

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH ELSA ULBRICHT - TAPE #1

AT HER HOME IN MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

DATE: OCTOBER 16, 1974

INTERVIEWER: DENNIS BARRIE

DB: Dennis Barrie

EU: Elsa Ulbricht

SIDE 1

DB Today is October 16, 1974. My name is Dennis Barrie. I'm here in the home of Miss Elsa Ulbricht who has been a painter, teacher, and a director of the Saugatuck Summer School of Painting at Saugatuck, Michigan. Today I'd like to talk to Miss Ulbricht about the Summer School of Painting and her own association with it. I'd like to start, Elsa - if I may call you Elsa --

EU Yes.

DB The School bill goes back, I believe, to 1910 which makes it the oldest summer school ~~for~~ of painting or art in America. Could you fill us in on some of the early facts like, for example, who founded the school and why did they choose Saugatuck?

EU Well, artists had been coming to the Saugatuck locality for a long time and they found it a very interesting place to paint. People like John Johansen and John Norton were among the earliest ones. And so they brought others. And then Frederick Fursman and Walter Marshall Klute joined them. And they decided that they'd start a school in some location. They decided on a farm just a little bit outside of the village of Saugatuck.

DB Where were the people coming from? Were they coming from Chicago? Were these basically Chicago people?

EU In the beginning most of the people came from Chicago because these artists all came from Chicago and they brought their own clientele. But they also came from Detroit and Milwaukee and vicinity. The school grew of course as it became well known.

DB Was Fur<sup>5</sup>zman a Chicago resident or a Milwaukee resident?

EU Mr. Fur<sup>3</sup>zman was a Chicago resident. He was teaching at the Art Institute of Chicago really teaching only in the evening school. Also he taught then in the Tower School of Painting in Chicago with another teacher. Then decided to give that up and come to Saugatuck during the summertime. Later on he made his home in Saugatuck and there he had a chance to find the unique characters of the village inhabitants which interested him so very much. Saugatuck was a sailing and fishing and lumber town so that produced a lot of interesting people that were interesting to look at. He used to call it his "anthology of citizens."

DB Anthology - that's a good term. Artists were originally attracted because of what? Because of the picturesque quality of the village - was that the reason?

EU The quality of the village was marvelous. It not only had vast forest area and lots of golden sand, brilliant sand - we called it the "singing sands" . Then of course there was Lake Michigan and the Kalamazoo River. This made it very interesting because the school was settled on the Kalamazoo River <sup>at the Bandel(?)</sup> ~~xxxx~~ farm in the beginning in 1910 and then moved down a little bit toward the west, and then later on across the river to the other side of the river, which made it very much more interesting.

DB Now<sup>by</sup> moving across the river, for those who don't know, that removed



it from the village; the village was on the east side of the river and the school is now located on the west side of the river.

EU That's right. It was away from the school; finally it became about four miles outside of the village which made it very private. It was just as though they had their own camp grounds. It was interesting from that standpoint because it cut them off from the running in of people who were just curious about what was going on.

DB Why did Frederick Fur<sup>S</sup>zman and Marshall Klute decide to fo<sup>RM</sup>ur a summer school? I mean what motivated them?

EU I think it was in the cards. Schools of art were beginning to form all over and this was one of the early ones. The thing that made this quite different from other <sup>summer</sup> schools of painting, of the arts, was that practically everybody had the opportunity of living right on the grounds of the school. They had their room and board there. So it made a colony that closed in ranks very well; everybody knew each other and worked very well together.

DB Did they expect to make money on this school? Was it supposed to be profitable?

EU Of course, they expected it to be profitable. At first they made it a profit-sharing organization but of course we never expected to make money, really didn't, because artists don't have that much money. Although there were quite a number of commercial artists in the beginning, and then teachers too, and then students who were art students either at the Chicago Art Institute or at the Milwaukee school, they had much in common because they were all there to get something in the nature of one form of art or another. In the beginning the school taught figure painting and landscape painting <sup>only</sup> mostly. Mr. Klute was directing

the landscape work and Mr. Fur<sup>s</sup>zman directed the figure painting.

DB Were there only the two faculty members then - only the two of them?

EU At the beginning, yes. And then of course the people that owned the premises were different each time. One was a farm. Then they moved to a country hotel and they could use the facilities of that hotel by using its boats and going to the mouth of the river. It had opportunities for every phase of recreational possibilities.

DB This is the present location of the school now?

EU ~~NO~~ No, I'm speaking as a whole generally. But after a while when we moved across the river to what was known as the Riverside Hotel that was already a settled hotel in charge of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Linz. Mrs. Linz was a very wonderful person very much interested in young people and in all types of people. Mr. Linz did all the shopping. He had a horse named Maude and Maude would go up and down the hills gathering the necessary food and getting the baggage and making the people feel comfortable right away.

DB Did the school buy out the Linzes?

EU You see, the government cut a new opening, a new mouth to the river and changed the course of the river so that put the Summer School of Painting and the Linz estate off of the track of regular passage, of regular access. So that took away the tourist type of person which was good for the school in a sense but not good for the Linzes. So after we had been in existence for about four years then the school decided it would be <sup>probably</sup> profitable for them to purchase the land and incorporate it on a profitable basis if that were possible. So they sold shares of common stock and also of preferred stock and it was the preferred shares that financed the buying of the land. The Linz land was seven-and-a-half acres but there was a lot of virgin forest all around the mouth of the

river and the course of the river, the old mouth as well as the new mouth. The new mouth was cut through <sup>a lumbering town that</sup> ~~what~~ was known as Singapore which had access to lumber mills and to facilities for developing. At one time they were afraid that it was going to be as large as Chicago.

DB The town of Singapore?

EU Yes.

DB And it's no longer there.

EU No. It never was anything like it.

DB So initially the school then was in the Riverside Hotel with seven-and-a-half acres on what is now called the oxbow of the river?

EU Yes. As soon as they bought the land they changed it ~~to~~ from Riverside Hotel to Oxbow Inn. The reason for that was because the twist in the river looked like an oxbow and so that was a rather fitting name for it. From this time on it began to be known as Oxbow—the Summer School of Painting at... Well, also it was called Schriver's Bend because the Schriver family was the Linz home family, as Mrs. Linz was a Schriver. And there were some buildings there especially the fish buildings on the shoreline. And the lighthouse was on that river because that was the natural mouth of the river. But it was changed, of course, so the lighthouse was not used any more but another light was put three-quarters of a mile north on the river where the new harbor was. So we didn't come in contact with that at all. The lighthouse was a massive building built in 1859, a beautiful old building. Later on when Mr. Furr<sup>5</sup>man decided he'd like to make that his home he was able to rent the lighthouse from the government and make it his home.

DB That's great.

EU And there was a little house on the shore line that was called the boathouse. He asked me if I wanted to live there. I said, "Of course



I would. That would be wonderful." Afterwards I think he was sorry that he had done so because it was quite an open spot, ~~wild~~ wild, lots of sand, lots of water, and very few people, and strays came from the lake from below, from down the lake shore. So he was ~~kinda~~ kind of sorry that he told me I could have it. That had not been occupied for years and years and it meant some doing to get it all cleaned up. But I liked it very much and I lived there for at least ten years.

DB When did you first come to the Oxbow School?

EU I came to Saugatuck in 1913. Mr. Fur<sup>z</sup>man came to our school - which was the State Normal School in Wisconsin - in 1911. He came up from Chicago at that time three days a week. We got to know him quite well and he kept on asking us to come to the school. Of course we liked him very much immediately. So quite a number of girls, Milwaukee girls particularly, and some fellows but not too many, immediately took him up. We formed a clique. <sup>At night</sup> / We used to go from the old landing which was on the original side of the river and formed what we called The Pirates and the five of us would go down the course of the river and swim in the lake. But the lake was pretty sold and we'd have to build a fire. That happened almost every night until we got tired of doing that.

DB Would you spend the whole summer there?

EU No. You could enroll from a week to the full summer of ten weeks if <sup>wanted</sup> you ~~wanted~~ to. But ~~xx~~ I never was able to spend the whole summer.

DB ~~xx~~ What was tuition like in 1913, 1914?

EU Oh, tuition was very cheap at that time; as everything was at that time. And food of course was inexpensive. When Mrs. Linz ran the Riverside Hotel (which was changed to Oxbow Inn) for us she had a very good table. She cooked very well. She ~~loved~~ loved people. It was all

cottage style. The chicken was all put in a bowl and you served yourself. So first come first served got the biggest share so you had to be careful.

DB When you say first come first served, how many of you were there, say, at a typical session at Saugatuck in 1913 or 1914?

EU Well, it was pretty good. I have the old register here and I think I ought to look that up to see how many were actually here. I could count that. In 1914 the school ran an autumn school and there were about a dozen people there and that made a good congenial group. I couldn't come to that because I had to teach. So only those who weren't engaged in such a strenuous and persistent job could go. So I missed out on all the fun. But they must have had a wonderful time.

DB What was it like, let's say, as an environment for learning in those days? What was a typical day like?

EU Well, the <sup>first</sup> bell rang at seven o'clock; that was the rising bell. Then if you wanted to you could go down and have a swim before breakfast, and I always did. The second bell rang at seven-thirty. We had to be back and ready for breakfast about eight o'clock. Then we didn't have very much time to get ready for classes at nine o'clock. We were very prompt and regimented almost. In the morning we had the life ~~classes~~ <sup>classes,</sup> the figure drawing classes. The afternoon classes were given to landscape work. So that made for a rather strict routine. But it was such a wonderful place to work in I always thought of it as nothing but sunlight and yellow sand and blue clouds and green-blue water. So that made the key of the work very high. In all my paintings I tried to keep the key in a very high key, lots of light.

DB It does have marvelous light. I recall that.

EU These are mine right ~~xxxx~~ around here. Most of these are Fursman's. As we grew we began to introduce new things. In about 1915 George Sensenay came with another man who belonged to the Chicago Society of Etchers and they brought an etching press. So that opened up the field of etching and everybody who wanted to could add etching to their program. That generally was taught in the evening, so it didn't cut into the --

DB I see. The etching came in the evening. So you could attend classes at night if you wanted to?

