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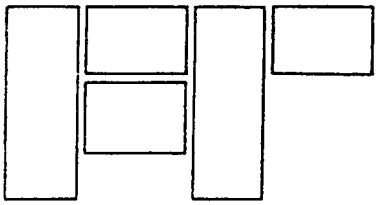

THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
OF THE FASHION INDUSTRIES

PREFACE

This memoir is the result of a tape-recorded interview conducted for the Oral History Project of the Fashion Industries by Mr. John Touhey with Ms. Harriet Meserole in New York City on Oct. 21, 1981.

Ms. Meserole has read the transcript, and has made only minor corrections and emendations. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that he or she is reading a transcript of the spoken rather than the written word.

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(signed) H. Meserole

(dated) Dec 11 - 1981

Fashion Institute of Technology, 227 West 27 Street, New York, N.Y. 10001

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THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE FASHION INDUSTRIES

Interviewer: John Touhey

Narrator: Harriet Meserole

Location: 360 East 72nd Street
New York City

Date: October 21, 1981

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I: This is John Touhey speaking, director of Library/Media Services at Fashion Institute of Technology. Today's date is October 21, 1981, and I am in the home of Miss Harriet Meserole, at 360 East 72nd Street. Miss Meserole, first of all, I'd like to thank you for allowing us to come and talk with you and, in a sense, relive your history. As I explained to you earlier, this is for the benefit of students at the college, for people who are researching the history of our industry, and of course could conceivably be used as a general interest document which we presently do not have. So, I think if our conversation could be as open and unabashed and informal and relaxed as possible, I think you'll find this an enjoyable experience, and we'll have quite a good document when we're finished.

Do you have any questions before we begin, about the process?

N: No, I don't think so.

I: Okay. Obviously this is a very nice opportunity for me, because I have known you now for some time and have enjoyed that friendship very much. And there are some things that I know quite well about you. Now, one of them is that you're in a sense very proud of your age and happy to have lived such a long and such a healthy life. As of your last birthday,

you were. . . .

N: Eighty-eight.

I: Eighty-eight years old, right. Okay, if we can skip back then 88 years to the beginning, and maybe just quickly take a look at the beginning of your career as it might've come out of your childhood, we would actually be going back to the year 1893, right?

N: 1893, yes.

I: Okay. Where were you born?

N: I was born in New York.

I: In New York City.

N: Yes.

I: Okay, and you were an only child.

N: Yes.

I: Do you remember any very, very early instances of liking to--if not liking to draw, or to create, at least beginning to react to things such as colors and forms and things like that.

N: Well, as a child I always had numerous drawing books; you know, regular copy books that I drew pictures in. And had crayons and all that sort of thing. But I think they looked like any children's drawings. (laughter)

I: A little of this and a little of that.

N: I haven't saved any of them. I had quite a few for a long time, but I haven't any of them now. But there was nothing startling about them.

I: Were either of your parents interested in drawing or in art?

N: Well, my father was. He was a civil engineer and an inventor and did perfectly beautiful mechanical drawings, they're unbelievable. (pause) And I think I get my liking and flair for clothes from my mother.

I: I see. So it was really kind of a combination of the two.

N: My mother didn't draw at all, she wasn't an artist. But I think she liked clothes; so did I.

I: How about your early schooling in grade school? Did you go to grade school in this city?

N: Yes, I went to kindergarten first. And I don't think I did any remarkable drawings in kindergarten. And when I was four years old I went to kindergarten; I remember we used to do these paper cut-outs and paste-ups. I think it's just the usual kindergarten thing. And then I went to elementary school and regular elementary school and high school.

I: Were there special courses for art students?

N: Well I don't think there were special courses. There were just--I think you always had some drawing in school, in elementary school, and I think in high school I had mechanical drawing. It wasn't a special course, it was just included in the regular course. I think everybody took it. You didn't have a choice about it.

I: I see. Were there any teachers that specially impressed upon you a liking for art, or influenced you in any way, at that point anyway.

N: Well, in my elementary school days, I remember there was one teacher at the end of the term, when you didn't have to stick to any form, you know. And other students did something else, she let me sit and do drawings all day long. (laughs) So she must've realized that I liked to do it. And then I remember one time when we had to write a little composition about how to do something. But I wrote about how to do a pen and ink drawing, which was a little startling for a child. (laughs)

I: Very good.

N: And I think I read about it somewhere. I think that was the day of the

Gibson Girl, and I used to copy Gibson drawings. And I think one time he wrote about how to do a pen and ink drawing.

I: I see. So that your early influences you would consider not too unusual for a young person.

N: No. No.

I: Rather typical educational process.

N: Yes.

I: Well now, your father, as you said, was a civil engineer. Did he love to draw beyond mechanical drawing?

N: No, no. I have one little drawing that he did of a little cottage. And I think it was some homestead or something. But on the whole, he didn't do anything beyond that. But his sister, my aunt, did. She did paint little paintings, and on her honeymoon to Scotland, she did a painting of a little lake there. (laughs)

I: Was she involved in the world of fashion in any way or art?

N: Oh no. No. I think she liked clothes too, though. I remember hearing of her having a yellow taffeta dress. And you know skirts were draped up in those days, you used to show an underskirt. And hers was pinned with--draped up and pinned with two real amber pins. And she had a real amber necklace to wear with it.

I: Lovely.

N: As a matter of fact, she gave me the amber necklace one time. (laughter) I don't really think I appreciated it.

I: Well then at some point, you made a decision to go to school to study formally. Was that just a natural progression for you?

N: Yes, I think so. I didn't--it wasn't any particular decision. It was after my father had died, and I wanted to do something, you know.

I: At what age were you when your father died?

N: It was in 1912, he died.

I: So you would've been. . .

N: Eighteen or nineteen.

I: Yes. Just right at the college age.

N: Yes.

I: Had you worked at all before that point?

N: No, no.

I: And well, then of course you decided to go to college, and you went to Pratt.

N: Yes.

I: How about your career at Pratt? Can you just sort of think back and . . .

N: Yes, we studied everything there. We had a very full course, you know. We did life drawing and still-life watercolors, and we had pattern drafting. And then we had regular fashion drawing, and we also had lectures on the history of art and history of sculpture. We kept notebooks on those, and I think we had a bit of psychology at the end.

I: To really turn things all around, huh?

N: Yes.

I: (laughs)

N: And then I think we had a poster class. I think I gave you a little reproduction of a poster. I'm a bit vague about what else we did in that class. Perhaps lettering, that's where lettering came in, because I have a lettering book. And so, I mean it was a pretty full course.

I: Was it a four-year program?

N: This was a three-year program.

I: Three-year program.

