he rang us in the middle of the night and said, would you come to Bennington, take over the sculpture department. And Tony shook me awake and said would you like to go to America? And I said, oh yes, yes lovely and went back to sleep, so he said yes. [laughs] So we went, we all went. I mean we packed up the home and we rented our house in Hampstead to Marlene Dietrich's daughter who had two little children I think. And so we just left the house as it was and piled all, everything we didn't want – I don't know what we did with it – piled it in the garage or did something. And went and hired Cold Spring Farm, which was an old farmhouse just outside Bennington, rented by

an old pastor and his wife and they were going south for the winter or something, probably for the sun, and we had this lovely old house very near Ken Noland's. And of course with that we all became friends. Jules was there, Jules Olitski and his wife Andy, his first wife, second wife? Second wife. Who was a lovely person and they were all teaching at Bennington. Ken not so much, but Jules was painting in ... in the painting department, Tony's in the sculpture, and we, then we all just joined together, talked about art every evening, went to each other's studios. I wasn't painting but I went to their studios and learnt so much by seeing the way they were working.

Can we rewind a little bit to that very first trip to New York in '59. What did you think about these new very abstract paintings – had you seen anything like them before? It's ...

[0:32:10]

No. Well I mean only in books, you know. No, I thought it was terrific. I thought it was wonderful.

Why?

Because everything was open, suddenly new materials were being used, new ways of using materials and the whole new concept of abstraction. It seemed, I mean the whole thing was just food really and you hadn't seen anything like it, it was terribly exciting, you believed in the people that were doing it, their sincerity. I mean a lot of art was kitsch and not ... you didn't want to do that, you know. But you believed in these artists and they were really struggling. I mean Ken would almost have a nervous breakdown before he started a picture, you know, they were really fighting to get through to things and we were all in it together, talking about it.

So when you left America after that initial trip, the first three weeks, what did you take away with you?

Just excitement of New York, you know, the whole thing. That's where it's at, you know, now it's left Paris, London is way behind, that's where it's at and that's where you wanted really to learn.

And how did that impact on Tony's art and your conversations and the ...

Tony's art, well Clem said to Tony – and this was very clever of him, I mean Clem was brilliant in point of fact and had a wonderful eye – he said to Tony, if you want to change your art, change your materials. And Tony at that point went to steel, you know, and that's when we all started, we came home talking about the way to use steel.

Why did he choose steel do you think?

[0:34:12]

I think because he'd seen David Smith's work.

And what did you think of that when you saw it?

David Smith's work? I thought it was wonderful.

What did you like about it?

The fact that he could work flat on the ground. I mean he would just throw a piece of steel, assemble it on the ground and weld it and lift it up. I mean he was ... of course Giacometti – not Giacometti ...

Gonzales?

Yes, Gonzales had started in steel and suddenly Tony felt the ease of welding and the availability of all these pieces of steel. I think he was influenced by David Smith certainly and saw steel as a way through. So that's why I think he went to steel.

Can you remember him making his first abstract piece?

I do indeed.

Can you tell me about that?

He'd made ... do you know – the one with the circle. Oh, what's the name of it?

Twenty-four Hours?

Twenty-four Hours. He'd welded it together and said where do I go? It was flat. I said lift it up and that's it, don't touch it. And he did and he said, are you sure? I said I'm sure, leave it. Leave it, leave it. And that was it, that was the first one. So that was his first breakthrough.

Can you remember why that piece was painted?

Because it had a vague ... in the beginning of the ... I mean on the steel as it was, there was a vague circle that something must have been placed on it, but there was the image there of the circle and that's why one painted it, you know, Tony said, you know, I'll paint it, and we did.

How did you choose the colour for it?

From a chart. One would say, does that go, does that go? Yes, that's the one, you know.

And can you remember showing it to people, can you remember people's responses?

I remember Michael Fried coming into the courtyard and Tony had done quite a few sculptures then, and jumping up and down with excitement. You know, Michael Fried really saw it for the first time and said this is wonderful, you know, and this started

Michael Fried really loving everything Tony's done and being a great help in the studio too.

Were there any other of your peers and colleagues whose opinion you respected in London at the time or ...?

[0:37:16]

Well Tony then was teaching at St Martins and I think he was talking to the students then who were of course all working after Tony in steel, and people like Phillip King, who was quite a mature student. I don't remember anybody, the older lot at that point had somehow got jealous, you know, they didn't like what ... Tony was going ahead of them and they fell off, in a way, which is a pity. But that's ...

And what did you feel about this major development in Tony's work?

Well I was so much of a part of it really that it was almost a part of me as well as Tony, you know, we were ... so much talked about what to do and how to get there that I mean I was completely going along with everything he did and helping, encouraging, giving ideas, you know, we were just working together really. I thought it was wonderful.

[End of track 8]

[Track 9]

Before you made the move to America in '63, Tony had a big exhibition in London, the first really big exhibition of his work, at the Whitechapel. Can you remember the preparations for the show?

Well, he'd made the sculpture. No I don't, I mean the preparations were just perfectly normal ones, you know, a truck came and took the sculpture and that was it really. I don't know if he ... did he have Pat? I'm not sure that he had Pat then, I think he had Charlie Hendy. No, I don't really remember. I remember the sort of going into the Whitechapel and ...

Because ...

... how wonderful it looked really. It was ... And Bryan Robertson was doing it then, you know.

Can you explain who Bryan Robertson was?

Sorry?

Can you explain who Bryan Robertson was for the machine?

Bryan Robertson was the, well the director. I don't know what you'd call him, the head of the Whitechapel. And he was ... well he was a wonderful man really but he procrastinated and he promised Tony the show and then Tony got it all ready and then they went out to lunch and he went to the bathroom and came back and said, I'm going to put your show off. And Tony nearly had a breakdown, I mean put it off for so many months. But that was Bryan, you know, he even put off his own funeral. [laughs] He was late for his funeral. But of course it came about in the end and it was a great success, it was the beginnings of Tony sort of really being recognised as a sculptor, which was all very exciting then.

Do you remember reactions to the show, specific reactions or ...

Well a tremendous lot in the papers. I mean it was written up, it was very exciting really. He had write ups and people were asking him to come and talk and, you know, it was really as the sort of young people are today, it was a break, it changed sculpture and it was, is it sculpture or is it just nothing or is it, you know, the new sculpture. And now it seems of course so accepted that it was hard to realise how very avant-garde it was then.

And how confident were you at the time as a sort of couple in this new direction that Tony had taken?

We were quite convinced, I mean totally convinced that that was the right thing to do. Very confident that that was the way to go.

And what about your respective families – what did they think of this new show and radical new sculpture?

Well my family of course were up in Sutton Coldfield so they didn't really ... I don't think any of them knew what Tony was doing at all, really. I think they just sort of went along with the fact that everybody else seemed to be sort of talking about it, but I don't think they would really know what it was about.

And what about Tony's family?

Well I mean Tony's family really, both our families, neither of them would know. Well, Tony's mother would only read the cuttings of the newspaper to read his name, rather. But no, I think it passed them by. They were very happy that he was getting so much recognition, but art-wise, they were both quite unable to understand it I think. And so ... I mean they were just happy really that he was being recognised and proud of him that he was in the paper, you know.

You've described how the sort of decision was made to go to America, but what were your sort of personal ... what was your personal response to the idea of moving to Bennington?

[0:04:31]

Well I said okay, let's do it. If we're all together I don't mind. You know, if I had to leave the children then I would have been very, very worried. But we all went and it was a great adventure for all of us.

And at that time had you a sense of time frame, did you know how long you were going out there for?

We ... I think it was a winter to start with, you know, the whole winter period. And then of course there was the summer. We went for about two years in all, but I mean really we'd have stayed there in some ways. We loved it.

Why, in what ways?

Well, we skied every afternoon, you know, all through the winter we'd go up to Prospect. The children came out of school at about two thirty in America and we'd throw the skis in the car and go straight up to the mountain and ski all afternoon and it was great fun. But we were very worried about Tim's schooling at that point because he was coming up to the change of school, to Common Entrance or whatever you called it then, where you went on to your big school, and he was going to the village school where the other professors' children were going, but it was two years behind the English system. So Tim was really doing everybody's homework for them and freewheeling, you know. And we knew that he wouldn't get into a decent English school if we left him there and we were worried about that. And Paul was only young you see, he didn't matter so much about his immediate change of school, and that's why we came, we thought we should go back to England.

What else did you enjoy about your time in Bennington? How, for example, the extremes of the climate compared to our temperate climate in England – how did you cope with that?

Well it was a wonderfully cold snowy winter, the whole winter, which was wonderful. You all wore very thick boots, you had padded clothing and we had a very ... I mean we had central heating in Cold Spring Farm so it was lovely, and big log fires. And I think it was great fun all learning to ski, which we hadn't done before. And Paul ... Tim now is a wonderful skier, you know, he really went on and of course skis in America a lot. But I think also the excitement, well of course that was wonderful really and of course you got stuck in the car and you had to have snow chains on your cars or, you know, you skidded into the ditch. And wonderful, a great sort of truck came every day and scooped out your drive, which was marvellous. They did it automatically, they sort of freed you from snow. It was great, great. And of course every evening we used to meet up pretty well at one of our houses, either ours or Ken's or Jules. And Andy was, his second wife, was a lovely woman and a marvellous cook and she would sort of swap with me doing dinners. And also being in each other's, you know, the studios, wonderful. To see Ken paint and how he organised his studio. He was very generous with the way he was painting, he didn't keep anything secret, you know.

Can you describe that to me a bit more – how was he painting?

[0:08:19]

Well I mean he was painting flat to start with, not up on an easel, he was painting flat, either on the floor or on trestles. And he was painting on raw canvas. And with very liquid paint and then I discovered acrylic for the first time, I saw acrylic being used, which, well I suppose started with Liquitex, but you know, you could pour it, you could do anything with it really. And Jules was painting very much in the same way then, he wasn't painting with impasto paint, it was very thin paint when we were there. He was really being influenced by Ken a lot and Helen. And Helen used to come up and Larry Poons and Frank Stella. We all used to meet up, you know, in the weekends.

What was Helen like, or what is Helen like?

She was, well she's a very poorly person now, you know, she's very ... she's not seeing anyone. She was lovely. I mean my first show in New York at Acquavella Gallery, which was very exciting, she gave me a party afterwards, which was very kind of her, in her studio, which I thought was very generous of her. She was sweet, she was lovely, fun, great sense of humour.

Did she talk about painting?

No, not a lot. But I've sort of been in her studio and see how she's done it, you know.

How did she work?

Very much with the hand and the arm. She would move the paint very much as a gesture. She always said it's in my wrist and in a way that's how she put her paint on. She didn't ... she was very spontaneous in a, sort of hit and miss in a bit of a way, but most times she hit, you know. And she'd move it with a sponge and she had a great sense of colour and taste really, and of course Clem looked at her work a lot, she was one of his protégés. She relied on his eye, they all relied on Clem's eye actually.

What do you mean?

Well I mean he would come to people's studios and say, yeah, nah, yeah, you know. [laughs] And you either sort of thought what's wrong with that, or yeah, so we want that, so okay. He had a wonderful eye really and he would judge which painting was good, which was bad, which to cut. I mean there was a lot of cutting of painting going then, which I'd never seen before. I'd only ever seen working on a stretched canvas and that was it, that was your picture. But they were painting on the floor, rolls of canvas sometimes on the floor and they would crop in where the picture was. And I mean I suppose the impressionists were doing that with landscape, they were sort of cropping bits

of landscape. You know, they weren't trying to paint with the golden cut, you know, they were cropping just bits any ... bits of landscape and painting it really in a sense. Well Clem would come and crop with them. He would tell them to cut it there, cut that off, make it smaller. That was his creativity really in the studio and everybody went along with it.