EU Yes. You could just add that to your program. The whole program cost I think about ten dollars a week. It wasn't expensive.

DB Which was ~~Was this~~ room and board and tuition?

EU And room and board of course was... ~~Room and board~~ I could look that up if it's important. But it was inexpensive because otherwise we never could have afforded it.

DB So by 1915 they were teaching life study, landscape painting; and etching with George Sensenay. He was from Chicago also?

EU He came from the East somewhere. ~~I think I think better get the register~~ I've forgotten now where he came from. I think I'd better get the register.

DB Okay, fine.

EU I think that would be a good idea. [Now she has the register]

DB This is the register from --

EU This is the register that was part of the Riverside Hotel. This starts with ~~in~~ 1914. That was the autumn class. So it didn't start in this.

And these are the people <sup>were</sup> ~~that were~~ registered: Jimmy Eckles --

DB Selma Rosen.



EU And they all wrote little captions here. Edgar Rupprecht was one of the early members. He was a commercial artist, a very good one. He was making quite a bit of money but he decided he wanted to do painting.

DB So he was a student? ~~er-was-he-a-faculty-member?~~

EU Yes.

DB Or was he a faculty member?

EU Later on he became a faculty member. Edward ~~Annis~~<sup>Quinn</sup>. Leota Shoulders.

And so on. ~~One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen.~~ There were fifteen.

DB There were fifteen students?

EU Fifteen including the two instructors.

DB So it was a very small, very intimate school.

EU A very intimate school. It must have been a very, very nice... They came from Grand Rapids, Michigan; and <sup>from</sup> Chicago; Park Ridge, of course, ~~was~~ Mr. Klute. Norma Kruse from Milwaukee. Mostly from Chicago. Now Jimmy Eckles and some of these people came throughout the whole period of the school. Every once in a while he'd turn up and re-enroll for the year to come. Mrs. Fursman came too. Now Mr. Fursman's name was Frederick Frary (F-r-a-r-y) Fursman (F-u-r-s-m-a-n). This date is Saturday, June 20, 1915, these are the new people that came on that day.

DB Maybe a dozen names there.

EU A dozen or perhaps a little bit more. And, oh, this is the time with my interest in theater - this is 1915 - I see this name Stebbins. She didn't want to use her name on the program so we called her S-n-i-b-b-e-t-s (Stebbins spelled backwards). She came from Battle Creek, Michigan. And this is the first time that Thomas Eddy Talmadge came.

He was an architect of no small accounting. He did the revival of the Virginia... He came from Evanston, Illinois. He was a bachelor and remained a bachelor. Merle Sheldon was from Milwaukee. Later she went to New York and made her home there and did very well from the art standpoint.

DB Now why would a man like Talmadge come to the school?

EU Well, He was in the Chicago Society of Etchers and brought with him added equipment there. He was very much intrigued with the landscape and the possibilities. He liked the landscape and he was the one that bought lots of the ~~ground~~ <sup>land</sup> around there. Most of the land was for sale and he bought it at low prices in most cases. So he had acres and acres of woods which later on he donated to the school. It was used by the school and was called Talmadge Woods.

DB Did Talmadge also teach?

EU No, he didn't. No, but he was president of the Art Institute Alumni Association and that gave us a good connection with the <sup>Chicago</sup> Art Institute Alumni Association. He always hoped that the Art Institute Alumni Association would take over the school but it didn't seem to want to; it had its own school to run. But it was much interested. After we began to organize more fully we had five members on the board and later on more. Five was a good number <sup>to</sup> of use because we could get the business done better ~~than~~. I was on the board almost immediately because I understood some of the needs that the school had and the men didn't always think about things that had to be done.

DB For example?

EU Well, the time element is a thing. You've got to get your notices out quickly if you want to meet a deadline and be sure you get in before a

certain date and get the crowd to come. The director of the Art Institute Alumni Association tried to urge me to prod these men a little bit to have them get going earlier in the year. They were easy going, happy-go-lucky and very wonderful people.

DB Did the board members attend the school also?

EU Oh, yes. They wanted to. There was only that one of course; Tom Talmadge was the only board member that did; and I; and Ed Rupprecht kept attending the school.

DB Did the board members also support the school financially? Or was it pretty much self-supporting at that time?

EU It was pretty much self-supporting if you can call it that. It always was nip and tuck. The fee wasn't too great and it didn't need too much. And of course the buildings had been kept up fairly well but they were getting quite old. They were beginning to show signs of age. Mr. Talmadge used to advance money so that we could fix up boats or build <sup>other</sup> ~~other~~ cottages until they were paid for. He built what we call the colored cottages, along the back in the west. All the cottages on the lake shore were all the old fish houses --

DB Fisherman's houses?

EU Fish houses. <sup>gave</sup> A fishing village. We called it Fishtown in the earlier days. There was a windmill here that gave us our source of water so we had running water. It was very primitive, though, but I liked it that way because <sup>we</sup> it got away from civilization.

DB You say "primitive." Did you stay in the hotel? Did everybody live in the hotel at this point, in the beginning?

EU Well, if you could get into a cottage it was very nice because the



cottages were in the woods and at that time the people that came were coming regularly and they built themselves a house. Mr. and Mrs. Duncan Kargan - Mr. Kargin was editor of the Chicago Daily News and he spent many summers there. And Mrs. Scanlan who had a beautiful voice and was a singer and of course contributed lots with her voice and she built a house. It was back in the woods, way back here.

DB When a person like Mrs. Scanlan built a house was that theirs exclusively? Or did that belong to the school?

EU She owned it but she had to contribute to the upkeep. There was a certain rule about those who owned houses. They had to attend each summer for a period of time, or see that somebody they knew was occupying it so it wouldn't be just left standing without anybody in it. And that worked out rather well. They either had to contribute financially or pay their dues, their tuition and upkeep and that helped.

DB Were they <sup>then</sup> entitled to keep the house?

EU Yes, it was theirs. And eventually those houses were all deeded back to the school which made it very good. The people that Tom Talmadge brought to the school were all people that were financially able. They were mostly from the Art Institute board of trustees. Hutchinson. And also they had friends like Charlie West, the shipbuilder from Manitowoc, Wisconsin, who built submarines at the time of World War I. He was a very good friend of Tom Talmadge's. And that's another thing. Tom Talmadge used to bring these people over Sundays and have them sort of guests of honor and they usually contributed a good deal by being there and also ~~either~~ giving a lecture on some subject that was interesting to all of us - so our Sundays were always occupied in the morning.

DB From what I'm starting to get together here there seems to be a mixture of

the types of people that attended the school.

EU Yes. That made it very interesting. Now these older men - and I thought of them as older people - some of them were artists, like the etchers - Tom Talmadge and --

DB George Senseny?

EU No, Senseny was an etcher. He came from the East Coast so he was already well known. And he was a color etcher. He made his etchings in several plates.

DB As you were saying, some of the older men were -- ?

EU ~~[Sound of pages turning]~~ <sup>Dan</sup> Let's see ~~where~~. Another person that was in the school was Lutz (L-u-t-z). He taught at the California School of Arts & Crafts. At the time he was the boy that took care of the school store. When he first came he was not married but he was married later on. He brought his wife who was a <sup>pianist.</sup> ~~pianist~~. She contributed a great deal because she was a concert pianist. So you see the whole colony was made up of people who had interests in certain things.

DB They were not necessarily art students studying for degrees?~~or~~

EU No. We didn't think of degrees at that time at all anyhow. No school did. We were satisfied with just taking the work and making use of it as best we could but not thinking of the idea of having a degree with letters, a masters or doctorate or something like that. That was a thing unknown in the early days. And of course the Art Institute of Chicago was beginning to give degrees so when we finally did affiliate so that we could get credit for work done at the Summer School of Painting we had to have the students register ahead of time and arrange it with the school from which they came so that we could be sure that they

would get recognition and credit from the school from which they started. For instance, our school - Teachers College - would give credit. But that meant a different type of record keeping. Keeping grades is an awful nuisance. But it was good to have it possible.

DB When did you say the school started giving credit?

EU More after I came I think. It meant that you had to be willing to take care of the books and that was an awful job, really it was. I didn't like it. And write your credentials.

DB Before that time there was not much of it?

EU No. They just worked for the fun of it. And <sup>really</sup> that's the way to work. I never thought of my credits. And, you know, to this day I haven't gotten my credits from Pratt Institute from which I graduated in 1911. I always intended to ask for my grades but I never needed them really. I didn't care whether I had them or not.

DB That's great. Again, did you start coming every year then to the school?

EU Yes. I used to come for anywhere from one , to three, or four, or five, or six, or ten weeks depending on whether or not I could. I had to teach summer school too for six weeks every two summers out of three. So I couldn't be there for the full time but whenever it was <sup>possible</sup> ~~was~~ I tried to be there the full ten weeks. Because then you could get a lot of things done; you organize yourself. For instance, I painted from 1913 on to about 1955 - no, not quite that long. 1957 was ~~wh~~ when I stopped teaching. But you get a lot of work done. You worked every morning on the figure and every afternoon on landscape or something else either <sup>A</sup> in class or landscape. When I finally assembled my show <sup>shown for fifty</sup> ~~wasn't asked to~~ for Milwaukee... I was asked to show after I hadn't ~~been asked to~~



~~xxxxx~~ at all for the fifty years except incidentally I'd send one or two paintings to the <sup>Milwaukee Art</sup> show. But I never cared so much for doing that. I enjoyed painting just for the sake of painting. When my stuff was accumulated I had such a lot of ~~paxin~~ painting and June Waseau, was a former student at Milwaukee, took it over and actually managed the whole show, cleaned them all up, put on new frames, and was a very good business manager. I have her to thank for pushing me forward because I never would have done it myself.

DB It isn't a place where you can produce a great deal of work I agree. There's a feeling to the <sup>place that way.</sup> As far as your contact, let's say, with teachers like Fussman and or like Klute, did they do a great deal of critiqueing critiquing of your work? Did they individually come around?

EU Every day we were supposed to have a criticism but if the class was very large... I never cared whether I had a criticism or not but we did get inspirational talks as a whole and especially at the Saturday morning concours when we had to work up <sup>for</sup> ~~xxx~~ criticism. ~~of~~ The whole school would bring their work in and it was hung. This gallery was built in 1920, or 1921 I think.