N: And that little poster thing that was reproduced--we went to the Brooklyn Museum to sketch that costume. An Ainu costume; I think they were Japanese. . . . Aboriginese--Ainu.

I: And that costume--that particular poster was selected to be reproduced..

N: Yes.

I: . . . by the college.

N: I'm afraid I never liked the kind of fashion drawing that I was taught, you see. There were regular illustrations that they had for patterns--on the little packages you get a pattern in, and in the regular pattern books. And in my water color class, still-life class, I was never pleased with what I did in that. And to sort of pick it up, I used to put black outlines around everything. It was a time when modern art was starting, and there were an awful lot of these black outlines around things. And so to everybody's horror, I put black outlines around everything I did.

I: (laughs)

N: I don't think all this set too well with teachers.

I: But you were beginning to express yourself at that time.

N: Yes, yes.

I: Were you able to visit museums and . . .

N: Oh yes. As a matter of fact, as a child, on Saturdays, my father always took me on jaunts to museums and to the New York Museum and to Central Park and that kind of thing. And one of the things I remember was seeing on Fifth Avenue, where the library now is--probably you know this, but there was a reservoir there before the Public Library, and I remember my father pointing it out to me.

I: That's going back to the turn of the century once again. So indirectly, perhaps, that

although obviously more directly than you realized at the time, you were being exposed to a lot of influences.

N: Yes, I suppose so.

I: Which your father saw as something he could do, which he probably enjoyed as well.

N: Yes, yes. Yes, he enjoyed all these things. (pause) And we went to the Museum of Natural History, and I remember that more, somehow, than other museums.

I: Yes. Do you ever remember him sketching at the museums . . .

N: No, no.

I: . . . or anything like that? Did he ever stop to . . .

N: I don't think he ever did anything like that.

I: Well, getting back to Pratt, were there particular courses that you enjoyed as part of the process, or particular teachers?

N: Well, I think I enjoyed the poster class most. The teacher who was head of the fashion drawing was a charming person, a perfectly charming person. But I just didn't want to do that type of drawing, that was all. So I wasn't a--I mean, for no reason.

I: Yes. You just didn't enjoy it.

N: I just didn't enjoy it. I think I enjoyed the poster class most.

I: How about fellow students at the time? First of all, you were going to college at a time when most women--many women were not even graduating from high school. And you had done that as well and went on to college. Was your class made up of mostly women, mostly men?

N: Well, there were both. Both men and women. Perhaps there were more women in the

fashion class. I think probably, for instance in life class, we had some general art students as well as the fashion students. I took what was known as fashion illustration, and then there was general art, and I think probably the men were more in that than in the fashion. (inaudible word)

I: Was there a healthy competitive spirit among the students in these drawing classes and in the poster classes?

N: No, I don't think so, I don't think so.

I: They were simply classes where you completed assignments and went on. How about your awareness at that time of fashion as it was being dictated from Paris?

N: Well, I don't believe I thought too much about it. _____ it must've influenced me a bit, but I--I don't think I thought too much about it.

I: You didn't actively follow it, what was happening in . . .

N: Not that I remember. (pause) But you know, while I was at school--I think I've spoken of it before--I did those little place cards. That was before I graduated, it must've been about my last year in school. And I looked at them since and where I got the idea for those things I haven't the slightest idea. Because it certainly wasn't anything I learned at Pratt, except for some of them had heavy black outlines (laughter), that's about all, which no one approved of at Pratt.

I: But probably you were in fact seeing some of the fashion magazines at the time.

N: I probably was, I probably was. I don't remember about it.

I: What's interesting is, some of your style is very similar to the style often seen in Gazette Du Bon Ton, the little French magazine.

N: Well, I was very much interested by those after I graduated. That was what I was really influenced by, because I adored those drawings. So that really influenced me in the work I did after I left Pratt to take around and show to people.

I: Well, that's what I was just going to ask you about. So that you went through Pratt as obviously a successful student, and it came time to decide what to do. Do you remember what went on in your life at that point?

N: I don't remember how I decided that I wanted to do Vogue covers. (soft laughter) I just don't remember. (laughs) And we didn't have fashion magazines like that at home or anything. But that was evidently what I wanted to do. And I sort of graduated from these Christmas cards or place cards that I did for large charity benefits--that's what those were used for.

I: Was that a freelance kind of thing . . .

N: Yes.

I: . . . that you were involved in? From home.

N: From home, yes. Someone wanted these things, and there were lots of charity luncheons and what-not.

I: How did you get started as an independent freelance artist?

N: Well, after I graduated, I think I--everybody worked at Wanamaker's, one of my fellow students was in the advertising department there. And it was one of the places where everybody worked; they had that fourth floor with all those wonderful and fascinating shops there. And we always went to Wanamaker's a lot anyway, because it had perfectly beautiful materials. Perfectly lovely silks, wools--all kinds of materials. And so someone suggested that I show these to Nancy McClelland, who was head of one of the shops. And she said that she could use some Christmas cards. I don't think she could use the place cards. I don't

really remember
^about that. So I did these Christmas card designs for her that she took. And I shellacked them to make them look antique, because everything is antique there. And so I did those for quite a while, and I think I did some Easter cards then for her. The place cards that I first did while I was still in school were all hand-done. When I did the Christmas cards, I had the outline printed and then hand-colored them.

And from there then, Nancy said--I mean the idea was that I might work in her shop sometime there. And she said she didn't have any place for me at the time, but then a little later in one of the other shops where they did more designing, they had an opening. So I went there for a while. They had lamp shades and pillows and I don't remember what else. And I was selling there and designing a bit. I don't think I did much designing.

I: Was Au Quatrième-was that the name that they used in reference to the whole floor or was it a special department?

N: Well, it was a--I don't remember how much space it took. I think there were four shops connected with them. I think in--I had a book I have given you of that showing the various shops. And Ruby Ross Wood-- who she was then, and she became Ruby Ross Goodnough--and Billy Baldwin, for instance, worked for her. . . . And she had the antique shop there. . .

I: One of the four shops.

N: One of the shops.

I: Yes.

N: And Nancy McClelland had the shop where they had little novelties, you might say. She had boxes made with pasted things on them and what-not. I really can't remember exactly what people had. Oh, before all this though, I think that Miss Swift, who was one of the decorators of the time,

asked at Pratt if they had someone who could make lamp shades. Well they got in touch with me about this, and I immediately made some lamp shades and took them in to show Miss Swift. There was a Miss Lyons there then who had charge of things. And what they really wanted was someone who did sewing--to make silk lamp shades, you know. But they liked these that I took in. So I did quite a bit of work for them after that.

I: Were these paper?