And what did you think of his involvement and his approach?

I thought he had a wonderful eye in the studio. And at that time I thought a wonderful approach, yes. It was only after, as I got into art more myself I realised that there were other ways to do it, which he probably wouldn't have approved of. But you have to keep going.

And what about Larry Poons, what was ...?

[0:12:46]

Well Larry was great. He would come up, try and make sculpture with the studios and ... mostly trying to make sculpture because he had the materials there with Tony. And he was painting, again, wonderfully. Throwing paint and, I mean that's something I never thought of, you know. I mean all these ways of doing things were so new for me. I mean I wasn't painting but I was there all the time and looking and learning and I think, you know, you learn so much the way ... Ken would let you put a bit of paint on his picture for him, you know, and whatnot, just to ... And I mean you learnt so much. It lasted me.

Did you paint any pictures for Ken or were you ...

Well we mustn't say it, but yes, yes we did.

And when that happened, was there much ...

I mean he'd choose the colour and he would draw it, but you'd filled it in, you know.

And did you ... was there much ... was that on a regular occasion or was that ...

No, just sometimes, as the mood hit us, you know. Oh come on, have a go, you know.

[laughs] It was all very, very free and wonderful really.

And what about Frank Stella, what sort of part did he play?

[0:14:18]

He was very shy and didn't come up so often actually, but David Smith came.

What was David Smith like?

Big bear of a man. Really very sweet actually. We went up to his place in the mountains one day and he was sweet with the children. He was very good with children. He called me into the kitchen and said, 'Come on, let's have a glass of champagne. Don't tell the others'. [laughs] He didn't want to give everybody champagne, but I thought that was sweet of him.

What was his place like?

A lovely old kind of American farmhouse, with a big open fire and a veranda and then of course his studio. There were all these old buildings with a great hill going down with all his sculptures going down, with all his sculptures ranged down the hill which was I think very ... inspired Tony a lot, you know.

And what was his, David Smith's attitude to Tony as an energetic and very radical new sculptor?

Suspicious. [laughs] And I think a little bit wary and jealous perhaps. You know, he didn't like these young puppies coming up biting his heels.

What did you talk about with him? Did you talk about ...

Oh, art. Anything that was happening really. Just ordinary conversation, I mean nothing ... other people, you know.

Did he ever talk to Tony about Tony's own sculpture?

Not really I don't think, but Tony would remember more about that. It was a more sort of general conversation, you know, about drink, girls, whatever. He'd divorced his first wife then I think, or his second wife too, he was living alone. It was very lonely up there and he sort of ran after you when you were going sort of trying to stop you going, he was sort of lonely really. American ... America can be very lonely because you don't have neighbours in the sense you have them in England. Well not in Bennington. All the houses are very separate, you know, in their own land and you don't go walks in America. I don't know why, I mean I went walks when we were at Cold Spring Farm and all these huge dogs from all round would sort of rush up and come with me which was ... [laughs] all trying to sort of be with me, all longing for human companionship. But no, you didn't go walks, you didn't walk unless you were just on your own land, but you never had the kind of meeting of people you have in England. You either invited them to your house or you didn't see them really.

And how often was Tony teaching at Bennington at that stage?

[0:17:33]

A few days a week. They gave him a studio there and of course he broke his leg very badly so

How did that happen?

Ski-ing. He was ski-ing downhill quite fast and a child cut in front of him and he had to sort of swerve and broke his leg very ... and I was down in the little place where we ... the little restaurant at the foot of the mountain and they sort of called out on a loudspeaker that Anthony Caro was up on the mountain with a broken leg. And I started to run up the mountain, they said, no, no, no, we go and get him. So they brought him down on a stretcher and just dumped him in the back of my car and said, 'Take him to hospital'. And he was in agony. So I went straight to the hospital and he had to have a plate put in, you know, it was a really dirty break. So that stopped him ... well he went on sculpting but he got other people to help him then, he'd have to point out, you know, do that, put that there.

Had he worked with assistants before this stage?

Yes. He's always had assistants. Not always, no, not when he was in Hampstead. When he got a studio in Loudon Road he had someone called Charlie Hendy. But he used to send his work to a little metalworking factory in – was it West End Lane? I don't know. But anyway, just near us and the young boy who's always given – and Charlie Hendy worked there – and the young boy who was always given Tony's work to do was Pat Cunningham. And one day Pat Cunningham arrived at the door and said I've given up the job at the factory, can I work for you, and that was it.

Can you explain who Pat is for the machine?

[0:19:30]

Pat Cunningham, well he came to Tony when he was eighteen I think and he was a young Irish boy then and worked at the factory and has worked for Tony ever since and he's now fifty-eight I think, so he's now really very, very experienced in putting up shows. He's very, very good at everything technical, really quite ... he'd have been a really good engineer if he'd had the training. Any more?

So who was working with Tony in Bennington as his assistant at that point when Tony broke his leg – can you remember?

Jon Isherwood I think. I think probably Willard Boepple. Jim Wolfe. I think there were all these young sculptors who I'm not sure whether Jon Isherwood – no, he couldn't have been there then – I think Willard and Jim Wolfe, who were young sculptors then.

And so were you visiting the studio as much as you had? Were you as involved in Tony's studio life as much as you had been in London?

Well yes, we were there all the time, you know. Ken was very kind, he gave us an old car of his so we were, you know, I was driving most places with, you know, the children and whatnot. Yes, I've always been very involved with it all. And we had more time there in a sense. I don't know why it seemed freer because I didn't have any help out there at all, but it seemed to be more relaxed in a way because we were on holiday in some sort of way. Had no other responsibilities. America.

And so were you ever homesick?

Mm?

Were you ever homesick?

No. Not really. I mean I would like to have ... I mean I wrote to my parents a lot. I'd like ... no, I wasn't homesick in the sense that I wished I, you know, I'd like to have been home, but I wanted to keep in touch. You know, I was worried about my parents rather, you know, if they were alright. In fact we loved it so much, as I say we'd have stayed in America had it not been for Tim. And I think I'm glad we didn't stay in America now because I think everything changed, you know. It's a very changing situation. We thought it was forever and it just hasn't been, you know, everybody splits up and everybody gets divorced. Perhaps we should have got divorced, I don't know.

What was so special about that community, that community of artists in Bennington at that time?

Because we were all at the same stage of development and they were all trying to push forward and I think everybody needed the friendship and support of each other. I mean Ken was very lonely before we came and we kind of adopted him, you know, we were always together. Jules and Andy, Andy was a sweet woman and was a great friend, you know, and Jules was always slightly competitive with ... the two painters were slightly competitive. But not Tony of course, because Tony was doing something different. But really they were very good days.

Have you ever had a comparable situation in London to that sort of artistic community?

No, not really. No. I think London, artists tend to ... I suppose St Martins, which I wasn't with at all because I never went to St Martins, I think probably that was something similar for Tony, but not for me. So I don't really know.

Was Tony, do you remember Tony exhibiting his work at all from that period?

[0:24:02]

The Whitechapel.

Do you remember any shows after that, that stick out in your mind?

Well, after the Whitechapel Kas took him on, Kasmin.

Can you explain who he is?

Kasmin Gallery. John Kasmin had a gallery in Bond Street, a wonderful gallery and he started ...

Why was it wonderful?

Well, the space, the light. He started it with Sheridan Dufferin who financed it and they were co-partners and after the Whitechapel, or even before the Whitechapel, I think he asked Tony to show there and that was when he showed Prairie and work like that.

And what was that like, what was it like having Kasmin as a dealer? What was he like?

Oh, he's always such fun. [laughs] Well, just he introduced us to people and he was a very good dealer insofar as he would let the artist do what he liked putting up the show and he would put on the music they liked and give them a glass of wine and disappear while they put the show up. He was very good like that. But he was a very good dealer too, you know. He introduced a lot of buyers. Although Tony didn't sell very much then. The first show he didn't sell anything at the Hayward and he put them all in trust for the children and myself. He said, well if I can't sell them, I'm going to keep them, and I'm glad he has because now I have Carriage and all wonderful pieces that I can live on hopefully if anything happened. So he showed at Kasmin's and he showed at ... where did he show? Hayward.

Before we get to that stage, were you visiting New York much when you were in Bennington? Were you coming down from Vermont at all?

[0:26:20]

Quite a ... I went, I went there with another friend – and I've forgotten her name – but we went there for the weekend I remember, just to for fun to look around and buy things, you know, that we hadn't got. We stayed in the old Chelsea Art Club and I know we went into the little diner opposite because you only had a bed and breakfast – or no, you didn't have break ... you just had your room at the Chelsea Art Club. We went over to this little restaurant to have breakfast and there was Allen Jones sitting there. [laughs] So we had a long chat. He was obviously staying there too because all the artists used to stay in the old Chelsea Art Club.

Can you explain who Allen Jones is?

Mm?

Can you explain who Allen Jones is, for the machine?

Where he lives?

No, who he is.

Allen Jones is a, he's a very well known painter. He paints very figurative sort of paintings of strange dancing figures and whatnot and he's an RA of course. But then he was not so well known. But it was fun suddenly seeing another Englishman in New York.

And because he was more associated with the pop artists of the period than with those pursuing sort of a pure abstraction, I wonder what did you think of the pop scene because that was obviously very big in New York.

[0:27:53]

One thought that it was a sort of bad movement, not going to last, which of course it lasted incredibly well. Not pure art. We were a bit sort of sniffy about it, you know, we thought art had to be pure and not about anything that's at all literary or to do with stories, literature. So really we looked down on it rather, being then very superior in our knowledge that we were right. But in point of fact it's lasted a very long time and had a very big influence on art. I mean if you go to the Jeff Koons now at the Serpentine, you'll still ... it's still right there, you know. So it's ... we were wrong. I think you can ... when you're young you have very much more rigid ideas of what is right and what is wrong. You slowly mellow as you get older and realise there's room for a lot of other things in life than just the things you're experiencing and doing.

Because it's interesting that you had been a figurative painter, very resolutely figurative until this point and very accomplished, and I wonder how easy that was for you to sort of relinquish ...

What figurative ...

The figuration.

Not difficult at all. It's as you're thinking at that moment and I don't think I've ever relinquished totally figurative. I mean that is totally – I'm pointing to something on the wall which is totally abstract I would say, and another painting which has elements of figuration in it. But I mean I've never found any difficulty whatsoever in either. I mean difficulty in doing the painting but not in knowing what I wanted to do, you know. So it hasn't been any sort of problem at all. And having been thinking so abstractedly with Tony before I started to paint again really led me right into it, you know. So it wasn't any problem.

So was it a wrench to make your departure from Bennington?

Terribly sad. We all wept and felt terribly sad about it and, you know, sort of vowed that we'd be friends for life and it was very sad, but in a way looking back I'm very glad we came back to England.

Why?

[0:30:43]

Because I think it's too much of a shifting environment. I think to bring children up there wouldn't have been easy. I think, you know, to keep marriages together would be terribly difficult.

Why?

Well Bennington was full of girls, full of young ladies all madly in love with the tutors and whatnot and I think the pressure on a ... the people that worked at Bennington would be great. You know, I know ... And I think with Clem sort of all the time insisting that marriage was wrong would have influenced in the end, you know, it would have been an influence. And I think the education in England is much better for the children, which I'm glad about. Although my grandson is being educated in America. No, I'm glad, I think England is steadier. I mean all the things that you thought would be forever broke up as soon as you went, you know ...

Like what?