DB It's the gallery near the lagoon; it's still standing, as a painting gallery.

EU It's still standing. That's one of the best buildings. And that was also negotiated by Tom Talmadge. Then we built this addition on. I did that, when I was director of the school. I became director of the school after Mr. Fursman died. But we put Francis Chapin in before that largely because I couldn't teach that summer; I had to be in Milwaukee and so I reluctantly gave the job over to Mr. Chapin. Mr. Chapin was brought into the school to teach lithography and they sent a lithograph press with him from the Chicago Art Institute. And

that ~~that~~ was another addition; that was a big ~~addition~~ addition. We put it in one <sup>on</sup> of those shacks along the river and it was just the right temperature and the moisture was right. The lithograph stone, the Bavarian limestone, would stay moist enough so that it wouldn't scum up and you could get many a print off of one stone if you were careful. Have you done lithographs?

DB I've seen it done. I've never done it. I love it; it's fascinating.

EU It's fascinating. You have to be very, very careful because the whole theory of lithography is that the stone is impervious to - it's sensitive, let's say, to grease and even your finger touching it might leave a fingerprint. But it was ground down with - what do you call it? - levigated? - no, funny I can't think of what it is - ~~iron~~ grains of iron, and that was in three grades: a coarse, a more fine, and a very fine. We'd grind it three times with these iron filings really and it took off the old image or any imperfections in the stone so that we could have a clean surface to work on. And that was sensitive to the greasy lithograph crayon. I tried every type of crayon that I could get, as well as tusche, which is ~~ax~~ like a watercolor crayon - we used it with water - and that had grease in it. So wherever a mark was made that was greasy it would respond to the lithograph ink which would touch that spot and adhere to it. So when we put the paper on top of it, with great pressure it was shoved through the press and it would take the ink and make the impression on the paper. It is a fascinating process. It's one of the most interesting of all the graphic arts. Of course it's called planography because it has no depth at all; there's no relief cutting, or like in etching there isn't any scraping or scratching to hold the ink. I've talked to the Saugatuck Douglas Artists Guild. I had to show the difference between all the graphic arts. I think



they got it because I diagrammed it on those papers that are standing there in the corner.

DB I see. The different types of graphic art.

EU What we used, what distinguishes one thing from another. Etching and aquatint is an intaglio <sup>and either through</sup> that is <sup>scratching or biting</sup> and that holds the ink and pulls the ink out of the crevices; whereas relief cutting is the height like woodblock printing.

DB Well, very early in the school's history there was ~~an~~ etching but when did the lithograph come in?

EU In 1935. In 1921 we bought the school, the buildings and grounds so we had a period in between there that we could develop other <sup>things.</sup> ~~thing~~ I was very much interested in bringing in more of the craft things. I was glad when people wanted to do it. They'd make suggestions, "Are we going to have anything else?" For instance, they'd ask, "Are we going to have pottery?" Well, we had Jimmy Acuff who was a very good potter; he came from the Alfred School of Pottery in <sup>Syracuse.</sup> ~~Syracuse~~ We introduced these things as we could. This was done much against the contention of <sup>some of</sup> the people that were more practical minded who were afraid that we wouldn't make good on it and that we would be running into the red.

DB That crafts would not pay off?

EU They were not put out; they're still running them now. But there were some people who thought that we should~~not~~ not have run the crafts at all. Well, crafts were like a step child anyhow for <sup>years</sup> and ~~years~~ until they were accepted by - well, William Morris was the one who did it from England. He did a lot of designing. He made the Morris chair



for one thing. And that started it. He also helped in the East. That's one reason why the summer schools began to develop in the East -- Skowhegan and all the other ones - more rapidly than they did in the Middle West. We were the only one in the Middle West for a long, long time. And then there was one in California, a very good school and that had lots of graphic arts. As I said before, ours was unusual in that everybody lived right there on the grounds, whereas in most other schools they had to knock on the door of a farmhouse or something like that. ~~Which~~ Which scattered the crowd and didn't give it any cohesion. But we were always together and we did all the community things we wanted to do all together. We tried not to develop any cliques where people would join this clique or another one and were not friendly with each other. It was really a wonderful ... Mr. Fursman had much to do with that also. He had that very jovial sort of manner; he liked people so well. And he wouldn't lend himself to only one clique. He wouldn't go to parties where he was exclusively invited because he was the director; if other people weren't also invited he wouldn't go. Or he might look in on the party but he wouldn't remain.

DB So the school always had a very close knit social atmosphere along with its learning atmosphere?

EU Yes. It was built around our interest. I think that's one thing that made it so good. And then the faculty was always part of the student body. On Saturday nights when we had the parties - and these were usually costume parties - and after the concours in the morning it was decided what the theme of the party should be and invariably they'd give it some crazy title, some creative title, and you had to conform

to the title in your costume so there was unity in the costumes that were worn too. And they had to make them from scratch with whatever they could pick up. Some of them got used to knowing what they might use so they'd bring scarves and other things that they could use as their ~~the~~ costume. I had one thing that I wore a great deal. I had a black silk robe with big sleeves, it was like a monk's costume. It was basic and I used that as a foundation usually for almost all of the affairs. I usually did it in this one house that I love to dance so I did pantomime. ~~This one house~~ had a stairway coming down. We called it the Waldorf-Asteria <sup>Castoria</sup> and next to it was the Drake.

DB These were all little fishing shacks.

EU These were the fishing shacks. And that house-and stairway made a wonderful entrance to whatever <sup>scene</sup> I was doing.

DB Coming down the stairway.

EU I had studied dancing. I have a diploma from the school of dance, so I had to run that in. One time when the president of the University of Lexington was there we did an Indian pageant, the coming of the two tribes meeting and making peace with each other. We put up a totem pole. We got a big telegraph pole and each one carved or put something on it that was like carved into the pole. That was there for a long time. And we had a ceremony and Mr. McVey, the president of the University, officiated. It was quite a ceremony. Then that decides the burial <sup>cid</sup> of the year. Those are the two big ones. And then, indieentially, we had Venetian Night. These are things outside the curriculum.

DB It sounds like the parties were almost weekly events.

EU Of course! And they're important. And I used to say: they are important

because unless an artist can play he's not any good.

DB Oh, my! This is something else! All right now, Venetian Night. <sup>c</sup> Would you explain that.

EU Well, it's called Venetian Night. That's outside of our landing. Each one had his own boat or rented one downtown. I <sup>had</sup> ~~have~~ a canoe. I ~~have~~ that one with a canoe; and my young brother was with me at that time. Let's see, ~~xxxx~~ I'm here in this canoe.

DB Yes, I thought <sup>that</sup> ~~it~~ was you.

EU And then there's ~~one here that~~ Mrs. Scanlan, the singer. The young man that had the etching press had lots of ink, of course. He brought a child with him, I think it was his oldest son, about seven years old. He blackened the child's face and had him stand on the bow of the boat with his dark face.

DB So you decorated all these canoes and paraded down the lagoon? Is that what you did?

EU Yes, we ~~took it up~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~in and out.~~ And you see these are all fixtures that are on the boats.

DB Attached to the boat.

EU And this is Tom Talmadge right here and Mr. Fursman is in this boat. And of course we gathered the stuff and gave time to decorating. And hereby hangs a tale, too, that is very funny. At the party there was a man from Milwaukee, a chemical scientist. We couldn't find any colored flashlights, or colored flares. We wanted to put flares all over on the other side. This man went to Holland, which is ten miles away, on a Saturday. Nothing was open. Finally he said it was an urgent thing and that he had to have all these flares. He finally succeeded



in getting them and bringing them with him. Well, when we came back from where we had been we had forgotten about him and he had no way of getting back. Somebody had taken him over to the other side and we forgot him. The poor fellow had to stay there until somebody remembered that he was stranded across the water. And he had been so decent as to spend Saturday afternoon finding those flares.

DB Now the parties, Venetian Night, ~~xxx~~ seem to have been a very important aspect of the school. Was that part of the school from the very beginning this social aspect?

EU Yes, I think it was. Mr. Fursman believed in it and I believed in it. The younger people didn't want the parties and I remember how this one man from Indiana who always came with marvelous costumes, really spent lots of time doing it, he bawled out these boys that were sitting on the sidelines just kind of poking fun at everybody without entering into it and didn't have any fun at all. But those of us who really participated really enjoyed it. And it's an art, too, because the costumes are made. For a while we said: if you want to do a full costume dress from the neck up and that always meant a headdress and that was just about as good. ~~xxx~~ But if you dressed from the neck up you also dressed from the neck down.

DB I hope so.

EU Now this is the pier. <sup>Normally</sup> The river was low.

DB Yes, it looks like it. at this particular time;

EU The river was quite high, it went over the top of these piers. We swam here. It was quite deep here. And there were springs in this water, there were cool spots that you swam through and you'd feel it. It was the most wonderful place. People all became enriched by being

there, by having been there and meeting congenial people. There wasn't any bickering, appreciable bickering; of course there always is some.

DB How would you say then - how was it as an artistic experience.

EU It had high standards. Mr. Fursman's work developed in the impressionist era and he was really the ringleader in our school in cutting away from the heavy German type of painting that had been done at the old Art Students League. Mr. Alexander <sup>Mueller</sup> Miller. Well, all the old Germans <sup>settled</sup> that ~~settled~~ here in Milwaukee were very talented people. But Mr. Fursman coming to the school put new life into the school. Lots of the students <sup>went</sup> ~~were~~ on to New York to study at the Art Students League and at various other places. I don't know if you know Carl Holty.

DB I know of him. I didn't know him personally.

EU He was a Milwaukee boy and he had a flair for everything. He was doing abstract work mostly. We had some wonderful things that he did at school. He was also president of the abstract painters in New York. He and Ed Rupprecht, this man that I showed you before ... I was going to rebind this book but I never did. (That's also one of my failings.) Probably it's more interesting this way anyhow. But this isn't the only book but I took this one because I wanted to rebind it. This book runs up to 1943. That was the year <sup>that</sup> ~~xxx~~ Mr. Fursman died. And this is the year that Mr. Chapin took over.

DB 1943.

EU At this time there were quite a number of students. We used to have at least a hundred at meals.