N: Paper. Some were done on parchment paper. And I did one that was supposed to be quite shocking. I don't know how I did it, but I did sort of a--just a black nude silhouetted figure. And then on the outside of the paper, she had some sort of a costume on. But when you put the light on, you see, all you could see was this nude figure. So that was quite a success. The only trouble was I did it on parchment paper, and I shellacked that. And when you put the light on, and left it on for any length of time, the lamp shade burst (laughter), because of course the shellacking held it down, it didn't give it any room to expand, so that kind of fell through. And also for her, there was a little elevator in her shop. And I painted the door of the elevator for her; she wanted something done with that, and so I did that.

Now where were we?

I: We were talking about the Christmas cards . . .

N: Yes, and when I had the job at Wanamaker's. Well, anyway, during all this time, I did a lot of other little things too, you know. I worked for someone who sent out a number of designs a month; you know, I think people still do that: have a sort of a service where they send out designs for clothes. I did a little bit of that, and I don't remember what other things I did.

But all the time I did drawings to show at Vogue.

I: You just kept knocking at the door.

N: Because they had a special day that they saw artists, and you could take work in. I think most places do. So I always took something in.

I: Were they always fashion drawings particularly?

N: Fashion drawings. And I don't really remember what I took--but they were fashion drawings.

I: How long of a period do you think this was where you were freelancing at various jobs, and you kept pushing to get into Vogue?

N: Well, you see I graduated in 1915, and in 1919 I had my first cover on Vogue. (Indicating cover) That was the first thing I did for Vogue.

I: So it was about four years.

N: About four years.

I: Let me just get something--forgive me, I just want to get something straight in my own mind. Had you decided about Vogue as a senior in college, or was it after you graduated that Vogue became--do you . . .

N: That I do not remember.

I: Okay, okay.

N: I just do not remember. I wondered myself how I decided I wanted to do this. I really don't know.

I: Well, one can certainly say you persevered. (laughter) Having made up your mind at some point, you went ahead and did it. Do you remember the meetings at going to Vogue, do you remember anything special about those meetings . . .

N: No.

I: . . . or were they just kind of, were you just sort of rushed through.

N: No, I don't remember. I think I usually left the drawings, you know, to be shown to the staff.

I: Were you taking your work anyplace else or was it simply to Vogue that you were most interested?

N: Well, I think I had taken work to other places, but I don't really remember. Maybe some advertising agencies, but I don't really remember. It was mostly Vogue, I think.

I: Do you recall how that first cover came about, meaning: Was it in taking your drawings--obviously they were probably new drawings that you had done, you took them in on a typical visit. Was there a special reaction at the time from the person, or did they . . .

N: (laughs) That I don't remember really; I don't remember anything about it.

I: Okay. You don't remember being called by them, or . . . You just had your first cover.

N: No, I don't remember about it.

I: Having had your first cover on Vogue, which was quite an accomplishment obviously--and fortunately we can still enjoy that particular cover and others that you've done up to this day--but once you had completed your first cover, did you then go to work for Vogue or did you continue with your freelance at Wanamakers and. . . ?

N: Well, no, no. Then I did mostly work for Vogue, because they gave me some fashion work to do--right after that, some black and white fashion work to do. And I think I gradually dropped the other things then. I didn't work at Vogue, you know, I was still freelancing.

I: You were. . . .

N: I mean, none of the Vogue artists worked at the. . .

I: In the studio.

N: . . . at Vogue, excepting the pattern people.

I: I see. Do you remember what you were paid for your first cover?

N: Yes--well, I'm not quite sure about the first one, but I remember after that

that I was paid $125 a cover.

I: Which was a considerable amount of money in those days. How many covers were you--let me ask the question another way: Having succeeded with your first cover, were you then commissioned to do so many covers in a row?

N: No, no. I never had any contract with them, and I don't think they ever asked me to do a cover. I just did them and took them in.

I: Did the editors give you a theme that they were working with in the next issue, and you . . .

N: Well, perhaps.

I: . . . worked around them?

N: Sometimes, or I knew what was coming up, you know. (pause) No, I think I just did covers, and I'm really afraid I was very unbusinesslike. I never sent a bill to Vogue or anything like that. I just took the things in, and they just sent me checks for them. I never knew--(laughs) never set a price or anything.

I: Yes.

N: I just accepted what they sent me. But I remember I received $125 for the covers, and I don't think that was ever increased. It stayed at that.

I: I want to come back to this period, but about how many years were you connected with Vogue?

N: Well, I think my last cover was in 1930. And then I did work after that--let's see (shuffles through papers), I jotted down some dates here. The last work I did for them really was that Vogue Pattern Book. It was published in 1952.

I: So you were with them roughly 33 years, off and on.

N: Oh, Was it as long as that? Well, '20...

I: 1919. . .

N: Yes.

I: . . . to 1952. About 33 years. Well, I know from talking with you that you have some extraordinary experiences with the people from Vogue and the friends that you had met. And I'd like to sort of go slowly, if we can, through that Vogue experience, and try to recall as much as you can of the great people that you worked for. Of course the editors--especially the editors--and also I know that you had an exciting assignment in Europe, in 1924-5. So, if we can just go back to--and I especially appreciate the fact that much of the detail could possibly escape us at this time. But just, what I would really like to come up with, at least, is just kind of a general feeling that you had of working at Vogue initially as a young woman who had accomplished this rather extraordinary feat of getting a cover on Vogue and then continuing to do covers for Vogue.

Do you recall the early days of your relationship with Vogue, any special people or things or attitudes or . . . ?

N: Well, I think it was always very pleasant--and I can't think of anything particular.

I: Who was the art editor at the time? Was that how they worked, that you dealt with the art editor?

N: Well, you dealt with the whole staff really. Mr. Nast had a great deal to say about things, and Mrs. Chase was the editor then, and she had a great deal to say about everything. As a matter of fact, she was the one who decided, I think, on my first cover. Not the art director, he didn't have the last word, but he probably, he showed it to them. And everyone was very nice to work with. (pause) I can't seem to remember anything particular

about it now. And as I say I worked at home, so I didn't have constant contact with people, and I worked with different fashion editors most of the time. And usually they would go to the wholesale places and pick out the clothes, and then I would go afterward and do sketches.

I: At the wholesalers.

N: At the wholesalers. And then they were credited to various department stores.

I: Do you remember some of the manufacturers that were particularly featured by Vogue during that period?

N: No. No, I do not remember manufacturers.

I: Or American designers, were they. . . . Of course this was the time, the period before American designers had their own labels.

N: Yes. And there were the manufacturers, and I think mostly the things were imported, I think a great many of them. Of course, working for Vogue, that was when I started doing a great deal of outside work--advertising work and everything. Either they would ask Vogue, or people would see my work in Vogue, and it wasn't things that I went after. I did a great deal of newspaper advertising.