... Ken and Jules quarrelled and never saw each other again, pretty well, you know. It all ... we almost kept it together, funnily enough. So I think ... and I don't think Tony would ever have done what he ... I think he's been able to work much more individually and privately in England rather than having Clem tell him what to do all the time.

What did Clem think about your decision to return to the UK?

What did Clem what?

Think about your decision to return to the UK?

Oh I don't think he even thought about it particularly. I mean it wasn't his ...

Had he been very involved during your time at Bennington, had you seen a lot of him?

Oh yes. He'd be up a lot, a lot. He'd come up a tremendous lot. Course, Ken would ask him up, every time he'd done a new painting Ken would want him to see it and so would Jules. No, he was up all the time. He loved coming up of course. You know, it was part ... a wonderful weekend and we'd all feed him marvellously and I think he thoroughly enjoyed it actually.

And what happened to his own marriage with Jenny?

Well it broke up. And they remarried at the very end, just really I think to sort out inheritance. She had Sarah, a lovely little girl, whom Clem loved actually. He never wanted ... he'd get rid of her to the analysts. No, I'm sorry, he really pushed Jenny away. She didn't want the divorce.

Were you around when that was happening?

I think it happened after we left. She was still with him when we were in Bennington. There's a photograph of us all outside our house in the book. But she said really he pushed her away. It was so silly really. I mean they bought a house in the country and she went and lived there and she couldn't stand it, so he went and lived in it and she came back to ... you know, it was just stupid, it was a silly life, theirs, they were leaving and I don't know why he wanted to persuade everyone else to leave it.

Who else were the casualties of that way of thinking at that time?

Well I mean Ken had divorced. Ken was alone. Jules divorced Andy or left her soon afterwards. And she was a lovely person really and they had a nice child. I think the whole thing is keep fluid, keep changing partners, keep ... well, I don't know why. I mean in the end that whole thing was ... I think there was a lot of publicity about how wrong they all were and how wicked they were at the end. Yes, they were taking children from their parents really. It's ridiculous.

So how easy was it for you to resume life in London after that very intense time in Bennington?

[0:35:36]

Well to get the house straight again. They'd stuck, Marlene Dietrich's daughter had stuck sort of false windows over all the other ... we didn't have central heating then and that made us really have to re-do the house and have central heating. We couldn't bear to live without central heating after America, we suddenly realised how marvellous it was. It wasn't difficult actually. I mean we had to get Tim back to school for a last year – no, less than a year – for a couple of terms or a term or something before he could take the Entrance to ... we were going to send him to Charterhouse and the head ...

Why?

Because it was Tony's school. And the headmaster of the Hall School called us in one day and said I think Charterhouse is totally the wrong school for Tim and I advise Bryanston. So we got in a panic and he said, don't worry, he'll go to Bryanston if you agree and I'll see that he does. Because he was quite a clever boy, and we said alright and he went to Bryanston.

What was special about Bryanston at that time?

I think it was a much more artistic, sensitive school, rather less of an army school, you know, which he didn't think Tim was the right sort of boy for I suppose. He ... enjoyed Bryanston at some point and some point not, which seems to be the same with all public schools with boys.

What was it like for you sending him to boarding school?

It's always worrying and sad and you think, is my little boy alright, you know. And, well he was, yes he was, I mean to start with until he settled in you were sort of worried about him and we used to go down every weekend mostly and that's why we got the cottage in Dorset, because not when he was at school, when Paul was there because the children were allowed, or the boys were allowed out for the weekend if you signed them out when Paul

went to Bryanston. So that we could get him out, sign whatever we had to sign and take him out Friday night and drop him there Monday morning, so that was a nice weekend and I think they liked that. Bryanston was a very free school and I mean obviously Tim got into Cambridge okay so it must have been a good school for, you know, getting people to university. I don't know, I mean neither of them were happy altogether but then I think no boys are unless they're totally rigger players. The more sensitive ones I think have a bit of a tough time now and again. But Tim became head of his house and did well I think. You know, he was quite a sporty boy. Played squash very well. Well that's Bryanston.

And what was the reception to Tony when he returned to London – what sort of stature did he have in the art world at that stage?

[0:39:00]

I think he had to work it up again, you know, I think he had to start work. How are we off?

Do you want to carry on for a bit or ...

Yes, we'll go to ...

Okay.

I don't actually remember when the next show was after we came back. But I think it was quite a tough time starting again and ... I mean he'd stopped colouring sculpture then largely I think, which probably wasn't so popular.

Why did he stop?

He felt it was getting in the way of what he wanted and it was becoming a ... he wanted something more serious in a way, he felt it was too acceptable probably.

And what did you think about that because you'd been very involved, or you mentioned that you'd been ...

I was fine with it, whatever, you know. I mean we talked, why are we doing this, or why is he doing that, you know, and I would say okay. I mean it's always what the artist wants, not what you want really. I didn't care. I mean I didn't have to paint them any more, which is fine. [laughs]

And did Tony resume his studio in Hampstead?

Tony had a studio in Loudon Road to start with and then Kasmin found him this studio, which was just that one, Tony's big studio, the one – are you alright? It was the big studio at first that was free and as Dunhill Pipes left, the foreman wanted to keep half the building and said he wanted the top half, so he worked up there making pipes and we had this show space and as the ... then we said we wanted the top space and he gave that up, so it was my studio. And then Computer Links came up for sale. Well, they were an American firm that had sort of as a storeroom I think. So we got that and slowly we've expanded to this. I'm sorry we couldn't have got the middle part. Would have been nice, but that's owned by a Greek family.

And was that a big change for you having Tony sort of move out of the studio at home when he moved to Loudon Road initially?

No, because the neighbours were complaining terribly and it began to be a worry that he was there and, you know, I was jolly glad that he moved out because any sort of hammering echoed through the whole building. And of course all the welding and whatnot. No, I was very pleased that Tony got a studio away from the home. And of course when this came up it was great, you know. Because I used to work in his, what is now the boys' tearoom through at the end, by his workshop there's a tearoom for the boys. That used to be my studio and that used to get very dirty because Tony would walk straight in and out and the dust and whatnot would get in on the painting. So really I was very happy to get a studio above when Dunhill Pipes moved out.

About this time there was another big exhibition at the Whitechapel of the new generation sculptors.

[0:42:51]

And they were all his, all St Martins pupils really.

Do you remember – what do you remember about that exhibition?

I remember it very well. I mean there was King, Scott, Isaac Witkin. There was one that ... I think Bill Pye, I'm not sure. I remember it very much in the manner of Tony and I remember Tim Scott's work for me shone out as by far the best.

Why?

It just had that eye and originality. You just knew it when you saw it. It's very hard to explain, you know, when a work looks, really shines out. And it was a wonderful show and that put the new generation on the map and Tony was very happy that they all were doing well.

And Tony at this time as well, a little bit after this, was exhibited in America in a show called Primary Structures. Do you remember that at all?

Do I remember what?

When Tony was included in a show in America called Primary Structures in New York.

No, I don't remember it. Perhaps I didn't go over. I don't remember it. I didn't always go over with him because I couldn't, because of the children.

How important was it at that stage for Tony to keep the American connection alive even though you'd left?

Very, very important. I mean he went over constantly and worked with Ken for three weeks at a time.

What were they working on together?

Steel sculpture, I can't remember, but I mean Ken made quite a few steel sculptures as well. I can't remember.

And why do you think their relationship, their working relationship was so productive at the time?

I think because they both stimulated each other and were sort of happy together and just Tony loved the general feel of America. But I mean I ... he would go off for three weeks about three times a year, so about nine weeks a year he would go to America, and I didn't go because I couldn't, you know, leave the children and there was no point in my going really.

So what did you do when he was away for that time?

Well I mean did what I always did I suppose. Take children to school and back and, you know, do what I had to do really. I wasn't doing art.

Was your mother supportive at this time, was she involved in your children's lives much?

No, because she was in Sutton Coldfield, you know. She wasn't terribly well at that point. I mean I didn't know she had cancer, but she had. No, she wasn't. I mean we kept in touch constantly and she looked after Tim an awful lot early on when I hadn't been well, you know, and when I had Paul. She was very supportive then, having the children with

her. But later, no I didn't see so much of her, which was sad really. I mean we kept in touch all the time, but London was sort of too far for her to come all the time really.

And what about your sister Audrey, were you in touch with her much?

Oh always been in great touch, I mean always. You know, she would come up and stay if I wasn't terribly well and I would go and stay and actually look after her house if she wasn't very well. No, we've always kept in constant touch. We're very close really. I mean I wished we lived closer, but there you are.

[End of track 9]

[Track 10]

This is Hester Westley talking to Sheila Girling in her studio in London on the twelfth of August 2009 and I'd like to pick up this morning really where we left off yesterday, and thinking about your return from America in the mid sixties, I wondered how easy it was to sort of readjust to life in London.

Not at all really. No, I think it was hard to clear up the house after the people had been living there and we put in central heating because we found that, you know, that was very necessary after America. No, I think things picked up very quickly. Tim went back to The Hall to finish his ... well, to get the Entrance to the big ... to Bryanston and Paul was beginning The Hall I think. Well, he was at The Hall. No, everything seemed to fall into place, it was good to be back in London in some ways and our neighbours welcomed us with open arms. I think it all went very well really.

And were your parents happy to have you back in the UK?

Oh yes, yes. They always worried about, you know, if we were far away. But no, everything really ... I can't sort of worry about anything that happened then, you know, nothing really worried me. We were back and settled in. I think Tony got a new studio, but I can't remember quite when he got it.

Tony certainly was enjoyed huge success and acclaim at that time and in '69 he had his big Hayward retrospective exhibition. What do you remember of that?

[0:02:01]

Well, it was very exciting actually because it was Tony's first big – after the Whitechapel – his first big museum show. A lot of work, a lot of worry, but it was a great show and I don't remember who curated it actually. But all these things were happening all the time: work, shows. Wait a minute, where are we? Well we moved then the studio here, to Georgiana Street, and it was the first time I had a studio away from the home. I had one in

the sort of little attic room at Frognal which the children had taken over really as their playroom. And it was very exciting, I had a studio which is now a tearoom for the boys actually. It was very cramped, very crowded and I was getting blisters round my nose. I didn't know why and I was talking to a painter in Canada actually and he said he was getting blisters round his mouth and it was the acrylic paint drying, because I was in such a small area without ventilation really. So we enlarged it to have the whole of the, what is now the tearoom, because it was only half when I first started. And as soon as I got more ventilation it stopped, so it's quite toxic actually, the fumes of acrylic paint in a very, you know, confined area.

Had you managed to do any artwork during the years when the boys were little? Had you kept sketchbooks or notebooks?

Well at first I painted Tim, but no I didn't really. I did watercolours and I think Karen Wilkin saw my landscape watercolours early on and offered me a show at ...

Can you tell me about those watercolours – where were they mainly realised?

Well, Dorset mostly. Wherever we went actually, I would take my watercolours.

And was that a medium which you were very familiar with?

Sorry?

Were you very familiar with the medium of watercolour – had you worked with it significantly before?

[0:04:45]

Well I was because I sort of learnt it at my grandfather's knee. I used to watch him paint and it's something that you can do. It's so portable, watercolour, you can take it wherever you are. You know, you can take it on holiday. I had so much ... well really, experience

in looking at watercolour through my grandfather so that it really was something I could do, you know, I was quite fluent. It's quite a hard medium because it's very direct, you can't over paint with, really with watercolour. It has to be very much a one shot type of painting.

Can you talk me through the painting of a watercolour – how would you choose your spot and how would you get started?