DB At one time a hundred students?

EU Yes. A good crowd.

DB That was a very large group. And by that time how large had the faculty become?

EU You could take a lot of people in the painting classes. The landscape classes took more time because you had to go around to where they were working. At that time they still sat in location. There wasn't as much compositional work made up.

DB There's one idea that we only glanced at and I think it's sort of important. You've mentioned the concours that were held every Saturday morning.

EU Every Saturday morning at nine o'clock from nine until about eleven-thirty up to the dinner bell.

DB I think this was a very interesting idea because all faculty and all students participated.

EU Yes. Sometimes the faculty would hold forth entirely and sometimes the students would, and ask questions. It was informal. It was very well attended. The village people would come to listen in on it. That was very good for them because art wasn't accepted either by the villagers. That's another angle to it.

DB Yes. That's another question I was ~~going to ask~~ curious about too.

EU I think they felt they weren't welcome. I think that was one of the things. You know, people are shy of things that they don't know anything about. After I became director I made a point to be sure that they came more often, as much as they could.

DB And they would attend the concours?

EU And they came and were urged to come if they could on Saturday mornings.



DB And at these there was open criticism of work, and instruction?

EU Yes. They put work on the walls all around the room and you'd "admit" which was yours and it was given the words.

DB Admit which ~~xxxx~~ was yours. And did that bother the students?

EU Not necessarily. I don't think so, on the whole. There were always people that have an idea that they don't want to change from. That's all right, too, because that brings out another argument about it.

DB But they were quite open? Did the students ever debate with the instructor over the ~~xxx~~ value of a work or the merit of a work?

EU Yes. Some instructors, of course, always want you to follow their direction immediately. Of course, in a sense, that wasn't good because the instructor/<sup>who</sup> could see in the work of the student his own interpretation was a better instructor I think. We got more out of their work. We had some very talented young people.

DB How long did Mr. Klute teach at the school?

EU He was there only about four years. After we moved to the Riverside Hotel/<sup>in 1914</sup> he was there only a very short time and he died that summer. I wasn't there that year except for the first week, as I had to go to Cape Cod. I was a counsellor at a summer camp there. And that was an opportunity for me that I would not have had; that was a new experience. I learned how to make a wine barrel, and to sail a boat, ride a canoe, and all those things. And we had a launch and we went to Plymouth Rock across the Cod. We were inside on the Cape side. It was wonderful, too, but I wanted to be at Saugatuck all the time. I had a chance to teach there. I taught weaving. We made mats for the cottages.

DB At Saugatuck?

EU No, at Cape Cod. Camp Chiquessett. It was run by people from the Rhode Island School of Design.

DB I see. So you were there that summer, the summer that Klute died?

EU Yes, for eleven weeks. When I came back he had died. He was the one that had the ecology idea. He'd take us around into the woods and show us, for instance, a tree toad chirping away in a hollow tree. He showed us the lights in the --

DB ~~Fluorescent~~ <sup>Phosphorescent</sup> lights?

EU ~~Fluorescent~~ <sup>Phosphorescent</sup> lights in the ground that were natural. Did you ever see ~~xxxxx~~ those?

DB Yes, I have. They're very fantastic.

EU And then, of course, <sup>there were</sup> /the glowworms.

END OF TAPE 1 - SIDE 1

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH ELSA ULBRICHT - TAPE #2

AT HER HOME IN MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

DATE: AUGUST 19, 1975

INTERVIEWER: DENNIS BARRIE

DB: Dennis Barrie

EU: Elsa Ulbricht

SIDE 1

DB Today is August 19, 1975. I'm here again in the home of Elsa Ulbricht to do a second tape dealing with the Oxbow School of Art and Miss Ulbricht's career. My name is Dennis Barrie. Elsa, I'd like to start with the question of: when did you become director of the Oxbow School?

EU I was there when Mr. Fursman died. He was ill and I was called to talk to him about his illness; he wanted me to come to settle some things. I went to see him with a group of people whom I liked and I thought it would be nice if he saw them. I didn't know that he was going to die. I really didn't. On a Wednesday I took a carload of people to see him. He was feeling very low but he was very gay and talked to us. I asked him whether I could do anything to help him. He said, "NO, he felt all right." But he got up. And on the next day we went out to Oxbow; that was four miles <sup>away</sup> ~~xxxxx~~ from the village, from the Summer School grounds. I had just sent him a set of chairs from the project. They needed chairs at Oxbow so I furnished him some chairs like this one and this one. These are Summer School things, these are my project chairs.

DB Oh, I see.

EU The house was so cold. It was early spring. It must have been Easter time or something I guess. I urged him not to stay in the house because the sun was out outside. So he came outside and we talked. He kidded me about the furniture that was ~~xxxx~~ there. <sup>He said, "Oh, well,"</sup> He liked the old furniture anyhow." He commented as though he didn't like the new furniture but he



did of course. So that was Thursday. He wanted to know whom we could get to take over the housekeeping chores. We telephoned this Mrs. Mason in Chicago and she tried to make arrangements so she could come back. She came back. He died on Saturday. I was there that day. By this time he was Christian Scientist; his family was. But he was Methodist otherwise. That made him a kind of interesting character because there are lots of things that are negative for Methodists. I taught him to dance, too, for one thing, so you could see he was a flexible person.

DB So he died in 1943?

EU Yes, in 1943. They had called a doctor which was strange. His ~~daughter~~ daughter Lucille who was an ardent Christian Scientist was there. She was waiting around there. <sup>His sister was there.</sup> They were all talking. I was sitting in the other room because I wasn't family so I didn't want to impose myself. But all of a sudden I heard them say, "Well, I guess he's all right. I think I'll go now" or something like that. Then I jumped up and I said, "Oh, please go in to see him while you're here anyhow." And he went into the bedroom and he found that Mr. Fursman had already passed away. And that was a shock for anybody. So I stayed on and Alice Mason came back and we tended to all the funeral needs. We went and got boughs in the Talmadge Woods. It was a beautiful service. The funny thing here about this was: here his daughter was there and they wanted me to write the service. It was a beautiful service maybe because I wrote it and <sup>because</sup> I know it. I wonder whether I have a copy of that. I don't think I have. But they published it in the newspaper. Lucille, the daughter, wouldn't let the minister use his service because he was so longwinded or something like that. Mine she used; the minister read mine. So you see how close I was to him as far as the family was

concerned; only I didn't dare be too close to him because the gossips would begin to talk. And I didn't like that.

DB So upon his death did you assume the directorship?

EU No, not immediately. I had to go back to Milwaukee to teach school and so I asked Francis Chapin to take over. He was a good person. He had some very good points but he was a little bit too free in attitudes. You know how young people are. But I was a teacher and I knew what happened. Francis Chapin then stayed for three years but he wasn't satisfied because he wasn't getting the publicity that he wanted in that woe begone sort of place. He expected to have everybody around, big city stuff. So he went somewhere else, I think to Vermont, for a while. But he didn't like that. After a while he came back. We liked him very much. And the strange thing about that whole thing was that his wife Helder was a former student of mine. So I had a nice time getting acquainted with him. It was good. But I had to fight off the jealousies of the other people that were there because of the new man coming and getting so much attention. Which wasn't right either. You just had to play it safe. But knowing his wife Helder - they came from Superior, Wisconsin, where she had been living... Then he stayed another couple of years after that. I've been reading a letter that Mr. Fursman wrote in which he asked, "Do you think Chapin might want to come back?" after he had been away for a while. Of course he did. And then he stayed for quite a while. Maybe I shouldn't be mentioning some of these difficulties. He got a little bit possessive. He was trying to get Lucille's stock so he could own the school. Mr. Fursman had quite a bit of stock. I must say that Tom Talmadge was one of the best patrons. He had the money and he was the one who had \$50,000 that he was going to give as



an endowment. And that fell through.

DB That fell through?

EU Because he was putting it ~~as~~<sup>and</sup> his mother. I don't know what happened to that. And that's the one I started to talk about before when Mr. Kraybill had been given a hundred dollars a week for his salary instead of fifty dollars which was what they used to pay. Well, there were always these differences that developed. People get - what is the term that I want to use there? - possessive and want to own the thing right away.

DB So it was Chapin's hope to ~~xxx~~ own the school?

EU Well, we thought so; we all thought so. Maybe we were a little bit too possessive ourselves; I don't know.

DB So what finally happened then? ~~Did~~

EU Then when Chapin showed signs of taking over and trying to get all of Lucille's shares of stock, Lucille got this lawyer that we finally got as our lawyer for the school and she helped her over the bumps, and it was all eased out. And Chapin was not reelected because of that. He had been given one of the largest houses with his wife and two children by that time, and everything that he wanted. It was just wonderful. And a good salary, a better salary than <sup>anybody</sup> ~~any other xxxxxx~~ had ever gotten or got later on. There was a feeling that if he was going to be that way he would take off still more. So finally we didn't reelect him as director. It was ~~xxx~~ kind of sad because he was good in many respects. And he introduced lithography and brought the lithograph <sup>press</sup> machine from Chicago, and it was a good one. It was a much better one than the one we had later on at our school.

DB So when Chapin was not reelected director were you elected director at that point?



EU He stayed there for three years, as director. By that time I was ready to take over. I wanted to take over. And that was the time I had three other offers for jobs. One was in Oregon. I've forgotten where the other one was. One offer I had was a very funny one; they wanted me to take over showing women how to use machines - saws and all those things. I had all that at school; band saw, coping saw by machinery, and drill press. And they were fun. You see, my grandfather was a mechanic, he was a house mover. As a child I used to go down there a lot to his shop and watch him work on these machines. So that came rather naturally to me. But women weren't doing those things at that time. This was during World War II and there was one firm that wanted to introduce its machinery so that it could sell more machines to women; they thought they'd introduce women workers. Well, I didn't do it. Everybody said, "But you'd get an awful lot of money." I said, "Yes, but money doesn't mean that much to me." And I had the Summer School of Painting in mind and I wanted that, more than anything else. And I got it.

DB So you first became director in 1946?

EU That's right.

DB Okay. What was the school like when you took over? And how did you ~~change~~ change it? Or did you change it?