I: For department stores?

N: For department stores. I worked at Best's with Mary Lewis, and I think Jessica Davis was there later after Mary Lewis. And I may be wrong about this, and then she was later editor of Vogue.

I: Right.

N: And so I had worked with her before, and I did work for Bonwit-Teller and Franklin Simon and . . .

I: Lord and Taylor, didn't you?

N: Yes, I think I did work for Lord and Taylor too. (pause) Then there was someone else in the Fifty-seventh Street area and I rather forget them now.

I: Yes. Going back to that period as a young artist and a successful artist and a cover illustrator and all of that, was your personal life pretty much built around the people that you met through the industry?

N: Well, no, as a matter of fact it wasn't. My close friends were all outside of that. People that I met through friends from school, you know, from college. Mostly, I think.

I: I was trying to see if there were particular attitudes at the time about what you were doing as an independent woman and going off to business and the success that you were enjoying and all of that: do you recall any particular attitudes that you experienced from people . . .

N: No.

I: . . . . or support, which is a positive attitude?

N: No, I don't seem to. I think we all took it in stride. (laughs)

I: Most of your friends, I assume, were working; had jobs of their own and various professions.

N: Oh, yes, yes. And one of my friends was in the advertising department at Franklin Simon's, and oh another one did work for some of the department stores, did designing for one of the department stores. I'm very vague about this, really didn't think much about it. (laughs)

I: Yes. You mentioned earlier the influence of the beginning of modern art on your drawing. Was that a staying influence for you?

N: Oh yes, I think so.

I: Did you keep aware of what was going on?

N: Yes, because of course I went to all the exhibitions of paintings. That was one nice thing about freelancing: you were free then. I didn't have a job, so in between times I was free to go around to galleries and things like that.

I: In that period, who were the artists that had influenced you the most, do you think?

N: Well I think those French artists in the Gazette Du Bon Ton. They influenced me most. And there was a whole group of them, you know. And they did work for Vogue right up until the Second World War, when they were all shipped home.

I: You also had a great deal of liking for Picasso, didn't you?

N: Yes. Yes, he was one of the moderns I liked very much. And of course I went to the Museum of Modern Art; I was a member for a while there. (pause) So that leads up to something else, doesn't it?

I: Well, what do you think it leads up to? (laughter)

N: The Museum of Modern Art contest.

I: Yes, it certainly does.

N: I read about that, and . . .

I: That was in 19__. . .

N: . Let me see, I think I jotted that down. 1941.

I: 1941. That was right at the period of the outbreak--well, not the outbreak of World War Two, but America's entrance into World War Two. Could we just stop for one second, though, because something was obviously happening in America with the outbreak of the war. The fashion industry was being hit directly by the closing of the European markets. Did that have any direct effect on you at all?

N: Oh my, yes.

I: In what way?

N: Well you see, I started out during the First World War, which is a bad time to start. And then I went through the crash, the stock market crash, and the recession, which was really dreadful. I mean, that--when they speak now of having a recession, you don't even notice it, you know. But that really was dreadful, and so was the stock market crash.

I: How did those two moments of--not moments certainly for those who lived through them--but in retrospect, those moments of history affect you personally and professionally?

N: Well, it affected me personally because I had saved quite a little money, and with the crash it just all vanished. Because I had quite a little bank stock in one bank, and that bank just disappeared right off the face of the earth, and that was that. And then of course there was no work being done, no advertising work or anything like that being done. And I had also taken out a small annuity fund I had paid into that. And so to get some money, I just cashed that in and lived on that. So it was really "great" time, a very bad time, and of course on top of all that for the poor artists, photography came in with a great big bang.

I: Good point.

N: And so, there we were. It was no--everybody rushed to have. . . . And of course, I think it must have been a great satisfaction to all the people who you did drawings for, because you know you would take something in and then they would--they could always criticize it and say that this wasn't the way it was, and you had to change it, you see.

I: Because of the photographs.

N: And now when the photographs came in, they couldn't say it had to be changed: it was photographed and that was it. And they couldn't argue about it.

I: Yes. So that was a particularly difficult period for you.

N: That was a very difficult period for me, and that was when I started doing more work for the pattern book. I did all those pages for the pattern book. And that was very interesting work, because I did it in black and white, and usually for that work, for every issue, they used three different colors that were decided upon. And I would make overlays then showing where these colors should be used, and then I think by some mechanical process they used the original drawings again to put these colors in. But it was very interesting to do.

I: That was for Vogue as well.

N: That was for the Conde Nast Publications' Vogue Pattern Book.

I: For the Conde Nast Publications.

N: Yes. And then I--I think somewhere along in there I started doing things for House and Garden too: interiors.

I: If I remember right, that was about 1935, '34?

N: I don't really remember. (pause) Well, you know I went to Paris in 1924 and '25.

I: I wanted to get back to that, thank you. There was one point that I had before that about the--oh, did you ever at the time of the advent of photography in the fashion magazines, did you ever think about switching over to photography?

N: Yes I did. But I just didn't have any feel for it at all. I just didn't seem to--I thought of it and tried a few photographs, but. . . . I was living in a penthouse then in Tudor City, and we had a view of all the buildings downtown: the Empire State and the Chrysler and--so I have some pictures of

those still that I took, but that's as far as I went.

I: Do you think your reaction to photography might've been caused because you saw it as the opposition, and you really were trying to maintain the art of illustration?

N: Well, yes. You'd think of something else to do. But I never had any real flair for that.

I: Going back to your reference of your trip in 1924: that was at the request of Vogue, but there was also . . .

N: Well, I mean--I think it was more that I said I wanted to go. (laughter) And so that they allowed me to go, and they paid me a small salary while I was there to take care of that. So that was really very nice.

I: And you were there about two years?

N: Six months.

I: Oh, six months, that's right, between '24 and '25.

N: And I went to a great many of the great openings, you know. And one thing I do remember about it: Mrs. Chase came over to go to the openings one season, and of course they didn't allow any artists to sketch at these openings. And she took me along,* and if there was any particular dress that she liked, she would point it out to me and asked me to remember it. So I remembered I don't know how many dresses. And when I got home I sketched these all just from memory.

I: Good Lord.

N: (laughs)

I: Of course there were many people--that's how many people took

*Sketches and photographs were arranged for later. - HM

the ideas back to the States.

N: Yes. Perhaps.

I: By the same process.

N: Yes. Perhaps--I do not really know of any.

I: What was Mrs. Chase--were you close enough to her to have an opinion of working for her, working with her, her attitudes toward . . .

N: Hmmm, no.

I: . . . freelancers and. . . ?