Well that's a good question. Mostly out of the wind with the sun behind you, if you can do that, and somewhere to sit. Really it's trying to find somewhere that's comfortable and not blowing your head off and really that's, I mean those are the practical sides of it. But then you want to paint something you love, obviously. You know, you stop and you say oh, look at that heather, look at that wonderful patch of water. And then you try and find a place to sit where you can paint it. So it's not always easy and I find it harder and harder these days because I can't sit on the floor as well as I used to with things in between my legs, you know, sort of propping everything up in the floor.

Can you talk about the sort of application of paint – do you work with very thin washes or ...

What, in my acrylic paint ...

With your watercolour.

Oh, well I always like tubes of watercolour, not the little square palettes, because you can get much more fluid paint on your brush with a tube. It's still wet and you can ... and I use big sort of tin plates as my palettes, just dinner plates, tin picnic plates, which are good. And always a bottle of water with plenty of water so that you can keep renewing your water and you don't get it dirty. But it's always fluid and I use a fairly large brush because I like the big sort of ... I don't like a little, tiny brushes where you're being very tight and sort of pernickety, I like big washes and I love the sea, I've painted a lot of seascapes. There's nothing more wonderful, the waves and I see they're in Dorset ... I

mean we used to go away to the West Indies a lot and I always did a lot of seascapes there, and still do. It's really a very fluid medium and I think ...

How long will you spend on average on a watercolour? Are they quite quickly realised?

Well no longer than an hour ever, possibly less. It depends what size it is, but never really much longer than an hour.

And do you work in a sketchbook or on a pad of paper?

I use, on stretched pads, stretched paper on blocks because it keeps the paper tight and the wind doesn't get under it. If you have a book pages tend to flap about, so I always use a heavy cartridge paper, heavy thick cartridge paper. I like the rough paper, I don't like the terribly smooth paper.

And when you're working on these trips in Dorset or in the West Indies for example, does Tony work alongside you or do you work quite separately?

Oh quite. Never with Tony. We started, he said I think I'll do a watercolour and he came with me and kept saying, 'How do I mix this?' 'Will you mix this for me?' 'How do I mix that?' And I just said, 'Just go away. I can't work with you at all'. So he never comes with me, unless we're on some lonely beach and he'll walk up the beach and do a drawing. He very rarely ... he never uses colour because it would be a whole different ... he doesn't understand colour and it would interfere with my painting too much really and he knows that so he's very good actually.

And do you talk about the pictures you produce on holiday?

We always put them on the floor at the end of the day and say, that's a good one, oh that's a mess, no, that's a good one. Okay, you could do a little bit with that, you know, and cut the top off, or something like that really.

And do you, what do you do with those pictures that you don't feel have been a success?

Rip them up. Just destroy them. We don't keep things that we don't like, you know, you get too much mess all round you if you do.

Are you not at all precious about your work?

No, not at all. No. In fact I should stretch some, well mount some paintings that I've got so many upstairs that I haven't mounted. But you do them and you just stick them in a drawer and that's it. It's really the pleasure of doing it and of course sometimes people want to exhibit them, which is very nice. And a lot of the watercolours I find go to things like, well when people want something for some fair or for some fundraising thing, they'll say will you give a painting, and you can't give a big painting every time, I mean you wouldn't be able to, so you give a watercolour. And they're usually very popular. I mean they usually sell and they thank you for them. But it's funny, an artist is always after their works to be given. You never ask a lawyer for his services to be free, or doctors, it's always the artists, it's funny. They seem to think it's something that's easy, that comes out of you, and it's not at all. I mean it's really painful sometimes to get a picture out.

How do you field those kind of requests, how do you deal with them?

[0:11:44]

Well I mean you think, oh God, here's another, you know, but you usually give something I find because it's usually a good cause and they ask you very politely and very nicely. So you do, you give in the end usually. Very rarely does one refuse. But I mean you'll see that it's a thing as, you know, a smaller work of art like a watercolour that ...

So you've kept up your watercolours. How much did they have any correspondence with the paintings that you'd grown up, the watercolours of your grandfather, for example?

Do you, when you look at them, do you see that they're ... because you said that you really learnt with him, learnt that craft with him – do they relate in any way to his ...

[0:12:38]

I don't think so, only that they're all watercolour. No, I don't think so. I think ... it's such a quick medium that you have to do it yourself, you can't think back how it should be done. The wind's blowing, the water's changing, you've just got to do it as quick as you can really. And I think it's funny because Clem loved my watercolours. He wanted me to stay with landscape watercolour and because I was just beginning with acrylics and they weren't as good as the watercolours. But he also liked paintings to be immediate and one shot so that the movement of the arm quickly on the canvas ... I mean he always said only take half an hour over any picture. Well, I stupidly said well what do I do with the rest of the day, and everybody laughed, they all said, you do another! [laughs] I thought he meant that you should only work for half an hour, but he wanted always that immediacy which in the end didn't suit me. I found that I would ... I painted a lot to start with in that way and I looked at the way, you know, I was learning a lot from Tony's method when I first started painting my big acrylics. Because Tony could go back, place, go back, alter, take months over one piece by taking it off, putting ... and I think that's why I found acrylic collage so very sympathetic to the way I was working.

Because how soon after acquiring the studio here at Barford did you actually set to work again, because the boys were still fairly small.

Well, I've ... at first I was just working with pads on the floor. I've got a lifting table now and – two lifting tables – so that I'm not bending all the time. I was very much influenced by ... of course Triangle had happened then, the Triangle Workshop in upstate New York where we had artists from all different countries, mature artists that were working there and most of the American and Canadian artists were working on the floor with acrylic paint, very much with the gesture of the arm, which Clem always sort of was admiring and probably influenced artists to paint that way. And I think that's the way I started really. And I did a lot of pictures and enjoyed doing them, you know, it was great really, but I think it gave me the immediate ... having to do it straightaway and leave it gave me a lot of anxiety I think and dissatisfaction if it didn't sort of work perfectly.

Because you had left off painting when Tim was born when you were working in still a very figurative vein. What was it like returning to painting and launching yourself into this new visual vocabulary of abstraction and how did you sort of gear yourself up to that?

[0:16:24]

Well I think, I mean obviously I'd been thinking in abstraction with Tony, talking and all the time looking at abstract painters, so that I mean my language in my head was abstraction. It was a case of having the courage to start putting it down, which, quite difficult to start with.

Can you remember where you did that first painting and what it was?

Oh. I started dragging the paint, throwing colours on to the canvas and mixing it on the canvas, dragging it across the canvas. And I went from a Botticelli roundel where the colour was halfway across, well there was a light blue and then all the colour was halfway across the canvas at the bottom, and that's what I did to start with. And I still think they're a good series actually, I stand by them. I wouldn't want to do them now but I ... it was what I was doing then.

And were those realised in the studio here and ...

Oh, the other side I think. I think, you know, in the tearoom. I think the first ... I didn't start with collage till after the clay workshop in America, which was ... I can't remember the date of it.

When you started to work with Margie Hughto – is that right?

Yes. I don't remember the date of it actually.

Oh, that's not to worry.

I should remember the date.

I'm interested in how confident you felt after so much time away and not only having had that time away, but also in that time Tony's critical success was so huge, how did that impact on you?

I was very nervous to start with and it used to be really not wanting to go in the studio almost, having to force myself to go into the studio, feeling oh, I don't know what to do, I don't know how to do it, you know.

And why did you persevere?

Mm?

Why did you persevere at that stage?

Because I don't like failure. [laughs] And it was my life. I mean my children had left home and what do you do, sit at home and be miserable, you know. So no, it was something that I really wanted to do and I was determined to do it.

And what sort of conversation did you have with Tony about it? Was he able to input ...

Not a lot actually. Not a lot until I ... he never ... he's never been able to, what to do, really where to go until I do it and then he can criticise it. You know, he's ...

Can you remember showing your new work to people for the first time? You mentioned that Clement Greenberg had commented on it.

Well I started to show, a show in Acquavella in New York and he came and he didn't like the fact that I wasn't doing an all over painting. His idea was that the paint should be all over the canvas and there should be no image. He wanted a kind of all over paint which

Jules Olitski ... well they were ... I don't know, he didn't want an image of any sort. I mean he liked them and criticised them but I still think he thought my watercolours were better because I mean they were much more accomplished because it was, you know, something I could do. And he really liked women to do landscape.

Why?

Masculine something or other, but I mean he didn't like women ... he liked them to do a lesser art in a sense. Dorothy Knowles in Canada he held up as a great example of, you know, and he said you could be the best landscape painter in England, you know, and I didn't want to be the best landscape painter in England.

How did you respond to his critique at the time?

[0:21:19]

I argued with him, said I didn't want to do that, you're telling me something that will be academic, and all that sort of thing. And he was cross and angry, you know. But you have to say what you feel about your work.

And how did Tony stand in relation to your separate sort of dialogue with Greenberg?

He used to try and interfere and Clem said, go away, I'm talking to her now, just as he wouldn't let me talk to Tony while he was there, then he reversed it so that he'd say to Tony, you know, you keep out of this, you know. Which was ... he was a funny man really, very likeable in some ways and very difficult in others.

Because how much had you kept up with your sort of Bennington gang after you left in the years following?

I mean very little in a way, because the whole thing split up. I think Jules and Ken didn't get on so well, we were holding everybody together in a sense, our place was a sort of

core. But I mean we've kept ... Tony quarrelled with Ken at a certain point because Ken felt he was doing ... he went to the same paper workshop as Ken and Ken felt that Tony was doing better than he was, you know, when Clem said, well Tony's work's better, you know. And Clem used to do that a tremendous amount, put one against the other. He was a child of three and I can understand the families of sort of - well, you're a child of three - but he tended to put two artists against each other by saying, ah you're better than he is, you know, and it was very destructive really. And they quarrelled and that broke it up very much. But Tony and Jules used to write and talk to each other and we've always been friends with Helen and now we're friends with Ken again now we're all in our prime, past our prime let's say.

And this is rewinding a little on the chronology, but David Smith died in the late sixties.

[0:23:48]

Yes, Tony was in America and rang me I remember from America saying that David Smith's died. Which was a terrible shock actually because he was still a young man, he was fifty something I think. And his car crashed, he had a car crash. But you know, it was very easy on those cold nights in America where the roads used to be like glass. I've landed up in the ditch two or three times and had to be pulled out. But it was really easy to skid at night probably if you couldn't ... if you had had a little too much to drink perhaps. I mean he did drink quite a lot. And that was very, very sad, it was like sort of the end of an era really. Tony was very upset. But all his work's there still. And his children are still friends, we still see his children now and again.

But you've kept that Transatlantic connection very alive.

Yes. I mean Tony shows in New York all the time. I mean I did show in Acquavella for about four shows and then he, you know, he took on a group of four or five not so well known artists - Sandi Sloane was one of them - and we were a nuisance in the end. I mean he could make a few million on the smalls ... I mean we hardly paid the light bill, but he was terribly sweet and said I can't do anything for you really, so that was it. But

those were wonderful years, showing in New York. But of course Tony, every year, every two years, you know, Tony's show is about every two years, we go. But not as we used to, we had a barn in, you know, we had ... we built a barn in a field in upstate New York.

Why did you do that?

Well, Tony was renting a school to store all the sculpture he made in New York and he made a lot because he used to work with Ken at his place and make a lot of sculpture and it would be ridiculous to bring it all home so we stored it in an old school and we realised that the sort of yearly rent of the school would buy about a hundred acres of land in upstate New York. So we went up there and it was very near where we had the Triangle Workshop you see, so we knew the country and we bought a big, well, hundred acres of fields and built a barn and a cow barn comes in a kind of kit, it's amazing really. And a local architect helped us and Karen Wilkin, who's a very good critic in New York, her husband was an architect and he designed the interior for ... so we could make living space and studio space and we worked there for ... we went every summer and quite hard work because Tony had to do enough sculpture to give to the boys who were staying there enough work till we came the next time. He had all these lifting gantries and whatnot, so that there was a lot of equipment there.