EU Well, I began to broaden its scope, because I felt there was need. I had lots of husbands and wives and they were not bringing in the finances that they should because one or the other didn't paint. And so I introduced the crafts. There was one man whose wife was a very interesting painter. I introduced metalwork, hammered metal. This man

got so interested in that that when he left after he had been there for only about two weeks. He went home and bought himself all the equipment that he needed and then came back and showed us what he had done. So you see that was a dual enrollment because his wife was enrolled and room and board was something too that were added to the finances. So those were some things I did. I began to take on more of the crafts. I had looms that were made on the Project and then I was able to have the Project make some looms for me at Saugatuck.

DB Oh, I see. Very good.

EU I worked them both together.

DB Well, how long did the Project last in Milwaukee?

EU Eight years.

DB Starting in what year?

EU In 1935.

DB So just before you took over, the Project ended in Milwaukee, right?  
It ended in 1943?

EU It ended in 1948.

DB 1948?

EU Wait a minute. It ran for eight years from 1935 to 1943. That's right.

DB I see. So you had looms and things left over from the Project?

EU No. I didn't take any things from the Project but I had them built for Oxbow.

DB I see.

EU We had what we called a crafts house which belonged to a person who lived across the river, a woman who was very wealthy. I can't remember her name. I should have reviewed a little bit.

DB Who taught weaving? Did you teach it?

EU Well I had enough people... I was teaching the weaving at school but I couldn't do both directing and teaching much because I had to start most of those things. But I always had enough people from the Teachers College where I also had introduced all of these crafts. It came at a very good time when there was a need for it and people wanted to do crafts when craft was beginning to be recognized as a fine art. There was a lot of difficulty in that, too, because it was busy work, you see, and they thought of it as busy work. It wasn't a fine art like painting is. We had a lot of trouble that way.

DB How did some of the artists react? How did the painters and sculptors react?

EU Oh, very badly.

DB Really?

EU Yes. And then in the course of time, however, they realized that there was an art basis in the crafts also. And we made it so because we had a philosophy; I devised a philosophy of art which I used to talk about wherever I went. I was looking over that the other day. It starts with the idea; you have to have an idea before you begin and as you work through you pick out your material that goes with that idea correctly and its tools. So the three are related so much that you can't go astray. And <sup>it's</sup> ~~it's~~ really done for people who are amateurs who think that they can paste buttons onto a vase and consider that crafts. I was on the hobby committee, too, here in Milwaukee and they wanted me to select things that were they considered hobbies for the crafts committee. I refused to do that because it wasn't.

DB Did you allow this philosophy or did you push this philosophy at Saugatuck?



EU Oh, yes. And everybody followed it; they had to really. I don't know if you know who young Bob <sup>von Neumann</sup> ~~Neumann~~ was.

DB No.

EU He was teaching jewelry. He was a good jeweler, very good. He got the Rhode Island design prize at the time. He got a job, too, in Iowa. I said, "Bob, how are you going to start with your teaching?" He ~~said~~ <sup>said</sup> "Oh, I'll just ~~them~~ <sup>teach</sup> them some diddly things." You know that was the nature of some of the art that was being taught in the public schools - just anything that could be passed off and that people could copy. We didn't do that. I also ~~taught~~ <sup>taught</sup> in Shorewood Opportunity School; I taught there for ten years in the evenings two nights a week. That was being taught by people who were doing a lot of crocheting and knitting and also copying things from each other and being <sup>giving</sup> given patterns, making lampshades and things of that kind. Mr. Denisco who was director of that came to me and asked if I'd take over. I said, "Yes, but I won't do patterns; I can't give them patterns; I haven't any patterns. I have a philosophy." He was satisfied. He had a woman in his school that was a metalworker and she knew a lot about how to cope <sup>with</sup> this situation. So she had told him to ask me. Well, it was lots of fun. When I retired I found a letter that ~~xxxxxxx~~ he wrote and told me how much he appreciated what I had done in changing. He had a sister-in-law who was going to the school in the evening classes, community classes. She was taking weaving. He came to me and said, "How come she's made lots of weavings, and in your class she's done only two?" I said, "Yes, I know. She's given patterns and all she does is copy what the other fellow ~~did~~ set up. But I don't do that. They have to set it up and decide upon the threads and everything else and do their ~~own~~ own." He said, "I knew there was some hitch to that."

So I got one up on that and I was awfully glad because he was an educator really and so he saw the difference.

DB Do you think Mr. Fursman would have enjoyed the inclusion of the crafts at the school?

EU I think so. I think so. I don't know really. I never talked to him about that. But I'll tell you what I did do. I had to talk about the Project at one time and a man was talking about what he was doing in the way of the arts. And Mr. Fursman almost had tears in his eyes because "this little snip" - as he called me - give this lecture on her philosophy and put it all over this man. So you see I had an "in" with him too. But he knew; he understood; he was a teacher so he was doing the same thing with his painting. He wouldn't let the people copy anybody else's work or be guided too much by their work. He had his ~~philosophy~~ philosophy of line and design and mostly design. He was a master in composition.

DB Yes, very nice composition.

EU Everything was right.

DB I agree. Beautifully done work. Let's talk about the period when you took over. Well, let's backtrack a minute. How did the school survive in the nineteen-thirties during the Depression? Did you have much to do with the school during the nineteen-thirties?

EU I worked until 1957.

DB You worked until 1957 but during the nineteen-thirties did you attend the school at all? Were you there in the summers?

DB Yes.

EU During the thirties?

EU Yes.

DB How did the Depression affect the school?

EU Well, it was low. We had to do everything we could to survive. But that's another thing he did; he selected people that he knew he could depend upon. Now the cook that we had came from <sup>Hammond,</sup> ~~Hammond~~ Indiana. She was Mrs. <sup>Lily</sup> ~~Wakky~~ Webb, a charming person, very strict in her cooking. (A Hammond person is I think.) Mr. Fursman used to say, "She has a golden aura." That's the way he appreciated her and he treated her like she had an aura. And that boosted up her morale.

DB Oh, I would think so.

EU Later on she brought her own daughter and her grandchildren to the school and they served in the kitchen. Her daughter served as house-keeper, managing the scholarship students and putting them to work and all kinds of things like that. So it was one big family. We liked Lily Webb. She stayed for twenty years.

DB So there were people like Mrs. Webb who were so dedicated that the school could continue <sup>despite</sup> ~~in-spite-of~~ bad times?

DB Yes, it did continue because she knew how to save and how to do things that were for the good of the whole and everybody liked her. And then, of course, in the selection of the scholarship students we didn't take anybody. We found out who they were and whether they would serve right-ly. And they didn't filch on the work. And they were nice boys and girls. And we carried on that same philosophy.

DB During the thirties how big was the staff? normally?

EU Well, we always had a teacher that taught the painting, life drawing. We always had a landscape artist. And we did quite a bit of drawing; Mr. Fursman liked to have people do drawing first; and that drawing



was always with a line that meant something, a line that expressed a feeling; not just any old line. I have a painting upstairs - or June has it - that he wouldn't let me paint because <sup>he thought</sup> it wasn't good in line. He never interfered except in that kind of a way. Probably it was a negative sort of thing - I don't know. "Don't do any more on that painting."

DB Very interesting. So you had line drawing and figure and landscape?

EU And landscape was a different artist. And Mr. Klute was the first landscape artist and he was such a wonderful person. I loved him very much. He threw in so much nature study; he'd stop in the middle of a thing and say, "Now here's a tree toad. Have you ever seen a tree toad?" And then he'd stop and listen to that fellow croak. That was a very interesting thing.

DB Yes. It did add a lot to it.

EU And I wanted to do something like that but oh, no, they didn't want to interfere with the painting; that would interfere with the painting. Mr. Fursman didn't think so.

DB Stop and look at nature.

EU Yes.

DB Well, it had such a natural setting you'd think that.

EU And we had such a marvelous hundred acres that Tom Talmadge let us have.

DB When did Tom Talmadge die?

EU About a year ~~half~~ before Mr. Fursman. It was a terrific blow. And that was another thing that made it easier for me because I was vice-vice-president and the/president took over so I became part of the works

right away by sort of taking Tom's place - well, not exactly because I didn't have money that I could give but I gave service and I worked hard. I hired the handyman and taught him what to do. We had one handyman that did some awful things. In a sense they all did awful things according to my feeling. One of them was shellshocked from the war and wasn't responsible so I was very patient with him. He put in some new screens and he cut the screens the wrong way so that he had to cut a small edge off of two sides instead of cutting them the size of the screen that was already there. He had a lot of scraps left over. ~~xxxx~~ <sup>I've</sup> forgotten his first name. I said to him, "No, look, you could have put this right on it and not cut a bit off." "Oh, yes, I see." And another incident. I took over the Talmadge cottage when I was director. That was a very nice cottage. In the beginning it had nothing but screens. It got awfully cold at night so I wanted to put windows in it. I found some windows second hand that would fit and also I bought some new ones. And ~~this~~ this was my nice Chester; Chester was a wonderful guy. He did everything I wanted him to do. He reasoned things out and he let me reason with him. It was so much fun working with him. And this Arthur Deam - we were redoing a shed, the car shed, we were going to pull it down and build an annex to the gallery which was a good idea. Arthur Deam said, "Now what we'll do is we'll get on top and pull out all the nails, take off all the shingles, and save everything and re-use it." I said, "But, Arthur, that's an awful job to do." He said, "We've got to save everything." That was a right idea. But Chester asserted himself and said, "We can do it this way." He kicked one of the up-rights and the whole thing tumbled down and only one board cracked. Chester would oppose Arthur Deam and did all kinds of things. Of course

he'd wink at me when he did it. Once he said to Arthur, "I'll take no directions from you. Elsa hired me. I'm going to take my directions from her." So that was good. One thing he did though. We were going to enlarge a house and there was a tree right in the middle where the enlargement was to ~~be~~ go. In fun I said, "Well, we'll build the house around the tree." And that would have worked; I know it would have worked. But Chester didn't have the vision to do that. He couldn't see it. And do you know what he did? When I wasn't there he cut that tree down.

DB Too bad.

EU It was too bad because I think we could have done something with it. It was the boys' dormitory and it would have been fun to have a tree in there.