N: She was sometimes very critical. And that rather depressed me. (laughs) But I didn't work with her a great deal; you know it was mostly the other fashion editors I worked with.

I: Do you remember her criticism of your work? Specifically or . . .

N: (laughs) One criticism I remember. I had a period of doing eyes as just little round spots or little dashes on a piece of paper. And she didn't like that at all, she said they looked like little burnt holes in a blanket. (laughter) So that's the only one of her criticisms I remember. (laughs)

I: That's an interesting line.

N: (laughs)

I: Very visual anyway. You can certainly see her point.

N: (laughs)

I: While you were in Europe for that six-month period, you were doing many of the openings for Vogue, covering the openings for Vogue, and what else? Were you doing any

other freelance work?

N: No, I wasn't doing any other work then. And I did buy clothes--I bought clothes at Chanel, and that was rather interesting. And I have a little photograph of myself in a Chanel dress. And then I bought clothes at other places. So it was rather interesting to go in and have things made--you know, the whole process. Ordering clothes and having them made for you.

I: Did you ever meet Madame Chanel?

N: No, no, I never did.

I: What was her showroom like at that time? Do you remember?

N: No. I don't seem to have any particular memory of it. (pause) But you'd pick out--you know, she was doing little sweater top things then and pleated skirts. Not like the Chanel suit now, but a little sweater top. You would pick out the sweater, you know, and ____ I had one of a perfectly beautiful pinkish color. And then pick out the silk for the skirt, to go with it. And _____ a pleated skirt then of this beautiful silk.

And then also in Paris, there was still that style of going to the lingerie places to have dresses made. It's like underwear now, you know, to wear as a dress, which people do very often. And these things were all made by hand: little shirtwaist dresses maybe with drawn work or embroidery or something. And I had a number of those made: perfectly beautiful and all made by hand.

And in those days, in Saks Fifth Avenue, they had their lingerie department on the first floor, where they had nothing but handmade lingerie, and that was all I wore. I didn't

wear any machine-made. (laughs) Those were the good old days. (laughter)

I: Yes, I'll say. Do you remember the price of your outfit from Chanel?

N: Not a great deal. I imagine around $150 or something like that.

I: And that was a sweater top and skirt.

N: Yes, yes. Not a great deal. Of course I didn't--and then I went to her sale at the end of the season. And I remember I bought a chiffon evening dress that had a band of fur around the bottom; and also a red velvet evening cape.

I never paid--they weren't very expensive. Not the way things are now. And Lanvin was one of my favorite places. I had a costume that I picked out there. It was a red wool dress, and it had--that was the era of the long waisted things. And it had strips of the material flying out--when you stood still, it gave the effect of pleats, and they would all fly out. And those were lined with--it was red and they were lined with a black silk with a white dot in it. And it had a jacket with it, and that was lined with the same black and white-dotted silk. And I knew I was coming home then, and of course the New York spring and summer isn't anything like in Paris, you know. And I thought, "Well, this wool dress, this wool top is just going to be too hot." So I asked them if they would make it in a silk, with a black and white silk top dress, and then these things--panels-

lined with the red wool. And they had to take it to Madame Lanvin herself to approve of it before they would do it and they did it for me.

I: That's fascinating, that's incredible. You had a real sense of adapting clothes to your own personal needs. . .

N: Yes

I: . . . as opposed to something you buy and then . . .

N: Yes, and they just wouldn't do it. The sales person (vendeuse) couldn't do it, they had to take it to the head of the firm. And then I had another dress--I got it at Patou's, I think. A beige dress and a beige wool coat with a lynx collar.

I: Do you still have these clothes?

N: No. Unfortunately.

I: (pause) That's fascinating. Was that your only trip for Vogue out of the country?

N: Well I went to London later, you know.

I: That was--yes.

N: While I was in Paris, I went down to Italy, to Rome, and did some of those little tours around there.

I: Again sketching and . . .

N: No, I did that with--this was purely. . . .

I: Purely for your own pleasure.

N: Yes.

I: I see.

N: But it was all very pleasant.

I: Was the work that you completed in Paris incorporated into each of the publications--American, British, French--the time that you were there?

N: I think so. One of the covers that's on Vogue I did there: the girl with the frail, fringy dress.

I: Right.

N: My mother was with me and we went down to Cannes, stayed there for a little while.

I: Wasn't there somebody there, as a matter of fact, working on a.... (pause) You remember a story you once told me about somebody else being in the hotel.

N: Well I don't remember now, but Mrs. Chase came down there while I was there, and we went on a little trip to one of those little towns, you know. And that's where I bought this head here. (You have the letter about it--over 100 years old.)

I: Oh, right, yes.

N: And Fish was there. She did a great deal of work with Vanity Fair, signed it"Fish."And she was with us that day. And then, what I started to say: this Vogue cover that--I belonged to the casino or whatever you call it, that isn't the word that I want to use. But anyway there, and this perfectly beautiful woman had this fringed dress on, and that was where I got the idea for that. Of course, you know, to go way back, at Pratt we weren't taught to do fashion drawings from a model. We had our life classes. But fashion drawings you just--you did not do from a model. You had certain proportions to follow. And so I have never liked to do fashion drawings from a model. I would make rough sketches from a model, but my finished ones I would redraw without a model.

So this is rather skipping around, but . . .

I: No, I'm interested in just letting you sort of think back slowly and recalling all of these little points.

N: And when we went down to Italy, we went on the famous Blue train.

I: Oh yes. That must have been quite an experience.

N: Yes.

I: Was that your first trip to Europe?

N: Yes, that was my first trip to Europe.

I: And your mother was with you the entire time . . .

N: Yes.

I: What were accommodations like for you? I'm getting into the business end of it, but did Vogue sort of set the whole thing up for you, or were you really on your own?

N: Well I was pretty much on my own. Of course they would set up any of the--oh incidentally, Mainbocher, the designer, he was the editor of Vogue in Paris when I was there.

I: And did you work through his office?

N: Through his office, and I worked with Pauline Pfeiffer, who later married Hemingway. (laughs)

I: Gosh, yes. (pause) What was her position there?

N: She was one of the fashion editors. I worked with her; she was awfully nice.

I: Was she dating Hemingway at the time?

N: I don't remember whether she was or not.

I: Because that would've been his Paris time. . .

N: I think it probably was.

I: . . . the twenties.

N: I think it probably was.

I: That's fascinating. Did you go to the local bistros and . . .

N: No, I didn't do any of that.

I: . . . see any of that?

N: No. (laughs)

I: Were you aware that it was going on at the time?

N: I think so. But I just--I just didn't do those things. (laughs)

I: Yes. Boy, certainly your schedule was full of just doing what you had to do.