So how did that work? Were there assistants who worked there all year round?

Yes, Jon Isherwood was the main one, who now teaches at Bennington College. He was a young sculptor and he lived nearby with his then wife, so he would come in and work there every day and probably stay the night, I don't know. But anyway, he was in charge of the barn and saw that it was alright. So he would try and make all the sculpture with a helper – John Hock I think his name was – by the time Tony ... we came back again in the summer or perhaps in the spring, it would be made and Tony could look at it. So that it was quite hard work, you know, Tony would arrive and immediately have to start work the next day for the time you were there. It wasn't an ideal situation, I think to have your work where you live wasn't that wonderful idea, it really wasn't.

And what about you, what were you doing all the time?

[0:28:46]

I had a marvellous studio on the second floor. Of course all our living quarters were on the ground floor. We had a big sitting room, kitchen and two bedrooms and a bathroom. That basically, that's what it was. Upstairs there was a lot of storage space and then I had a wonderful studio looking all over the land we had and the wonderful views and I mostly did, well I did do a lot of ... I did that painting actually in ...

Can you for the tape describe the painting you're looking at?

Well it's a large painting, about nine foot by five or six, of Three Wise Men, I call it. So I did do quite big, well collage, abstract paintings as well as painting from the window because the view was constantly changing and you got these wonderful colours in the Fall in America. Everything was orange and red and green, you know, it was marvellous. So I did really a lot of ... I painted most of the day upstairs because Tony was working at the other end of the barn with all the equipment. But we didn't really enjoy it as a holiday. I mean we had a lovely swimming pool which I thoroughly enjoyed, but I think we swam once the whole time we were there together, because he was tired when he'd finished working. And ultimately we found it too hard work, we had it for about ten, twelve years and then Tony had a stroke there, you know, which rather worried us. But he was working in very cold weather and he'd only had a very light lunch and we had a big ... we went out to the local restaurant and had a big steak and suddenly it happened. So we realised that it was too hard a work and climate change is never good for things like that, you know, to go from hot to cold. So in the end we said well we'll sell it, which we did.

And how did you feel about sort of severing that connection with America at that stage?

Well I mean we never severed the connection with America, but we severed the difficulty of working. And I think really we both felt it was the right thing to do. I mean if Tony was going to be ill doing it, then that was no good. And I'd got all I could ... I mean it

was a wonderful place for me to paint landscape but I can paint just as well in London abstract paintings. You know, I've got a wonderful studio here so really in a way it was sort of inevitable and a kind of relief in the end, you know, it was getting too much for us.

Can you talk a little bit more, in a bit more detail about Triangle Workshops and how the idea for Triangle came about and what your involvement was in that?

[0:32:05]

Well, Tony and Robert Loder who, I mean he was terribly interested in art and collected a lot of art, he's not an artist, but he wanted ... I mean they talked together and well, he had a club in upstate New York, he bought a farm there to have a foot in America I think at that point, and Tony went with the club, he went up and stayed with Robert in this marvellous old fish and game preserve, club, run by quite a crazy Irishmen. And they were talking about ... oh Tony wanted – that was why – he wanted another place to store sculpture at that point – this was before we had the barn – and Robert said I may have something in my farm. Well it was right on the road and it wasn't suitable, but the man at the club, this crazy man, said why don't you have artists here. He loved the fact that artists were going to be there, so they started talking about having a workshop there and using all his barns at the club. The wonderful barns in a very dilapidated state, but nevertheless usable, the roof was okay, and they thought that's what they'd do and that's how the Triangle Workshop started. But Robert Loder resigned really over the finances the second year because the club man was being difficult and wanted us to pay for the lunch that day and Robert said he couldn't get the money out of the bank or whatnot, so they quarrelled and he said, well I shall resign if you do, because Tony said I shall have to pay for it myself till we get the money because you can't have thirty artists without lunch. So he said I shall resign if you do. And Tony said well okay, I can't do anything about that. So we were running it really between us. You know, I'd take care of the painters and Tony would take care of the sculptors.

How did you choose who to invite to be involved, how did it work?

Well people asked to come. Word of mouth really. So there were, to start with there were Canadian painters, American painters and English painters. That's why it was a triangle. But after that, I mean China, Russia – they came from all over the world. It was wonderful really.

And what did it mean to be in charge of the painters, what were you doing?

Well there were always sort of emotional problems, somebody couldn't bear the person they were in the same room, you know, you had to double them up. I mean John Hoyland went home because he hadn't got anywhere to hang his suit. I mean it was very rough; the living quarters were very rough. But everybody ... it was like a camp, you know, it was like camping but everybody enjoyed it incredibly, most people, and got a terrific amount out of it.

And what about you, what about your painting, what did you get out of it?

I did mostly watercolour because I didn't want to take a space in the barns and there was so much, so many calls on your attention, time and whatnot that, you know, I didn't want to start a big painting. So mostly watercolours, which I thoroughly enjoyed because the whole of the landscape was beautiful all round there. And then we went, we took it to Barcelona, you know, started to go to different places, and that's really where I ... well I'd started to use collage, you know, I went to a clay workshop.

Can you talk about that?

[0:36:30]

Well, Margie Hughto in Syracuse was the ceramicist and she'd been encouraged by Clem I think to have artists in the workshop, I mean it was a big clay workshop in the art school in Syracuse, and she invited artists to come and do their thing. So if you were a sculptor you did your thing in clay. Painter – everybody was sort of doing something quite different. And I went with Tony and I was sort of, said I'll sit in this corner and let Tony work, and

she said well here's a bit of clay and there's some colours there, paint on it if you like. Which I did and she liked it and then she said, would you like to do a workshop. Well the next year I went and I got very dissatisfied with ... I might have been painting on anything, you know, it wasn't taking advantage of the clay. So I said could you roll colours into balls of clay for me. And she had two assistants and she said yes, sure. Everything you asked for she made easy, she was a wonderful woman. So I had all these little balls of clay that I could break off and throw on to a surface and roll them so that it welded into the clay and I got wonderful patterns and colours. And when they were fired it was really very exciting because you couldn't really see the colours till they were fired, you know, they'd change. And she loved it and Clem said they were the best things that had been done at the workshop, so that was rather nice. He didn't tell me that, he told someone else which was, you know, he was very funny that way. Then she asked me back again the next year, which I came, you know, we did it again. But that started me wanting to put colour on to the surface of things rather than paint and that really started me using collage, which I did in Barcelona workshop. I used paper collage and everybody, it was very sweet, everybody got into it, you know, we all got excited about each other's work and everybody would be finding bits of paper to bring me. So I had a wonderful store of colours and paper and that was very exciting and that really started me on collage.

So were you working with sort of existing scraps of material to collage or were you finding pieces which sort of fitted your preconceived idea, if you see what I mean?

[0:39:25]

No I'd just have odd bits of paper which I would cut and rip to the shapes I wanted. So that you would have a bit of packing - I mean people were bringing me everything, it was very funny really - bits of packing case paper and black tar paper and all sorts of things. No, I've always cut the collage the way I want it. I painted it freely to start with and then draw the shape I wanted and cut it.

Because we've talked a little bit about the paintings you started working on initially which were the painting when you poured the paint and pushed the paint, but can you talk to me a little bit about how your painting progressed from that point?

From ...

What did you move on – after your initial sort of foray into abstraction?

Well first of all I was just pulling the colour across the canvas so that the colours actually mixed on the canvas. And then, when I wanted to get more perhaps shaping and colour and not leaving it so much to just the arm, the way the painting was organised, I started to pour colour on to the canvas and then block it out with a ground colour so that I would get something shining through, which is like that painting actually.

Which painting are we looking at?

Painting – I've forgotten what it's called – but I poured the colour on to the canvas first and glazed it and then with this green I masked out the shape that I wanted. And at that point I'd just started to add a little collage. So it was all coming together, but first of all I think I started to block out the ground colour into the shape I wanted, almost like a window. So I slowly sort of worked my way through really.

And so when you are working on this scale do you have sort of preconceived images, shapes and forms in mind or are they very improvisational? Can you talk ...

No, I think I have preconceived ideas, vaguely. They alter as you go, but I always mix my colours first. If I don't have the colours right the painting never succeeds. So I always get all my colours mixed to a certain extent, I know just what the colour is going to be on the painting. And then I have a, yes, the shaping I want is in my head so that I know, I can know where I want to start. Things alter, I mean the painting often takes over in a way you didn't expect it to and you think, oh gosh that's nice, or oh, that's a mess, I'll, you know,

take that off. So it's a sort of dialogue, a painting, you know, with the way it's going and the way you thought it was going to go.

Do you ever do preliminary sketches?

No, never.

And so how do you determine the scale of a work?

[0:43:09]

Well, mostly I would ... the scale is usually the size of the canvas I put down. I can start on the lower pads on the floor, I have a pad that's raised about – well just on blocks on the floor and if I cover that pad with canvas and put a ground on I know I'm going to ... I want that ... with a big painting, I know the sort of scale I want. But I often, you know, leave a border that I don't paint so that I can turn it round, the canvas, the stretcher, and also sometimes you come in more than you intend, you know, you find that the image is ... you need to constrict it more so that really you're not painting on a square canvas where you're very conscious of the square, you're painting freely on a field of colour really. I don't like painting on a square, a preconceived stretched canvas because you're always conscious of the edge really and you're not conscious if you're painting on the floor, you're walking in it, you're sort of paddling in it almost. And then when it comes to really the beastly jobs of sort of sticking down the pieces that you put on, I lift it on to a lifting table so that it doesn't wreck your back, which you can do if you're bending all the time. So really that's the way it goes.

Do you ever work with the canvas up rather than on the floor?

At the end, yes, when I lift it. I ... Pat comes over usually with a helper and we staple it on the wall and then you see, you have to reassess it. It looks quite different sometimes from looking down on it and walking in it, you know, you suddenly see it as a different thing. And then I often paint when it's up, some things, not a great deal, but some things I paint

while it's up, yes. Or sometimes if a lot has to be done I'll pull it down and lift it down again, because you can control the paint so much better when it's flat. Because acrylic can be very fluid, you know, you can ... although I use a lot of mediums, a lot of gels they bring out now. A sort of pumice gel that's like sand you can mix with your paint, and thick gel, thin gel, all sorts of mediums, you know, that are really rather wonderful.

Why do you like to work with those? What is the importance of the texture for you and that sort of ...

Well, you know, I've been doing ... there's one in the Academy at the moment of really an abstract beach scene and to have the fluid water where you're using a lot of water in the paint and then having the sand and making a lot of pumice gel with the colour, you get a sort of gritty surface where it absorbs the light, which is rather wonderful actually. All these ... you can make them shiny or you can have a dull, matte gel so that you can make one part throw the light back and the other absorb the light. It's very wonderful all these things that have happened and they probably happened with oil paint too but I use acrylic now because really it dries so quickly, you know, it's a great joy. And the colours are very good.

On this question of texture and surface, can you talk a little bit more about the significance of collage? You talked about the sort of excitement of discovering it, but what does it bring to your pictures?