DB Yes. You mentioned that Mr. Talmadge tried to set up an endowment. What happened?

EU I don't know. Somebody opposed it, some of the family perhaps. And then they withdrew the money. Because he had money. He was an architect, you know. American buildings. And that was a wonderful source of income for him because it went into its twelfth edition and, oh, also in its translation into other languages. It was called American Architecture.

DB He published this?

EU Oh, I've forgotten. It was a very good book. Tom Talmadge had many connections, wealthy connections. And he had lots of connections with the Art Institute. He was president of the Art Institute Alumni Association too.

DB Oh, I didn't know that. When he died then where did the source of



money come from for the school each year?

EU Well, we probably were on our own pretty well. He died in a railroad accident when he went to New Orleans. He was the only one who died in that accident. His sister was with him and she was hurt but she didn't die. It was awful sad.

DB So did the school survive then on tuition and just here and there a gift or donation?

EU Well, I did a lot of things that were not according to Hoyle and they're awfully funny. I couldn't collect money and take it off on taxes because we were still on a tax basis. But I did it in a facetious sort of way. I had a birthday party and I had a cake - I called it a cake - made out of paper and I cut some candles and wicks. If a person donated he could light a candle and put that paper wick on the paper candle. We raised quite a bit of money on that. I called it an endowment fund so I didn't have to put it in the treasury. I was <sup>cagey</sup> easy on that. But it was all right to do because I didn't lie about it. I held it in reserve for a scholarship fund. There was two thousand dollars that I had raised. When I came back after I had left I found this had all been used for other things and one of the things it was used for was very bad. They bailed out some people who had used somebody else's ID card in the bar.

DB Oh, so it was used for bail. How many scholarships were given during the 1940 's or when you first came?

EU It varied. Usually about ten. Because we needed them, you know. And I used to break them in before during the early days of their summer vacation and they were so nice; they'd work for nothing and be given their food and get broken in that way, get to know each other. It was wonderful. They were some of the nicest people.

DB The scholarships then/<sup>didn't</sup>cost the school - they cost the school room and board and free teaching and tuition?

EU Yes.

DB And where did you choose the scholars from?

EU Recommendations from teachers. I took one boy from Ed Schuster's store here in Milwaukee. This was a dry good<sup>s</sup> store. I knew Max Friedman who owned it. The boy worked there in the hardware department. I knew ~~Maxx~~ Max and talked him into giving three hundred dollars for a scholarship for two years. So I came across that.

DB Very nice.

EU I approached <sup>Max</sup>him a second time and <sup>his</sup>Max's secretary said that they didn't expect to have to be repetitive, that they thought it was only one dose. But Max was a very good person; we liked him. He was interested in the arts. That helped.

DB Were scholarships given to both men and women?

EU Yes. And two of our very nicest ones got married later on. Barbara Holberg - her father had been a student in the earliest days and I took Barbara because I knew her father; he was there when I was there. Barbara was working at a school in California, going to an art school. I didn't know her but I called her and said, "Anybody that's Arthur Holberg's daughter is eligible as a scholarship student." Then a boy by the name of Dickerson came from Grand Rapids, I think. He was one of those arty people, a little bit arty, doing the things that they did in the public schools and he had to be broken of that habit. Barbara did an awful lot to help him. They were married. I let them live in my house after they were married.

DB So, as you just said, there were both men and women on a scholarship.

EU Well, there was dishwashing to do and beds to make. We divided the work. And this woman who was Mrs. Webb's daughter - funny I can't remember names today - I'm tired I think; my shakeup was bad yesterday or the day before yesterday.

DB Tell me, was attendance very low during the war years?

EU It started very low. Temperance you said?

DB No - attendance.

EU Oh, I thought you said temperance.

DB No.

EU Oh, yes; that too. But we got up to ninety, most of the time.

DB Really? Each summer?

EU And another thing that happened. I had a lot of friends that had been there for a long time and came back; so that was a very good thing. Later on in 1964 when I took over again - and ~~thxxxx~~ that's a thing I think I'd like to read to you if I can find it - it's right here... There was a kind of breakup in the Art Institute Alumni Association. The Art Institute Alumni Association had stopped in the school and they had a right to decide what they wanted to do, what they could do. So the president of the Art Institute Alumni Association - Doris Serens - was made director. She was a wonderful worker and she watched the pennies very well. I was going to go on another angle and I've forgotten it.

DB I think you were talking about money and attendance.

EU Oh, they got very low. I was reading that too. They had \$190 left over for the next year to start the school. That year Rachel and I and this girl each one loaned, lent the school \$200 each one. But we got it back because we made so much money. And this is what Doris



did; she advertised on a big photo "Elsa is back." And that brought all the old people that had some dissatisfactions.

DB That was in 1964 what you're talking about?

EU Yes.

DB Did attendance at the school pick up after the war was over? Did a lot of --?

EU While the war was on we had scholarship students that were in the ~~xx~~ war - the government boys. And that was another thing that was very difficult to handle because I had to do all that figuring out what they should do, what the government should pay. That was a new wrinkle in the school.

DB What - these were GI's?

EU Yes.

DB And they were working at the school?

EU Yes. They were getting a scholarship.

DB From the government?

EU Yes.

DB Why did the government do this?

EU Well, that was the thing to do. Take the Layton School, for instance - maybe I shouldn't talk about this - but that school was really started on that. Miss Partridge solicited much. I didn't solicit very much because I didn't want to get involved too much. It was added work. I had to keep books and I wanted to do the bookkeeping; I didn't like it but I had to do it. And there were certain regulations that had to be followed <sup>and met</sup> accurately.

DB Did the school show a profit each year in the forties? Did it show a profit while you were director?

EU Well, I did a funny thing. There was always a surplus. I always paid the bills before it was time for the income tax to be made out and I didn't have any money left, not much. But I paid all the bills, the good bills, for the next year so I had enough to start the next year but not too much. But that was not very good for my reputation because people like Arthur <sup>Deam</sup> ~~Demon~~ would look at the statistics and see that there wasn't much money. And I couldn't explain it to him. He didn't understand. But I paid all the necessary bills and had enough money to start the school. It was a kind of sneaky thing to do I think on the government or on... But everything had to be paid or done anyhow. Whatever was stable had to be fixed. It was good to do. My grandfather was a carpenter and contractor; he moved buildings. And that came in very handy because there was one building I had to move. There were trees growing in the way, nice pine trees, and I didn't want to pull them out. So with the knowledge I had from watching my grandfather put the rollers in, I had Chester build a slab so that the rollers could go on the slab. We were going to get a car to pull it but instead of that they pushed it and it worked all right. We pushed it six feet back. It was the biggest of the houses that Tom Talmadge had built for us, the pink house, the double house, for our people. It was fun to do. I was amused at myself doing it; I knew it could be done; I knew the principle involved.

DB Who were some of the outstanding personalities during your tenure as director?

EU Well, even before that there was Anita Enters - <sup>Angna</sup> ~~Anga~~ Enters - who was a dance mime. She went to New York and took <sup>her</sup> work with Mishouita, the Japanese man. She was also a very good painter and designer. She came from our school so I knew her very well. She even was in my dancing

class. So we were all together in those things. I never separated very much from the students because I was in the classes and also in other classes like the dancing class with my friends.

EE So she was there in that class. She got her diploma when I got mine.

DB And she was at the school?

EU She came with Alexander Tillotson who came from Waupan, Wisconsin. And his mother came too. There was a nice group. You see, families did come very nicely. The crafts pulled in more families because there were more options. But, again, I had to fight it. The way I got past that: I went to the director of the Art Institute of Chicago and I asked, "Norman, what do you think of having crafts at the Summer School? (He was on the board.) He said, "I think it would be fine." And that sold it. My opinion didn't count although I was an educator. Norman was, too. He was head of the Art Institute school. He said, "I think it would be fine." So I started in a small way by doing it myself. I did jewelry in one of the studios. I brought my own tools. I did basketry. Oh, that was the time that screen printing was beginning to be taught. And I did that myself. I taught some of the things myself. And it was a good thing for me to do because those were new things for me to work out for myself because I didn't know anything about some of those things. I knew weaving because there was one loom at school that I took over. Then we built looms afterward so I had a lot of looms.

DB Getting back to the people that were there, who else was very influential at the school during your period there as director?

EU [Interruption for telephone] Yes, I had to teach most of those things



because I had the philosophy and also the technique. I came by it naturally. My mother and father both were good, my mother better than my father because she was my grandfather's daughter.

DB We were speaking of influential people at the school during your period as director. Who else stands out as far as faculty or --?

EU Let me get this book - oh, here it is. There were some very good people. Of course, Fursman had a lot of influence because he started a school in Chicago called The New School. It was in the Tower Building in Chicago. He ran it for only one year. And of course the other teachers drew a number of people too. There was one Mary Mack who was a very charming person - no, Not Mary Mack - Mary Wren. Her mother had a lot of stock in the Chase Bank in New York and of course that went to the wall for a while during the Roosevelt withdrawal. Mary used to come every year. She was a good painter but she was kind of lazy. Mr Fursman used to have to bawl her out for not working harder. She had talent but she didn't apply herself as well as she could. Another thing that was very bad about Mary - maybe I shouldn't tell some of these stories ~~xxxxxx~~ - but she liked gin pretty well. She used to like to go down to the little bars downtown and sit with the men and discuss things with them. She was a very interesting person; to me she was very interesting. She had coal black hair and a rather pale white face and was stunning looking. She had nice clothers that she had from previous days when she was rich; mostly white dresses. She was very dominant, too, in knowing what she wanted. But she was right. She used to swear a little bit. She'd take a boat and take people across the river. One time a Swedish woman stood up in the boat and Mary yelled at her, "Sit down, damn you!" in a kind of voice that was ... Those were interesting

fun things.

DB Yes, they are.

EU But Mary Rand died. The drink got her a little bit after a while. There was a girl that was at Pratt when I was there - Florence Hazeltine. I went to Pratt after I had taught kindergartn for three years. I spent two years at Pratt. After I graduated from Pratt I did get the job in the school which was the one I kept for forty-two years. That's a long time.

DB That's a long time, yes.