N: And so I mean, any place that I went to sketch, it was arranged by Vogue. But I was left a lot of free time to do whatever I wanted to do.

I: During this period were you in fact a salaried employee of Vogue?

N: Yes. Then I was on a salary.

I: Just for those six months.

N: Just for that six months. Which was very nice of them, really.

I: Yes, lovely. Do you recall any other experiences of visiting the showrooms or the salons, as they were referred to?

N: Oh, I remember we went to Poiret's one time with one of the fashion editors. Or else--I don't know whether I went with a fashion editor or whether I was there on my own. I think I went with a fashion editor. (pause) And I'm getting a little vague about this now, but one of the famous sopranos in opera then came in--and now I've forgotten her name, but it's one of the famous ones of that period--and they didn't recognize

her, and whoever I was with told the head of shop there that this soprano had come in, don't you know. So they rushed out to take care of her then. I guess I was doing some sketches there then.

I: Did you buy any of Poiret's things?

N: No.

I: What was your reaction to his design?

N: I don't remember. I don't think I cared for his things so much. And I mean to wear.

I: Yes. How about Fortuny? Was that the period when Fortuny would've been just down--really next door, wasn't he?

N: Well I don't really know, because I didn't--I don't know anything about that.

I: I remember there was a wonderful story about Poiret--a client coming in to see Poiret, wanting Poiret to do something, and he said something to the effect, "I don't do that kind of thing, go next door to Fortuny." In which, I mean in today's world, just boggles the mind. . .

N: Yes, yes.

I: . . . that the two men were right next door to one another and so comfortable with one another, and referring people, evidently, back and forth easily. It was a very different world in those days.

Well then, during this period of working with Vogue, you were most heavily involved with Vogue up through the thirties, right?

N: Through the thirties, I think.

I: Yes. Did you take any other trips for them . . .

N: No, no.

I: . . . during that time?

N: That was all.

I: Just pretty much New York based.

N: Well, of course I did go to London later, but that was when I wasn't doing so much fashion for Vogue itself. I was working--doing things for Vogue Patternbook then.

I: Yes.

N: So this was a private--it wasn't sponsored by Vogue, my trip to London. When was that, '39?

I: '38?

N: '38, '39?

I: Yes. Just right before, and now we come back to the museum. How did that all come about?

N: You mean. . . ?

I: The contest.

N: The contest. Well I just read about it in the paper.

I: Did they do annual contests--this was at the Metropolitan.

N: No, this was at the Museum of Modern Art..

I: Yes, the Museum of Modern Art, I'm sorry, right.

N: I don't think so.

I: This was a special contest.

N: I think this was a special contest. And of course most of the people who entered it were really quite important in their fields,

you know. That was one of the things I was very pleased about, that contest, having things in that. Because they didn't know who I was at all, you know it wasn't a personality thing or anything. You just sent in your things with a number on it, and they were judged before they knew who did them.

I: How many entries did you submit, do you remember?

N: Well I think just four.

I: Four entries. And one--
just for purposes of an audiotape, would you describe, if you would, the winning -- the winning number?

N: (laughs) Well, they exhibited two--I sent in four, and they exhibited two. One was a series of arches, and they were supposed to be fabric designs, but afterward mine seemed to fit into wallpaper designs rather than fabric design. And then there was one of steps in--that was all grey and white. And the arches could have more color in it--I think there was two or three colors, I've forgotten. And so I was very pleased to--well I didn't receive a prize, I received honorable mention.

I: Well, in that kind of a contest, of that scope, certainly that in essence is receiving a prize.

N: Yes.

I: How many pieces were in the actual exhibit, do you remember?

N: Well I just had--there were two in the exhibit. . .

I: Two from you.

N: I sent in four and there were two in the actual exhibit.

I: Two of your works, but how many were in the total exhibit,

do you remember?

N: Oh I don't really know now.

I: Did the exhibit go on for some time?

N: Oh yes, yes. I mean I think I've given you some books about it that would explain the whole thing. I've rather forgotten now.

I: Was that the only contest that you ever entered?

N: Yes.

I: You had no inclination to go on from there and pursue it?

N: Well I don't think anything ever came . . .

I: Because then again you were hit by the war again.

N: Yes. Yes, I've been through two wars. (laughter)

I: At least. Now we're at the period at the beginning of World War Two, and as you mentioned earlier, all of the French people were sent home, and foreigners for the most part were sent home or went home. What happened to you at this point in your career? This would be 1940, 1941.

N: Well of course they were very bad times, and very little work to be had. And I think that--wasn't that the period photography made its entrance?

I: Well I guess in the thirties, in the mid to late thirties, was when it was beginning.

N: And I think then I did most of the Patternbook work.

I: Dorothy Shaver had begun her American designer movement at Lord and Taylor at that period. Were you connected with that at all. . .

N: No, no.

I: . . . did you ever work for that movement at all?

N: No.

I: Do you remember the effect of her work on the industry; I mean, you know it certainly is written about today, but you having been there.

N: No, I don't remember anything particularly about it.

I: She evidently had the windows at Lord and Taylor given to the various American designers.

N: Yes.

I: It was really quite a wonderful thing that she did. (pause) So that your last cover for Vogue was in--I'm just trying to recall the date myself. . . .

N: I think it was 1930.

I: Yes, I think so too, okay.

N: But I went on doing things for them for the Patternbook.

I: Right. You also did a lot of personal things for Conde Nast, didn't you? For his--didn't you do some work for a Christmas card. . . ?

N: Well not for Conde Nast, I don't think. Did I?

I: I thought you did something for his family. There was something that you did: an announcement, a wedding announcement maybe, or a Christmas card?

N: Oh no, it was just some pages in Vogue, I think; that was all.

I: Oh, that's right, that's right.

N: It was when . . .

I: For his daughter's wedding.

N: His daughter's wedding, yes.

I: And you illustrated the wedding dress.

N: Or her debut I think it was, I illustrated some pages of her clothes at the time of her debut. I'm a little vague about that now, I think though I have those pages somewhere . . .

I: Yes.

N: . . . but--no.

I: What about Carmel Snow? Now there you in fact . . .

N: Well she became an editor of Vogue, and I always liked her very much. She was very nice to work with.

I: Did you deal with her directly?

N: I dealt with her directly. I think before she became editor, she was just on the fashion staff, and that was when I dealt with her a great deal. And I think when she became editor too, or--she didn't. . . .Well I'm a bit vague about how all these things fit in, but I liked her very much and she was very nice to work with. Because she always explained what they were trying to do, which was always a great help, because if you were just sent to sketch things with no background, why, you know it's sometimes difficult to arrive at something.

There was one nice thing about Vogue: they always let me do just about what I wanted to do. I mean there might be a main theme for the things, but . . .