[0:47:31]

Well for me it was, you know, I've learnt a lot from Tony about how to ... the method really. And I always envied his ability to pace himself with a sculpture, being able to take it off, cut it, put it back. And I think collage gave me that freedom in a sense and I found, you know, the anxiety of trying to make a picture with just the arm, which Helen does wonderfully, Helen Frankenthaler of course, she's a master of the sort of arm. For me it was, I wanted to go deeper into the picture, I didn't want it just that and the picture was finished. And to be able to put a very fluid ground down, say, and then paint and I'd paint

a lot of colours on canvas, pieces of canvas, and then to be able to assemble the picture gave me time to get into the picture, change it, but keep the freshness. Because if I'd done that with just a brush it would have got muddy and dirty, but it keeps clarity. And I was looking a lot at Japanese art then, the wonderful sort of drawing in Japanese art, the freedom of the colour and yet there's a sort of very, enormous clarity of drawing, which I loved. And I loved the colour and I looked a lot at Japanese art then. Of course we'd been to Japan as well with Tony's ... I mean all this time we were travelling a tremendous amount, I mean we were going to Korea and Japan as well as America, all round the world actually. We took the children. Tony had a drawing prize in Australia; they asked him to go out and judge it and they sent him a first class ticket. And he said could I change it for the whole family, we'll go cabin, well whatever class we could get, and they said yes and we all went round the world, it was wonderful. So we've travelled enormously and I think India influenced me a lot.

What way?

[0:50:05]

Colour. I think I dreamt about India for a week after we came back, just the sheer colour of the sort of earthy ground and all these saris and whites and bits ... The colour was just wonderful and I looked at Indian art after that and learnt a tremendous lot again from the way they organised their miniatures – they're wonderful, those little miniatures and the colours are so superb. So there's a great vocabulary of colour in all these things that you could learn from. We've ... I think we've been a great collector of books because all these things feed you so wonderfully. And of course Tony learnt so much from Greece and whatnot. So travelling has been a tremendous part in our lives and we've travelled all over the world really.

It's interesting that you mentioned sources, new sources of inspiration from other cultures because of course collage has been very rooted in the sort of European modernist tradition.

Yes, yes.

Did that play a part – I mean did you see yourself in any way responding to that great heritage?

Possibly with paper, you know, I've done a lot of paper collages with handmade paper from a wonderful lady in Wales who's since stopped I think, she got ill. But I think yes, I looked at European collages for that, but never with acrylics, no. No, they didn't ... I mean they were very ... I mean there's all the cubist stuff, the Braque and whatnot, but I don't think, no, they never influenced me ... I never looked at them for the larger acrylics. And of course you look in yourself for things as well too, you look for things just as the two big pictures that I've done this year – one's in the Academy and the other is in the Broadbent Gallery at the moment – but I mean that came directly from painting the sea actually in watercolour, because I thought why don't I try a really big seascape and I started to do it in a naturalistic sort of way and then it sort of ... I thought no, and started to drag all the colours and different bunches of colours you see on the beach, it became an abstraction, but perhaps with some figurative elements.

Because there are so often these elusive kind of ambiguities in your work. The big painting that we're sitting next to, Three Wise Men, it could be an abstract work but then again it could have sort of elements of figuration and I wondered why, what is important about that tension for you or ...

[0:53:20]

I think the importance really is that it enriches an abstraction. I mean if you ... purely abstract art, in a way sometimes gets a little predictable. And I think to introduce some ... just as Miro introduced sort of machinery and things, you know, which made his abstract art more exciting. I think it adds a new dimension in a sense. And also it gives you new ideas really. I did The Last Supper, which for me it's purely abstract but it has elements of The Last Supper, so I think it enriches abstraction for me, I mean it may not be for other people, they may hate it. But for me it gives me something to go from in a way.

Because you were so privy to the very big debates about figurative versus abstraction and pure formal abstraction, which really dominated in the sixties, I wondered how did you then situate yourself and how do you now and has that changed at all? Your relationship to this notion of abstract art?

[0:54:58]

I think ... well I mean I think possibly I don't feel I belong to the sixties. I'm not ... although I learnt a tremendous amount then and appreciated the work that was being done, I never feel I belong there at all.

Why?

I mean I hope I've moved on, I may not. For me, it wasn't me, it was something that would have been superimposed if I'd tried to do it. So I mean just as you develop through your own work in a sense, what you failed to do in the last painting you try and do it the next painting.

What do you mean, you didn't feel you belonged in the sixties? Can you explain that a bit more?

Sorry?

Can you explain that remark a bit more, about belonging or not belonging in the sixties?

Well it was very, very, I mean very abstract, totally ... very much to do with the surface of the canvas to try and lose the image in whatever way you could. I mean Larry Poons poured paint down and Jules was using his hand all over the canvas. It was, for me it was like a dead end in the end. People began to imitate it, a lot of Canadian painters were trying to imitate it and it became almost academic I think in a way. It's something that I didn't want to go, I didn't want to be there, although I still appreciate what they did, you

know, and I think there are some wonderful paintings. But it wasn't what I wanted to do, I felt dissatisfied with it. And it was not, I suppose what I know. Of course I'd learnt so much at art school about putting on the paint too and I thought these people in a way hadn't learnt that and they were putting on paint in a different way than I would. But I mean it was wonderful, the fact that you could pour it or throw it or Pollock was just throwing it. I mean all these things were wonderful, but for me it was ... I would have been imitating and it wasn't me. So I think that was an era that had passed and I wanted to go back into the canvas, I didn't want the surface of the canvas to be, the whole thing, you know, not to break the surface of the canvas, I wanted to be able to get into a picture again. I wanted, you know, perspective in a sense or the feeling of space, which was frowned upon by Clem, say, you know, he didn't want the movement in the canvas. And I wanted the image back too. I didn't want an all over surface, I wanted the image back. So that I, you know, I feel I'm not doing sixties paintings.

And how assertive were you able to be in your sort of commitment to your particular vision without the sort of pressure of, you know, Greenberg's commentary ...

Well of course I started when we got back, I wasn't painting in America then, at the early part. I mean I was painting at the barn and I just ignored it, I did what I had to do. You know, it was no good trying to paint something that you didn't feel.

And Tony has incorporated increasingly sort of figurative elements into his sculpture of recent years and I wondered, has that been a point of conversation for the two of you, have you discussed these kind of subjects?

[0:59:23]

We discuss it all the time of course. I mean he bought ... I think he felt a desire for something other than pure abstraction too. And I think going to the clay workshop that he goes to now with Spinner, where clay becomes almost figurative because it's a ... well it doesn't have to be, but it did with Tony and The Last Judgement, there were a lot of heads and feet. And I think you don't have in the end to be purely in anything, you can do what

you like, you know, and that's the great thing about art really, you can go where you want to be and do what you like, which he did. And he's always done that actually. Whenever he's got sick of something he wants to move on, you know, which is great. That's why he's able to ... I mean whatever he thinks he'd like to do, he can do it. He hasn't any block between the idea and doing it, which is wonderful really. That's why he can get through so much work. Most of us have a kind of block and say, oh, am I right. But Tony's very free, he can do what he wants.

And have you – just picking up on an earlier point of conversation about palette, you choose your palette before you start painting?

I choose the colour always.

Choose the colour.

Yes.

Can you talk to me a bit more about that – are there colours that have particular significance for you – how do you go about choosing?

[1:01:22]

Colour is everything for me really. I mean painting for me is about colour. I think ... I couldn't paint in monochrome or black and white. No, colour is very, very important for me, I love colour and that's what's so wonderful about paint really, is that there are colours there.

How do you go about choosing colours for a particular painting? How does that work? Do you mix the colours and see what develops?

Yes. I ... well they start talking to each other too. You get ... you put a ground down say, very loosely usually, with a sort of mop or a broom or a – not a broom so much as a

squeegee mop, you know - I can drag it about and ... I don't know, I think ... I know that say, I want certain colours. It's hard really to say, I mean you've got the picture in your head and possibly it has some sort of figuration like The Last Supper. And I saw this wonderful Leonardo Last Supper and I always remember they were sort of pastel colours almost, moving across the middle of the canvas and I suppose I mixed up a lot of colours on my big lifting pad, make areas of canvas different colours till you got the sort of group of colours that you want, and then you start cutting them into the shapes you need, you know.

And what about – I mean we've talked a little bit about the scale of your works but how do you determine scale, what makes you ... what prompts you into painting a really large canvas? Do you prefer working big or ...

I do love working big actually, but I have started to enjoy working on a smaller scale too.

What's the difference?

I mean I've done a lot of really small paintings, largely through being asked to show in Small is Beautiful at Flowers. Seven by nine. And I've kind of started to do quite a few little paintings for the show and to choose one, the one I wanted and I've done a lot of paintings on that scale because sometimes when a big painting's drying and you can't work on it you can just sit down and enjoy something smaller.

How do you go about working on such a small scale?

I cut usually a window from a piece of paper and put it on the canvas and work from there and often you find, there you do find pieces of colour that you've done previously that have been cut away, so that you can put it on a bit of blue that you've done and then you start working with snipping other colours that you've got in your box say, so that's a way of using up, well all the little bits you had. But you always have to fashion them and reshape them. I mean nothing is there, nothing is given in a sense except sometimes the colours.

What is your attitude to glazing works, putting them behind glass?

Well, I never glaze acrylic paints, but I mean with paper pieces it's inevitable, you have to.

Why do you never put your large acrylic pieces behind glass?

I think it would shine, it would be difficult. And I think also I put such a heavy ground on my paintings that you could pretty well wash them. I mean, you know, you can clean them almost with ... it's like house paint in a sense. But I mean I was so ... I saw so many paintings being done on un-primed canvas, Ken and Helen, and realising the total difficulty of cleaning them because they absorb dust, the canvas, and the painting would fade. So I thought well no, I don't want to do that, I want to really make a hard ground and I put quite a thick ground on so that they're very permanent. As I say, you could take a wet sponge over them really.

Have you ever worked with assistants?

With what?

Assistants, studio assistants?

No. Only at the end when I come to stretch paintings and then Pat helps me stretch. But I couldn't do that by myself. No, I couldn't bear anyone in the room with me. I have ...

So what are your studio habits?

[1:06:51]

Well I mean they vary. I try and get, you know, in the morning I'll ... there's always things that have to be done, machines that have to be fed and, you know, breakfast to be cleared away. I usually try and get down around ten and I go into the studio, I look what's

happening, what I've done yesterday, I usually make a cup of tea in my little room upstairs, and start. And I work through usually till lunchtime when Tony and I have lunch together in this room, we usually have a sandwich or something. And then I will sometimes have a little sit down and rest for half an hour, and then I can work again if I do have a little rest, I can go on till ... In the winter of course you stop quite early because I like to paint by natural light and it's amazing how quickly the light goes if you're painting by natural light.

Why is it important to paint by natural light?

I like it, that's all. I mean a lot of people prefer to paint by artificial light, but I prefer natural light and I've got wonderful light windows upstairs; enormous sort of windows that let, you know, tremendous light in. And you know, I always think artificial light does alter the colour a little, it gives you a little bit too much yellow in it and things change. I prefer natural light. And then I usually stop and have to do some shopping probably, get dinner, you know, and go home. And I mean there are lots of days when people come to the studio and you can't work, or the washing machine breaks and you have to wait at home for the chap to come and mend it, you know, because Tony never does. It's always somehow the woman that still does it, in my family anyway. Things ... I think you could never say, this is what I do every day because things happen. Say somebody wants to come and see the paintings, then I have help. I say Pat, my studio's in a mess and he'll come over with another young chap and they'll clear it up and, you know, pick things off the floor and pin things on the wall and generally help.

And what about framing your works?

Framing? I don't very much frame, but if I do, I usually have a strip of wood and we order it by the meter or whatever it is nowadays and we just cut it and pin it on to the canvas.

How do you decide if a canvas needs framing?

How do I decide if the canvas is framing?