EU But, you know, it's a funny thing how many jobs I had offered to me during that period. Cornell offered me a job in the design department; it was domestic science. I said, "I'm not a domestic science person; I don't know how to cook or do anything like that and I'm not interested." She said, "But we want an art person; we don't want a domestic science person." And Miss Blanding who later on was head of Wellesley after I turned her down... Then there was the machine shop thing that I was to teach. And there was one other one, oh, the one in Oregon; they wanted me to take over the weaving. That was the time that I had two other jobs that I was dealing with and I didn't know what I was going to do. He couldn't believe that I wouldn't take that job. He said, "Is it the salary?" I said, "No, it isn't the salary." He said, "We'll raise your salary for six weeks; we'll give you a thousand dollars." But I couldn't be bought with that. I didn't like to work for money. It was more fun... My grandfather was the same way. Look at what I've done with my pencil.

DB Yes, I see. Were you paid when you were director of the school?

EU Yes, but not very much. I knew that the school needed the money more than I did. But later on when we could do it I did get some back pay,



a little bit. But it was enough. I had a home here; I own this home. I paid the mortgage on this house and my family all wrote it off to me. So that was not too bad. I think that people have altogether too much money and they think too much of money and they don't do anything else. I don't buy too many clothes. I like clothes but I make do. My mother was a good dressmaker. Her father, as a contractor, thought that everyone of the girls in the family should learn a trade. My mother sat in on a dressmaking establishment and was there for a number of years. She was a good dressmaker. She did all of our clothes. She even made the boys' uniforms out of old policeman's clothes. There was a policeman living next door where we lived downtown, a very charming person. The material in those clothes is so good; it's such firm fabric just as uniforms are. So mother knew how to do this. She even sewed for our relatives when they needed it. We had a maid here that came the year I was born. She was twelve years old. She was the daughter of one of my grandfather's teamsters in his business. My mother took Gustie and my grandmother took the other girl and they brought them up. And this woman came to me when I was born and when she was only twelve years old. She was one of us in the family. We never treated these servants as servants. I know that when this house was built the room upstairs had a push button that would go to the attic room. The architect had devised this for the maid. But we never used it as a maid's room. And that had a bell in it from my mother's bedroom if she should have needed it at night. But I don't think my mother ever would have used it because she was too independent.

DB During the forties did the school attract a lot of recognition? Was



there a lot of attention given to it? Or was it always<sup>a</sup>/very out of the limelight situation?

EU Out of the limelight/ And I don't think that the Summer School of Painting even now - they<sup>were</sup>re superior to the village and they didn't encourage... And I think this is the case even now. I did most of the encouraging of people coming to our things. When I finally took over the last time I had a reception for Mr. Fursman and his work and that was beautifully received. They just loved it. They weren't as snobbish as people thought they were. I think it was a case of their not feeling that they were a part of it. Just like my maid here; she's superior to me.

DB So the school never attracted very many ... Did it attract a lot of national figures? Like I know Wallace Kirkland was there in the forties and fifties.

EU Yes. He was a wonderful person only he was a ~~xxi~~ little far out once in a while, but I was very careful in my dealings with him so I wouldn't be talked about.

DB Did he come as a student or as a --?

EU Well, it was awfully funny. He wandered in. There was another Life photographer came ahead of him but he didn't stay - Loomis Dean. I don't know whether I knew Wallace ahead of time or not; I think I did. When he came he already had that feeling for nature; he was featuring the dragonfly. I have some of his dragonfly pictures, you know, I think.

DB So when Kirkland came he came just to photograph the place? Or --?

EU He loved outdoors. He was a nature man anyhow. He worked at Hull House, you see; he was doing work with the boys at Hull House. Mrs. Kirkland was there too. I don't know whether they were married before they went there or not. She was a charming person.

DB And Kirkland was there for how many years?

EU He came in about 1948 and was still there in 1964. He loved it; he loved that kind of free life. Everybody liked him. He initiated a number of the stunts that we had. We had parties of all kinds every Saturday night. On Saturday mornings we'd have a concours and at noon when the concours was over we'd decide to have a party that night. We'd decide on the theme. Nobody knew what the theme was going to be. The idea was that you were supposed to make a costume that carried out that theme without any previous preparation, without gathering much of anything except what you could do. The more imaginative people did the most wonderful costumes.

DB I can't imagine. I've seen some of that that are just amazing.

EU That's one thing that Mr. Fursman encouraged. And while I think of it, another thing that he encouraged: he never encouraged cliques. For instance, if there was a party given by a group he'd never go to it because ~~xxx~~ he didn't want to show preference to the group. And he never went to any of the drinking parties. We didn't encourage them either but we had them. Some of the most important people had the parties. Like the Masons; Dr. Mason was a marvelous bone specialist.

DB And he had parties? Was photography ever taught at the school?

EU Yes, we tried it. Don Loving was... It's being done now.

DB But it was brought in while you were there?

EU Yes. But something - oh, the people ~~xxxxxxxartistsxxx~~ were a little bit shy of the artists and they did not feel a need to associate with the artists. Again, it's that feeling of insecurity I think. And so it didn't work too well.

DB The photographers and the artists were kind of apart?

EU The artists were all right to the photographers. The photographers were a little bit skittish about associating... Well, it's the same thing - I think that's what's the matter with Margaret, too. When I came back from the hospital and they got Margaret to be my companion supposedly...

DB The school also attracted some people in more the theater arts. I know that Burr Tillstrom was there.

EU Oh, yes. I knew Burr before he came to Saugatuck.

DB Oh, you did? Where did you know him from?

EU I was a puppeteer.

DB Oh. I see. <sup>EU</sup> I started my puppeteering in 1921 because I knew Tony Sarg. And I knew Lillian Owen who was working with Tony Sarg. And, believe it or not, she was our chaperone. We had a chaperone in the beginning but it wasn't necessary. The ~~chaperone~~ <sup>chaperone</sup> got a little bit uppish, too, you see. You can't take a person like that. Mrs. Neebe was a chaperone and she was a well-meaning person. Oh, one time we had two midgets and they were performers in a show. If I could bring out some of my old snapshots sometime - I have lots of other snapshots.

DB Oh, really? So a lot of performers were brought to Saugatuck, a lot of performing groups?

EU We always had a speaker on Sundays. These speakers were very interesting people. They talked on subjects of their own.

DB For example, would Burr Tillstrom speak on Sunday?

EU Yes. And what he did, the first time he ever came he studied the group all day long and took them off, made a play around them. It was very smart. He was very smart anyhow.

DB Yes. He was a very fascinating man. What other types of things would you have on Sunday? Would you have dancers <sup>afterward</sup> ~~er-aeters~~ or anything of that nature?



EU No, I don't believe so. The only dancer we might have had would be <sup>Angna</sup> Anita Anga Enters but she wasn't there long enough to <sup>really</sup> have gotten a performance going. Oh, but we always had Saturday night plays or parties and they were always costume parties and that always lent itself to a good time. And we had hikes in the woods. And we did plays. I did The Old Lady Shows Her Medals. I told you that. You see, I was in the theater and I was crazy to... We built a stage on the old studio, we raised it up about three feet. It had a back entrance so that we could use, enter from the outside, and a side entrance. We did - I just had it on the tip of my tongue... I was going to say we did a Galsworthy play but we didn't do that; we did that with The Players. We did that one with all men in it. Maybe I'll think of the name of it. Of course I encouraged those things. I directed most of them if I couldn't get anybody else to direct them.

DB Why did you encourage these things?

EU Because I believe it's all one thing art. And it was good; it was good for some of those people to have <sup>some</sup> experiences like that.

DB So did the visual artists like performing?

EU On the whole, yes. With The Old Lady Shows Her Medals I picked them for types, for what I believed they should look like. That was a good thing to do. That helped the acting.

DB I'm sure it did. Let me do one thing, let me change this tape.

END OF TAPE 2 - SIDE 1

SIDE 2

DB Who is this now? ~~XXXXXX~~ Zaidee ~~22~~ Scanlan --

EU Zaidee (Z-a-i-d-e-e) and her husband was a doctor, Doctor Scanlan. They came every summer for a while. He didn't come as much as she did. She used to sing an awful lot especially on the water. Oh, and we had Venetian Night almost every time - here it is. You've seen that?

DB Yes, I think it's fascinating; I really do.

EU You saw it? Did I show it to you?

DB Yes. It's great.

EU I'm here too. My little brother is here with me.

DB Yes. Beautiful.

EU Now of course this is the old pier where the boats used to land. The water had gone down so low and later on it was way up.

DB Tell me, did the school ever attempt to get funding from <sup>some of the</sup> national programs?

EU ~~DB~~ There weren't any.

~~DB XXXXX There XXXXX weren't XXXXX?~~

~~XX XXX XXX XXX~~

DB There weren't any?

EU No, not like there are now. This is just a recent thing.

DB You never got Ford Foundation money?

EU I think they had something last year. I think.

DB Yes, I think they did too from the Michigan Council they had money. So there wasn't any source you could go to to try and --?

EU No, government <sup>wasn't</sup> -- that didn't come until later on. What started that? Did Roosevelt start that?

DB There was some in there but mostly it came after World War II. There was quite a bit of --

EU Yes. But the Theater - Hallie Flanagan --

DB The Theater Project - right - those were all during the WPA. How was the faculty chosen?

EU I was reading that in one of the minutes. We were talking about whom to get. Mr. Fursman believed in getting the ones that would serve the best and give the most for the money. And that was a good idea and that person fit in, too democratically inclined.

DB Did you choose them when you were director? Or did the committee choose them?

EU The board usually did. I had the advantage because I was teaching here at the school and I knew an awful lot of people and I knew what they did and what they were able to do. And if I found one who was willing to come for what I could offer... I didn't offer the craftsmen as much but they were willing to come anyhow. That wasn't very fair but and I didn't like doing it. In the case of Dorothy <sup>Meredith</sup> ~~Marrett~~ I had her mother stay here and let her come to be part of this thing, let her work in the school. So that was compensation enough. But they were all good people. I knew them well.

DB Were these people almost exclusively from Milwaukee? Or were they also from Chicago and other places?

EU From Chicago; and from the Layton Art School I had a few but not very many because they didn't have the stuff that I wanted.