I: But there was not a lot of detail dictated to you.

N: No. Usually I more or less planned the pages myself--of my own work.

I: Now right about at this time--well, before I leave Carmel Snow, you also did the announcements of their first child--a Christmas card.

N: Oh yes, I had forgotten about that.

I: Yes; those were beautiful. In fact, I know I told you that their second child, who is Carmel Snow Wilson, was recently at the college and I showed her the card that you had done for her--I think it was her older brother (pause) or sister. I can't remember now, but at any rate, she was just thrilled to see them.

N: I don't remember who it--but it was evidently, it was Carmel Snow's first child, anyway.

I: Right, exactly.

N: I remember going to the hospital to talk to her about it.

I: When she left the editorship at Vogue, was that when Nancy White took over?

N: Oh . . .

I: Oh No, wait a minute.

N: No, Jessica Daves.

I: Jessica Daves took over. When was Carmel Snow at Harper's? Or am I getting this all very confused.

N: Well I don't remember the dates of all things; she evidently left Vogue for Harper's.

I: That's right. And then Nancy White took over from Carmel Snow . . .

N: At Harper's, yes. I didn't have anything to do with that after

she left Vogue. I think Jessica Daves took over next.

I: Right. And you worked for her.

N: And I worked with her.

I: Right. Again, this was in the Pattern . . .

N: And of course--no, this wasn't Pattern, that was Vogue. Vogue proper.

I: Oh right, I'm skipping ahead. Okay I'm sorry, okay.

N: (pause) I was trying to think--well, I can't remember now exactly. Who was editor of Vogue after Jessica Daves?

I: I'd have to go back to my resources. My calendar puts a very confusing _____. (laughter) I want to jump back one more time, which is confusing for the people who will be listening to this someday, but what was your impression of Mainbocher?

N: Oh I liked him very much.

I: Was he . . .

N: He was very nice, very nice. He was editor of French Vogue when I was in Europe. And I liked him very much.

I: Did you do any assignments particularly for French Vogue, or were any of your assignments used in French Vogue that you were doing for American Vogue?

N: Well you see I worked with--now what was her name, I've forgotten who became . . .

I: We'll come up with it.

N: I worked with her, I didn't work directly with Mainbocher, but I knew him of course. You know, the girl who married Hemingway, I was trying to think of her name.

I: Oh, Pauline Pfeiffer.

N: Pauline Pfeiffer. I worked with her, and I don't remember other people particularly.

I: Okay. Now we're going to go back to (laughter)--do you feel like we're on a bouncing ball here? (laughter)--back to World War Two. And of course this was another difficult time for you. . .

N: Very difficult, very difficult.

I: . . financially and professionally.

N: Of course the Depression--when they speak of "We're having a recession or a depression" now, it's nothing like that was. That was really something.

I: Were a lot of your friends out of work during that period?

N: Well I don't remember so much about other people somehow. Just about myself. (laughs)

I: Yes. Were there really low periods for you, I mean when--I hate to be so crass about it, but _____.

N: Well, I've forgotten, it all sort of merges together now, don't you know.

I: Sure.

N: But that was when Vogue changed completely. And they started using photographs instead of drawings and things like that. I mean I don't remember too much about it now.

I: Well then obviously at that point you started branching out again. You were doing freelance work, and you did some advertising work at that point. And you also then did the village for Shredded

Wheat, right?

N: Yes.

I: That was in about 1944, '45?

N: I haven't that date down.

I: How did that all come about? Can you share that with us, how that project came about?

N: Well, I'm afraid I got that through a friend. (laughs)

I: Why are you afraid? (laughter)

N: Well I didn't just go in cold and get the . . .

I: Oh, well sure.

N: . . . the thing, don't you know. But a friend of mine who knew my work was with . . .

I: McCann-Erickson?

N: McCann-Erickson. And I think perhaps it was his idea, this project for Shredded Wheat. And that is when I did that; then I did--first I did a village of cut-outs and . . .

I: Each box had a different building, right . . .

N: Yes.

I: . . . and you would put it all together.

N: And you put it all together.

I: I remember that. I hope I told you that, but I remember that as a child, completing that village. Or I hope I completed it, much of it anyway.

N: And it was quite a big, a large village when it was all finished, you know. And then after that, I did the circus for them.

I: Right.

N: But that was the end of that business, of the Shredded Wheat business.

I: Yes. You were paid very well for that project, if I remember right.

N: Yes, yes.

I: I think these points are interesting for people historically to realize what people were paid in a freelance situation. And I think it was about four thousand dollars for the village, right?

N: No. I'm afraid it was nearer four hundred.

I: Four hundred; one zero too much.

N: But then, for the circus, I think I received $2500.

I: That's it, okay.

N: Because I mean I think those were quite a success.

I: Do you think your pay for the circus was because of the success of the town?

N: Yes.

I: I would think so, yes.

N: Yes, yes, yes.

I: Then you did the Williamsburg Project. The Williamsburg Restoration Project. Again in this period you were doing the houses at Williamsburg and it was . . .

N: Well, nothing ever came of that really.

I: There was just another take-off on the same idea.

N: Yes, yes.

I: And also, which I adored, and it was never a published product, so to

speak, but your work with the alphabet for children.

N: Yes.

I: All of those various things that you did.

N: I decided I should have an agent then. And so that is when I did all the book ideas, because she was in touch with all these people. And that was when I did those alphabet things.

I: Now this would've been in the late forties, early fifties?

N: I think so, yes.

I: Now where it's kind of hitting the fifties, and you were soon to end of--your last work with Vogue was about 1952.

N: 1952, that was when I did illustrations for the Pattern Book that they got out. Hardcover. *

I: How many covers in all did you do for Vogue; do you remember, Miss Meserole, how many covers?

N: I think about twenty. I'm not quite sure of that, I think it's twenty or--I think it's twenty though. And I did them--the first one was 1919 and the last one was 1930. I remember that, of the covers. And then I did Vogue Patternbook covers. And I also did some covers for the Designer; it wasn't a Conde Nast publication. And I also did some work for Butterick.

I: Right. Butterick Patterns.

N: Butterick Patterns. I did a great deal of work during those--between 1919 and 1930. Other work besides Vogue work: advertising work for various agencies.

I: But always as a freelance artist.

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*I find I have work in Patternbook dated 1955. - HM

N: But always as a freelancer, yes. The only time I ever was on a salary was when I was in Paris.

I: Right. For that six months.

N: And then of course I went to London too at the time of the coronation, and I wasn't on a salary then, but I did some work for Vogue then while I was there.