No, how do you decide which canvas needs a frame?

Oh I don't really, it's whether it's going to an exhibition and it needs something to protect the corners really, that's all. I don't, I wouldn't want ... I don't frame paintings very much.

Why not?

I rather like the sides, the edge, you know I always paint you see, sort of proud of the image so that when you turn the canvas it's the same colour as the picture, so you get the feeling that it's sort of going back. I hate the front of the canvas to be painted with the white edge of the canvas. It always sort of stops the image for me, stops the sort of going into the painting. So that's why I don't always frame, but to me it's totally unimportant really, it's just a protection, in a way.

Do you listen to music while you work in the studio?

Never ever, ever. I can't ... I'm tone deaf and it's just an irritation for me. No, I hate any sort of noise. I like to be totally quiet. There's enough noise in my head at the time.

[laughs]

Have you, over the years you've worked with communities of artists in various situations, how important has it been for you to sort of engage in dialogues about your work or are you quite a solitary artist?

[1:11:29]

I think we learnt a lot, I think you learn a lot at the workshops that I've been to. I went ... but it's more fun in the evening when you're talking about art rather than a dialogue. I went to ... Terry Fenton did a landscape workshop in Calgary in Canada and he asked me to go and it was great fun really. But no, I don't ... I'm more solitary. I'm a solitary person in the studio really. I mean I don't even like Tony to come in till the picture is

decided in my mind, because he's so emphatic, you know, that if it's half done he'll say, leave it, and you know you can't leave it there, you know. So I wait till the picture's really firmly on the canvas and in my head before I call him.

And then how do you respond to his remarks?

I would ... well sometimes they're very good. I mean often he comes in with a fresh eye and says, you know, you need something up there, and I listen, you know, because he knows my work and he's, you know, often right actually.

And do you still spend time in the sculpture studios looking at Tony's sculpture and discussing it with him as you did very much in the early days?

He always, he always says don't go home without coming into the studio, I want you to see something, you know. No, we always ... I'm always in there actually, every day pretty well, to see what he's done and, you know, he'll say, what should I do with this, you know, I can't ... You know, or I'll say, that's too crowded and he'll say, that's what I want and I'll say okay.

Have there been any sort of British painters of your generation or at all who you have felt an affinity with working, because so much obviously has changed since the sixties and there's been such an increasing conceptual art practice. Have you ...

What, you mean in the conceptual artists?

Yes, or have you ... or amongst painters who, you know, people who sort of resolutely use paint and canvas as you still do?

[1:14:12]

Not really, not in England, no. I mean I'm always interested to see what other people have done, but I don't think they've ever influenced me at all.

Do you feel connected to any kind of artistic lineage?

Any artistic what?

Sort of lineage? Where do you sort of situate yourself?

I suppose in a painterly linear. I mean I'm a painterly painter and probably, I mean Mel Gooding did a Matthew Smith show at Sanderson's Gallery I think and they invited a few artists that had been influenced by Matthew Smith and I was one of them, but I actually never have been influenced by Matthew Smith, but I saw what they saw in my work connection, in the fact that we were both painterly painters. I think ...

Can you explain what you mean by that a bit more – what do you mean by painterly painter?

I think we love the feel of paint, the application of paint, the colour, the sort of sensuality of the paint, just the ... well not the smell for me even, but the feel, the touch and doing it through your hand and your senses really. I don't think, you see, someone like Bridget Riley who's a very good painter, is a painterly painter because she can cut out the pieces of paper and somebody else paints them. I think if you hand over the actual, if you delegate the actual application of paint it's a different ballgame really. It comes something else and I don't think that's where I would fit in at all. But I mean it's valid, but it's just not where I am, you know.

And has that ... the shift in sort of art practices to more conceptual practices had any impact on you or what do you think about that? Do you take any interest in it?

I take an interest in it, yes. I mean everything is interesting. I mean photography and everything that's removed from the hand, for me is not as delightful in a sense. But I mean it's all valid, but it's not where I am and I don't think I could ever do it, you know. I mean I don't totally understand it in a sense that ... we've just seen the Jeff Koons show at the

Serpentine and these blow-up plastic sort of beach toys that are now cast in steel and threaded through ladders and whatnot, well it's kind of amusing and I look at it, but I would never want to do it and I'd never want to own one. But I mean people are flocking to see it. It must have some connection with the art world, but not for me. And I suppose Tracey Emin's unmade bed, it was a brilliant idea of hers and she's used her, really life history in her art, I mean she uses herself. Again, it's another way of doing it and I couldn't do it.

The mention of Tracey Emin brings me on to another question. How ... has it been at all significant do you think, the fact that you are a woman, well what's a woman's place in the art world?

[1:18:29]

It's a tough one really. I mean women haven't been at art that long, you know. I think Tracey Emin, well she's used her body, she's used sex, which is always exciting and people want to go and see it. And she's not married, she's not a mother, so she hasn't any of those handicaps. I think it's terribly hard for a woman to be as successful as a man if she has children. I mean Bridget Riley's never married and never had children, you know. You can be then as focussed as a man. And I think women are just as good as men really, I think they have the same abilities. But I do think they have problems, really. I mean you can't escape the fact you have to physically bear the child and when you have the child you want to feed the child and all these things are so tearing you away. The men go off and the child is there somewhere and they're working all day. But I do think it's hard to be it all really and I think women have that handicap.

Have you found the right balance? You've reared your sons and then you've been very committed to your art practice – do you think you've found the right balance?

Well now there's no problem because I'm ... my children are grown up and it's their worries now, their children, and of course I adore my grandchildren, but I can send them

home when they're tiring. No, there's no problem now except that of course I am always the cook and the housekeeper, you know, my husband doesn't do any of that.

Did you ever have twinges at the time, did you ever feel frustrated when you were so involved in your sort of domestic world and separate things to do?

I sometimes feel frustrated now when I have to go home and cook a large dinner and Tony's collapsed in a chair watching television. Sometimes I feel slightly ... and both my boys cook as well as their wives, which is something that happens nowadays, but it didn't in our day. So I see that they share a lot with their wives much more than we did in our day.

How much did your ... were your boys sort of involved in your artistic life and what does art mean to them respectively now?

Oh, tremendously involved. I mean Paul always wants to see what I've done up in the studio because he's a painter too. Tim always wants to know, you know, Tim's asked me to do his books.

Can you describe what you're doing for Tim?

[1:21:43]

Well Tim is a zoologist, my elder son, and he writes, I think he's on his fourth book, and they're very technical books on animal behaviour and dispersing of animals and he asked me to ... he'd had someone illustrating I think his second or the first book and he didn't terribly like them, they were rather commercial. Then he saw some drawings I'd done of pigs and he said I like these much better, would you illustrate my book, which I did, the last one, and it was successful and we enjoyed it. And I'm just finishing the illustrations for the fourth book, which has been great fun. It's lovely to work with your child and produce a book together.

And what's it like doing such illustrative drawings? I mean in a way you're drawing on that rigorous training you had in draughtsmanship.

Well that comes, I mean you can draw anything once you can learn to draw, so he just tells you what to draw and you draw it.

And what sort of pleasure do you get from doing such graphic drawings as opposed to working with much more sort of abstract shapes?

I mean you get tremendous pleasure because you're doing it ... you know, you know you're going to text it off to Tim and you want to see what he thinks about it, and he'll say great, or I want more trees behind, or something. So that all the time you're working with a goal so that it's good. You get in in the morning and you think now I'm going to do that, I'm going to do a hyena or whatever, you know. And you just settle down and do it. And it's pleasurable, I've enjoyed it.

And what's it like having passed the baton on to Paul now who's also a painter – how involved are you with his ...

He's rather private about his paintings. He does a lot of writing about art; colour and how pictures are constructed, he lectures on these things at Byam Shaw, and he's more private. He's a bit nervous about criticising his work I think, you know. It's hard for him I think to be a child of, you know, of Tony really as well as my work. But he always wants to see what I've done. But I think it's a tough time for him, but now he's doing a lot of work for Tony, putting up shows, because Tony can't travel so much now. So he's enjoying that too and of course his children adore coming to the studio and painting. They're both really very artistic so perhaps it'll go on.

It's a very obvious question and it's one that we've sort of touched on thematically I think during the course of the interview, but what has it been like for you being the wife of an artist of such renown, such stature? How is that ...

[1:24:52]

Well it has its plusses and minuses. I mean I was nervous first of all to start painting because I knew so much about painting and about art and I felt nervous about failing, you know, you have to get over that really. I think it's great that we can work together, talk together, live the work together, that's wonderful actually. It's endless sort of ... rapport, endless. And I think a lot of it is very hard because I've had to give a lot of time up to Tony, and still do because he doesn't like travelling by himself and I mean all his shows and whatnot. I learn a lot and I give a lot. It's swings and roundabouts really. I don't think either of us could have done what we've done without the other actually. I mean I don't think I'd have been able to pursue what I've been doing without Tony's constant encouragement and, now let me see what you've done, you know, and that sort of thing. So I think we've both, you know, been together moving forward in a way.

How much do you find correspondences between aspects of your work and aspects of his work? Because you are showing together on occasion now and I wonder are there sort of visual correspondences?

There must be, mustn't there. I mean I think we think so much in the same direction and we talk so much about art and we know each other's work so well, there must be a – we're not conscious of it – but there must be a connection in that sense. I think had I been a sculptor it would have been very difficult. You know, I don't think ... we'd probably divorce by now. But doing something so different ...

Do you think, thinking back on the young woman who was so committed and driven with her art practice from such a young age, have you fulfilled everything you needed or wished to fulfil?

Yes, I think so. I mean I think I would have probably got farther if I'd never had children, but then that would have been such a sadness. I mean Helen you see has never had

children and she's always ... but I think I couldn't have, you know, I'd have such a big part of my life missing if I hadn't. And I think you become a much sort of a deeper person in a sense if you've had to, you know, battle with children and whatnot. You're not sort of ... well in a sense, I won't say so selfish, but so self-centred because I don't think Helen is selfish, but I think, you know, you're so ... you can see the whole breadth of human, really frailties and whatnot if you've had children. So I don't regret it. No, I think I've done what I ... I'm glad that I've sort of been able to produce some paintings that are probably alright, you know.

And what about future projects – do you think very much about what's coming next?

[1:28:54]

Yes, we always do. You know, I always sort of say, what shall I do next? And then we'll talk about it and ...

Do you know what you're going to sort of launch yourself into after you've finished your work for Tim's book?

Sort of vaguely. But you can't say it at this point, because things will evolve and change.

And what about ... do you feel ... how important do you feel sort of success is to you in terms of sort of critical success – is that of great importance to you or is it as ...

How do you mean – critical success?

Well just recognition in terms of shows and exhibitions.

I think, sort of important in the ... you know, if you paint and paint and paint and nobody ever sees the work it's sort of not born in a sense. I think it's quite important to show and let people see that you're working and see your work. I don't have a lot of critical acclaim I don't think, but if it were nice criticism I would like it. [laughs]

What's your attitude to selling works, letting go of works?

Painful.

Why?

I think ... I don't know, if I really like a painting I'm sad to see it go if I wanted to go on working from it in a sense. I think it's very tough to give the dealer fifty per cent of what you've done, but that's their life as well. I mean they've got to do it and so many poor dealers fold now, you know, it's hard to ... I think to have to sell, it would be a horrible job actually, so they deserve it probably. But that's quite tough in one's head. I sometimes am sorry when paintings go that I've really liked, but then, you know, if you're sensible you've got a good photograph of them, so they're with you always, you know.

And what about a retrospective, when your time comes for a retrospective exhibition, how would you like it organised?

Well I did have one at the IVAM Museum in Spain, in Valencia.

When was that?

Well, it wasn't so long ago actually. It was ...

In 2006?

When was it?

2006?

Yes, probably, yes.

And how was that organised – was it thematic, chronological?

It was all the best things that I'd got. She chose it I think, the woman, largely. The director or whatever you call it, of the IVAM Museum came actually to see Tony. She's a wonderful woman, she was dynamite. And she looked and she said, 'Have you done these paintings?' or whatever was up here, to Tony and he said, 'No, they're my wife's'. She said, 'Can I see some more?' So I took her upstairs and she said I'll give you a show, just like that. And she gave me a wonderfully big space, marvellous room. Well it's a lovely museum actually, but she gave me a very good space. So I had a cross-section of all the work I'd done, pretty well. I mean not every one because you couldn't do that, but you know, a cross-section.

And how easy was it to select the works?

Mm?

How easy was it to select the works? Do you have a very clear idea which works ...

No, you worry and you say, should I put that, and I like that one better. Oh no, that would be better than that. You know, you juggle them around because you have to pare them down. No, it's always a worry actually. You agonise which one to put in and which one not to put in. So that was ... and I would probably do the same if I had a retrospective here. And I had one at Dean Clough too, quite a big retrospective. So I've shown quite a bit now I think really and hopefully I'll go on showing. We're showing in Amsterdam in November, Tony and I. The lady who runs the gallery asked us if we'd have a show together. I think it's a new way of showing Tony as well, it's a new angle, you know, to have a husband and wife. So we shall show then and next year we've been asked to show in Crete I think, or Cyprus, I forget which, together. So I'll have to get my act together and start smaller paintings.

And finally, as I think we're winding up now, a last question. What do you think of this recording, I mean have you enjoyed the interview and do you ... has it been a worthwhile exercise for you?

[1:34:29]

I think so. I think you've been very sympathetic and you know me and my work so that it was very nice having you as someone to talk to rather than someone I didn't know. Well, you clarify your mind to a certain extent. I mean it's ... it's quite tiring in a sense because you're having to think what happened, what you did. No, I think it's very worthwhile if it goes down, the record of how someone lived, how someone worked. You know, I'm sure you've done quite a lot of people and I think in years to come it'll be interesting for people to know what it was like.

Are you somebody who dwells on the past significantly or are you very much in the here and now and ...

Oh I think the here and now really, because it's not what you've done, it's the next thing, what's going to happen next that's exciting. Our lives are full of events, I mean we're always talking about what's going to happen, what are we going to do. It's never looking back really and you look at your grandchildren and think what are they going to do too.

[End of track 10]

[Track 11]

We're going to talk a little bit now about your exhibition history. And I wonder, we talked a little bit about the Acquavella exhibition, but how did you get involved with the Acquavella Gallery in New York?

He wanted to take on some artists, I mean he's really a gallery with old masters and I think he wanted to bring it alive really with living artists. He came to the studio here and saw my work and said look, I'll give you a show and I'll take on, I think four or five other – I won't call them young artists – but unknown artists. And he showed me for about three or four times in New York and it petered out rather. He had trouble with the other artists and he found it wasn't the great fun he thought it was going to be and said look, I can't do anything for you really, you know. And he went back to just being a gallery for wonderful old masterpieces. But I mean I was very grateful to him for showing me in New York, and make shows.

How was your work received?

Well I had a very good write-up in the *New York Times* by John Russell, which ... I mean I had a good reception. The first show I had there, Helen Frankenthaler gave me a wonderful party in her studio, which I thought was very sweet of her for a new boy, so to speak. But I mean, you know, I've never tried since to really show in New York after that.

Why not?

I was sort of concentrating on London really and I had no reason. I preferred to sort of make my name at that time in London rather than New York.

And how much, what was it like being sort of thrust back into the world of art galleries and dealers – how have you coped with that and is ...

Well I mean I've been painting for quite a long time and artists, you know, knew my work and then Francis Graham-Dixon opened a gallery, a lovely gallery, in London and he met me at an opening or something. He said I've heard about your work, could I come and see it? And I said, yes please do. And then he offered me show with him and we were ... well I showed with him for about ten years, every two years, you know, with the gallery.

And so how did that work? Would you select paintings with him or would you choose the works for the show yourself?

I would, I mean he'd probably have a say but mostly it would be my choice. I think almost solely my choice really.

And did you work in series for exhibition shows?

Not entirely, but I mean I tend anyway to get into sort of a run of a group of paintings. I was doing, you know, at one point I was doing sort of wall paintings and I think you get somehow you want to do more, you know, one isn't satisfactory, you want to do another and another and another and they keep coming out till in the end you think no, I want to move on. So that you do, you know, so many paintings quite often of a series and then you've had enough.

And how do you go about pricing your work?

Badly. I never know how to price my work really. I usually ask someone. Ask the dealer or Tony or someone like that. I'm very bad at that.

And in terms of the hang – are you at all involved in how the works are displayed in the gallery?

What, in the gallery?

[End of track 11]

[Track 12]

Always wanting to go ... no, you always want to be there at the hanging and some dealers like you to be there more than others. I know at Roche Court, when we showed at the new art centre, I went very early in the morning all ready to hang the show. When I got there it was all completely hung and I thought oh dear, she's done it already. But then she was very good and she said, we'll alter it if you like. And I said, well I'd like to put this there and that and change it, and I was wrong, she was right. So we went back to her hang. She knew her gallery, she knew what she wanted and she was very good. I mean sometimes it's me, sometimes it's the gallery owner and sometimes it's a bit of both.

Why did your relationship with the Francis Graham-Dixon gallery end?

He went bust. I mean he just lost all his money and he couldn't make it pay. He had a very tough divorce I think, which meant he had to give away a lot of, I imagine, stuff to his wife. So no, he had to close, which was very sad actually. I mean all his gallery artists were very sad because it had been a lovely space, a lovely gallery to show in and he was a very nice chap. I'm very sorry, you know, what can say. But I mean it's happening to galleries all the time really.

Did you enjoy having that sort of pressure of working to a solo show – does that make any difference to your working practices?

I don't terribly like pressure. I prefer to paint enough paintings so that when a show comes along I ask them to choose from that lot of paintings rather than having to paint specifically for a show. I find that I don't paint well under pressure. I'd rather paint in my own time and in my own way. I think, you know, suddenly I've got to make three more paintings, it's not a nice situation for me at all, but some artists like that.

Have you ever had any trouble with dealers or have you always found – or gallerists – or have you always found them fairly straightforward to work for?

[0:02:41]

No, I haven't had trouble with dealers insofar as Francis Graham-Dixon closed. No, not really. I mean most of them are very nice people.

Do you enjoy that side of sort of being an artist?

No, no. No, not at all. [laughs]

What about your private views?

I'd like someone to take over from me and do it all, but then, you know, it wouldn't be done as you wanted it. And Tony's a great help at these times because he's so experienced. He'll always come with me to hang the show and things like that, you know.

What do you find stressful about that part of the art business?

Organising things, getting carriers to take the, you know, get the work there. Pat is very good at doing that of course too. Pat is Tony's assistant and he's very experienced with carting things around. And I find openings rather sort of nerve raking. You know, you're suddenly ... it's like taking all your clothes off, you know, in the middle of a room. Everything you've done and worked for is sort of up for grabs there. I find that ... I suppose really the joy of being a painter is the painting, not the showing and whatnot. But it's something you have to do and I've seen Tony do it and he's learnt to be professional about it and I've learnt a lot from Tony with that sort of thing. The first show Tony ever had, he was so sick he had to stay in the lavatory all the time being sick, you know. I mean it's hard for everybody. Of course now he doesn't hardly notice when ... although the Tate show was a great strain.

Why?

[0:04:44]

Well it was the first time he ... it's the biggest retrospective he'd ... well no, perhaps it wasn't the biggest retrospective, but it was home ground and Tate and there was so much work going on beforehand, you know, choosing and arranging the rooms. We had models of all the rooms so he'd move the sculpture around and Paul Moorhouse was curating it and he was very good but it was all ... made Tony very nervous. Because he was really ... well he'd had an enormous show in Japan and he'd had huge shows, but I think sort of Tate was something else.

What about ... you're often in group shows and you've mentioned that you show regularly with Small is Beautiful at Flowers and you also participate in the Royal Academy Summer Show, are those things you do annually, are those targets that you work towards?

No. I just, if the show comes along I usually ... Usually Flowers, well with Flowers they've kindly asked me to show in their Small and Beautiful for quite a few years and there's usually a subject you see, like death, love, war, you know, things like that. So you do probably paint something especially for them, but as it's only seven by nine, sort of smaller than a piece of paper, it's just fun, you know, you fiddle around. I enjoy it actually.

And what about the Royal Academy, what does it mean to you to show there, especially with your visiting?

Well it's very nice if you get in, that's all I can say. [laughs] A couple of years I didn't get in and this year I'm in again, but I mean it's very nice because it's seen by more people probably than any other exhibition other than the Tate and whatnot. You know, I mean everybody goes to the Academy, it's part of the season and all your sort of visitors, old friends and whatnot go, you know, it's just something that is seen so widely and a lot of selling goes on too, which is nice.

How important is it to you to sell your work?

[0:07:14]

Well I mean not at all actually. I mean financially it's very nice, but I mean I'm not having to live by selling, you know, which I know quite a few people are, so it isn't a terrible anxiety to sell. I mean it's very nice if somebody wants to buy your painting.

You've talked about exhibiting with Tony. I wonder, have you ever thought about being in an exhibition with your own family, your first family, the Harvey family painters?

I've never been asked and it would never occur to me actually. It would be nice, but ... Birmingham Art Gallery were going to put on a show of the Harveys and the director came up and looked at all the work that I'd got, you know, I'd got quite a lot of paintings, and cousins and whatnot, and it never came off, I don't know why. Probably expense or availability, I don't know. But it's a thought but it's one that I don't think will ever happen.

And on a slightly different subject – what about your own art collecting? Over the years you have accumulated a lot of artwork and how has that come about and how important is that to you?

Well it's mostly actually swaps with friends. I mean we've got a lot of Nolands, we've got Olitskis, we've got Poons. A lot of them are lent and put in store because we can't hang them all. Hofmanns. They are important because they're paintings we've loved and they're our friends. Unfortunately we can't hang ... I mean we've bought a lot of paintings from younger artists too, but we've mostly lent them to Cambridge, a lot of them are in the colleges. It's a shame, I mean it's nice that they're seen rather than they're stuck in a store, you know.

Do you have any favourites in the collection?

Hofmann I think.

Why?

I never knew Hofmann, I mean I think he was still alive when we were in America, but I never knew him. But he's such a painterly painter, you know, he's really a wonderful colourist, a wonderful painter. I think because they appeal to me personally, I think.

[End of track 12]

[Track 13]

There are in your home two pencil drawings, portraits of you and Tony by ...

I think they're pen actually.

Oh pen. By David Hockney.

We were with the Dufferins in Ireland. They gave a big party for a lot of artists. I think, well I don't know whether it's ... Lindy ... I don't know whether she was a widow then, but anyway, Hockney was there and he was drawing us all and we all sat in turn really. He just ... he was wonderful, he'd draw all the time, everybody. It was very nice to be drawn.

Do you ever do portraits now – do you ever ...

I draw Tony. That's about all. I've drawn his portrait for the Palace, you know, when he became an OM he had to have a portrait drawn of him for the collection and he said could I do it, so I did, which was nice, so that's in the collection. I draw, I'd like to draw my grandchildren, they won't sit still. But no, I don't do any portraits really now, we just draw each other very often, you know.

[End of track 13 – end of recording]