I: It seems to me I remember a conversation where you said you would get an idea and you'd check with Vogue, and they would say, "Go ahead." It was kind of, each item was a new item for you, and each item--you were working for Vogue, but as you say you weren't salaried, but you kept doing things . . .

N: No. No, I think they sent me to do some sketches at some of the dress houses there.

I: In London.

N: In London. (pause) No, I don't--I can't seem to just connect to bringing in ideas. (Shuffling through papers) I probably did sometimes. But that was a very interesting time, I enjoyed being in London very much.

I: With the coronation.

N: And I did consider staying there--that was one thing, you know. I could've stayed if I wanted to. But as I have told you before, it was very fortunate that I didn't because the Second World War broke out soon after I was there. And of course all the Americans were sent home then.

I: Yes.

N: So it was fortunate that I didn't make--because that would've been

a really great break for me, the move there. So I'm glad I decided against it.

I: With the advent of photography, did you just resign yourself to the fact that this was it? You know, you had to move on to other things?

N: Yes, yes, because--and you know, that was really so, because before that, everything was drawn.

I: Yes.

N: Of course with the Patternbook, they had to have drawings instead of photography. There might be one photograph, but that would be it.

I: And then, so in '52 or '55 you completed your last . . .

N: With . . .

I: . . . with Conde Nast, with the Patternbook.

N: With the book. . .

I: Right.

N: . . . that they published. And I think since then, they published another book.

I: Yes; yes they have. And your active professional career--you quote semi-retired then about the mid fifties, is that right?

N: Yes, I should think so. Before that I did a book on furniture.

I: Right.

N: For Miss Miller. That was 1946, I have that date here. (pause) And I don't know what else I did.

I: Well, there are lots of examples of all your illustrations in the library now, and soon to be in the exhibit. Looking back

over your career, there are hundreds of questions that one could ask to either support history or to find out more about you personally, but I don't think that's the purpose of this particular meeting. But looking back over your career--professional career--are there highlights that you are most happy about, and if so, what are they?

N: Well, I think I was always pleased when I had a cover on Vogue. And then when I won an honorable mention in that Museum of Modern Art contest of fabrics, I was very pleased about that because--you see, your name didn't appear in that at all. You put a number on the thing you sent in, and it wasn't till after it was all decided--what they, you know, who won what--that they knew who you were. And of course there's some very big designers in that contest. One very well known one whose name I can't remember now, and he's still going strong.

I: A fashion designer.

N: No, a furniture designer and fabrics.

I: Furniture designer.

N: This was furniture and fabrics.

I: I see, okay, right.

N: And so I did these designs for fabrics. But they really used--they were more wallpaper designs, and Katzenbach and Warren bought one of them, and did some wallpapers from that-- in various colors. They did some beautiful colors.

I: How about the really low points--the bad memories of your career? The things that bothered you the most, perhaps.

N: Well, I think the recession or the Depression, that was the very worst thing. Because the bottom kind of fell out of everything then.

I: But generally, your working relationships with the companies were pleasant. You came and went as you pleased and. . .

N: Yes, yes.

I: . . . controlled the amount of work you wanted to do.

N: Yes. And usually I was left pretty much to myself to do what I wanted to do.

I: Uh-huh. (pause) If you were standing in front of an audience of today's students entering the fashion industry--because you certainly have kept up with what's happening and with designers and the trends and the styles and whatever--what would you tell the students of today? . .

N: (laughs)

I: . . . based on your personal knowledge and your career?

N: Well, years ago you know, they asked me to speak to the students at Pratt, when I had the exhibition there. (laughs)

I: Right.

N: Well, I certainly feel I am no match for the students of today. They know far more than I do about any of these things because

mine was a rather hit-and-miss career I think. (laughs). And I'm sure that they would be very much better established to start with, very much more capable than I am. I certainly couldn't tell them anything. (laughs)

I: No advice to the lovelorn, huh. (laughs)

N: No advice, no. Because I'm sure they know everything is so much more professional now than it was then.

I: How about just as artists. Just as young and budding artists.

N: Well, I don't know. Do what you want to do; that's the main thing, which I did. And everybody was quite horrified by it.

I: Well, you really were one of the pioneers, so to speak, of the women's movement. I mean you did your own thing, to use the vernacular, right from the very beginning.

N: And I never had any trouble about, you know, doing things because I was a woman. I can't say that I was ever interested in the women's movement, because I did what I wanted to do. I never had any trouble with opening accounts or anything like that.

I: Of course, in support of the women's movement, you were a successful person at a young age and were financially secure from that success. And so that helped you, obviously quite a bit, to avoid some of the problems of the daily working secretary or whatever.

N: Yes. I didn't do any of that.

I: Right.

N: The reason I started freelancing in the beginning was because

I couldn't do--couldn't make any money taking a job. You see, that was World War I time, when things weren't any too good. And they would pay you ten or fifteen, twenty-five dollars a week for a job. It just didn't amount to too much even then.

I: Yes. That's amazing to think back: a weekly salary of fifteen or twenty dollars.

N: (laughs)

I: But to some people it kept families going.

N: Yes. Well I think at Wanamaker's when I took that job, I think I got fifteen dollars a week.

I: And that was a nine-to-five. . .

N: A nine-to-five job. That was why I didn't stay very long. (laughter) I think I was only there a couple of months, I mean it really wasn't of much importance, you know.

I: Yes. (short pause) Well, I certainly want to thank you for sitting with me--or allowing me to sit with you, I should say, in doing this little interview.

N: Well, I thank you so much for being so interested in my work.

I: Well, it's a fascinating, complete reference that we have at the college, and this tape, of course, will be just another part of that. And the spoken word is obviously very important to people later on. They love to listen to what people say as well as to see what they've done. And for that opportunity for those people, I thank you.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

Miss Meserole's Postscript

I worked until 1964, when I moved to my present address: mostly privately printed and designed Christmas cards and book (children's) ideas.

****

One of my favorite designers was Joseph Whitehead. He was not on Seventh Avenue, but nearer Fifth Avenue on Forty-seventh Street. I wore a great many of his clothes--they were always made of beautiful materials--especially the evening dresses. I did some exclusive fabric designs for him after the Museum of Modern Art exhibition.

He made some lovely things for my trip to London at the time of the 1937 coronation. I believe in one of his sketch books there is a page from Vogue of my sketches of his dresses.

It was through Joseph that I became interested in FIT.

He died in March 1980.

-H.M.

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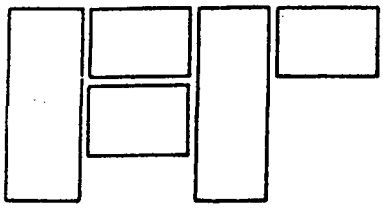
Fashion Institute of Technology, 227 West 27 Street, New York, N.Y. 10001



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