DB And seldom did anybody come from outside of Chicago or Milwaukee, right? It was mostly a <sup>Wisconsin-</sup> ~~Winnipeg~~ Illinois faculty?

EU Well, there was this father, a man whose name I can't think of, but twenty-five years later he brought his family, a boy. They came from New York I think. There was that kind of thing.

DB But almost exclusively we're talking about -- /



EU And from around Detroit --

DB Oh, you did have some from around Detroit?

EU Yes. We had Weiborg. I don't know if you know who he is. And you know Phil Fike.

DB Phil Fike I know.

EU He came in my time. He did a good job.

DB During the period you were director most of the students came from Illinois and Wisconsin?

EU Yes, most of them from Illinois; not many from Wisconsin right away. But later on when Fursman taught in Milwaukee then there were quite a number that came from Wisconsin.

DB You were director from 1946 to 1957. Except for Mr. Fursman that was the longest period that anybody directed the school that I know of from studying the records. Other directors seem to have lasted only a year or two years.

EU Well, there was too much work to do, you know. Just like Francis Chapin. He found it not satisfactory to him. <sup>After</sup> He had been there two years I think ~~and~~ then he went to Vermont because he got <sup>better</sup> an audience, a better sale on his paintings. Saugatuck wasn't art-minded. That I can say for it; we really had a right to have more or less of a grudge because they didn't understand. They thought: well, at the school they're "arty" people. They didn't even know what the word implied; that was a term we used for people that we didn't like.

DB So there was a lot of work. So why did you stay on then?

EU Just my stupidity, my interest in giving and knowing that <sup>perhaps</sup> I had it to give, you see; and not being <sup>afraid</sup> ~~afraid~~ of work. And, you see, you had to break in so many people. That was hard work. Take my three handy men.

Chester was the most satisfactory one. I sought him out. He lived in the country near Holland. I went to get him because the woman who was our housekeeper <sup>was running</sup> ~~xxxxxxx~~ a newsstand. Chester would come for a newspaper every once in a while. She knew him. She ~~xxix~~ thought he would like it. He had never been in the vicinity of the school before. He was very interesting. He was a tall, gawky fellow. He came around. He folded his hands like this, looked around. It was really pathetic the way he talked. He said, "My! this is beautiful. I've never seen this place. But, oh, I'm going to like it here." I said, "Well then, you're hired." Then he wondered whether he could do it or not. That was another angle about him that I liked. I said, "I'm sure you can do it." He was the one that did lots of the work. He thought things through pretty well. He was the one that scrambled the shed.

DB Did most of the faculty come back year after year?

EU Yes, a lot of them did. Most of the stable ones. Most of mine always did.

DB Who did you have back each year, for example?

EU This year?

DB When you were there who did you usually have teaching?

EU Well, they didn't repeat on mine. I'll tell you what they did though: they carried on the crafts. <sup>They succumbed</sup> ~~xxxxxxx~~ to that even though <sup>Art</sup> ~~art~~ was still ~~thaxxx~~ there.

DB But I mean who were some of the people who worked for you, some of the faculty members who worked for you?

EU Dorothy Meredith and <sup>[R]?</sup> ~~Mosalind~~ Meyer. My assistant when I was alone was a girl from - I can't think of names - what's the matter with me today; ~~I guess I'm going something I don't know --~~

DB Well, it doesn't matter.

EU Avis McHenry was my bosom friend here. She was a kindergarten teacher. She was very brilliant. As far as I was concerned, I never had much time to read because I was working with my hands so much. Avis roomed with me in my little house which was the boathouse. I wish you could see it. One day Mr. Fursman ~~xxix~~ in a mad moment said, "How would you like to live in the boathouse?" He was living in the lighthouse. It was built in 1859. It was almost a hundred years old when the cyclone took it.

DB Too bad.

EU He rented the lighthouse. You see, the lighthouse station is in Milwaukee and when Percy was teaching here in Milwaukee he went down and saw the possibilities of renting the lighthouse for his own use. And he did. Of course that was unheard of at the time. It was all boarded up when we went over there <sup>the</sup> first time.

Sounds like a great place.

DB Why did you leave in 1957?

EU Because there was a lot of dissension about me about the fact that I didn't follow the dictates of some of those narrow minded-people that wanted to ~~not~~ have a narrowed down program. It was very strange. You see, I believe that everything that you learn is valuable; that you can use it somewhere. And I always did use it. That's one reason why I didn't ~~xxxx~~ <sup>intend</sup> to join the Wisconsin Players in the first place because I didn't think they were serious enough. Isn't that funny? But they were ~~xxxxxxx~~ serious; they were the most serious people. Mrs. Sherry was the ingenue <sup>actress</sup> ~~xxxxxxx~~ in Richard Mansfield's plays here in Milwaukee and in New York. She was interested in everything. I was amazed at what she knew and how she felt about the arts. And she wasn't wrong. I was supposed to be an artist and I didn't have all that that she had. Mr. <sup>Sandburg</sup> Carl Sander used to say of me, "You're Laura Sherry's right-hand man."



She'd include me in everything. And I gained so much from her. I wouldn't give up that education for anything. It was such a natural thing because we acted<sup>but</sup>/the thing, everything.

DB So what you're saying ~~ix~~, though, is that you had this broad background, but some of the people at the school did not want this broadening effect on the school?

EU They didn't think it was necessary. They couldn't understand it. I don't know - of course my broad background comes from the fact that my mother and father - my father liked to sing; he joined the Milwaukee Musical Society which was the first early musical society in Milwaukee. There are lots of Germans here in Milwaukee and they're the ones that are interested in singing and culture.

DB What happened to the school after you left?

EU A man by the name of Boothby was given the thing. I don't know what was the matter with him. Nobody liked him. He didn't have the feel of an outdoor place. An outdoor place is an outdoor place. You can't make anything else out of it. I tried to have as many ~~outdoor~~ classes as I could outdoors. Even the crafts classes. I made it possible. I built a platform for the looms about twenty feet by eight or ten feet, something like that. We moved the looms outside whenever we could. We usually did. First of all, I took over some of the buildings and I started my jewelry in the Waldorf-Asteria<sup>Castoria.</sup>. Do you know what the Waldorf was is?

DB No.

EU The boys named the building the Waldorf-Astoria<sup>Castoria.</sup>. There was a stairway going up. It was almost ready to fall down. Art Beam wanted to pull it down right away. I said, "No, we won't pull it down." In the middle

of the night we got some boards. Dan Lutz was another artist who was very good. He's in California. He helped me, he was in cahoots with me. We got boards and stained them as though they were old and put those up while Art wasn't looking. You had to do so many things like that that you didn't like to do that could have been done in the open.

DB So after you left did attendance at the school go down? Did it fall on hard times, or what happened to it?

EU I didn't have much to do with it after that, after 1957. Lots of people in charge didn't understand, they didn't know what it was to have a free school free in action and yet with good behavior. That was the trouble. The people that didn't know how to act were the ones that were the most difficult to manage. You've seen people that are not art-minded that do all kinds of things that people don't approve of even though they may be all right as far as... *and* doing it is for them to decide what is right. You see, I didn't know many of these people who came in the earliest days because they were mostly from Chicago but they were very good. Here's Aileen <sup>House</sup> ~~house~~ you see, she's a Milwaukee girl, <sup>this was</sup> back in the early days. Some of these things are almost faded out. I once made a roster of those people that came back again and again but I lost the list. I was always interested in having people come back because it was like seeing an old friend.

DB Yes, it really is.

EU When Doris took over - maybe I've told you this - she put a headline on top of the ... "Elsa is back". And, you know, that brought in a lot of people, the people that had been there. There was a time when people didn't like to come. I don't remember what happened. I think somebody was <sup>sliding</sup> riding down on them pretty hard.

*lighting*

DB Why were you called back. Why were you brought back?

EU Demand. And Doris had something to do with that. She got out a petition. That isn't generally known I don't think. I didn't like it very much.

DB How long did you go back for - just one year?

EU No -- Oh, I know. ~~Max~~ I had to -- No. I had to withdraw because as in all my other activities when the Project started in 1935 - but I was still teaching ~~then~~ <sup>there</sup>. I didn't withdraw willingly. This is another girl - Norman Shaw - from Kansas. She was a regular Kansas person if you know what I mean. Norma was the girl that worked for Mrs. Fursman. Another thing that Mrs. Fursman did: she always had a sort of a maid, a helper, in the lighthouse. She'd take an art student. That was a good thing to do because that gave them the feeling of the school and brought Mrs. Fursman ~~in~~ more into the school. Mrs. Fursman was not art-trained either. That's one of the things. But she was a wonderful person in lots of ways. She was the one who when the fifty-seven teachers of the Chicago school system fought the Chicago Tribune...  
The teachers were fighting for higher salaries - they were being <sup>paid</sup> ~~pad~~ in scrip at the time - and they found out that the Chicago Tribune had not changed its evaluation of its tax rate for all those years the Tribune was in Chicago. The teachers found that out and fought it and they won.

DB That's pretty good.

EU It was good. ~~And Max was fighting with them~~ But, look, they lost their jobs for quite a while; they were out and couldn't go back to teaching for a while. Mrs. Fursman was one of those teachers. I admired her very, very much for that; even though she didn't have very good sense in art.



She didn't know what was good in Mr. Fursman's work. That was a sad thing. I used to get so mad at her. He'd be in his studio painting and, for instance, painting hands. She'd say, "Fritzie, we need a loaf of bread. You go to the store and get the bread." He'd be right in the middle of it. I could have killed her.

DB Yes, it's really rough when you're doing something creative.

EU He'd show some signs of being not interested in doing it, or think it was not right to do it. Sometimes he'd throw his brushes down. I watched every move he made. He always let one of us, or some of us, watch him paint; he didn't seem to mind. I guess he was playing to the galleries. There were some very interesting people. And I ~~xxxx~~ <sup>was</sup> going to say that the very wealthy people liked/ <sup>the</sup> Saugatuck Oxbow - we named it Oxbow afterward; it was called Riverside Hotel. The people that had the means to have lived in much comfort, which Oxbow didn't have - they didn't have any electricity in the beginning. Charlie West, the shipbuilder from Manitowoc who built <sup>submarines</sup> ~~submarines~~ during the war, installed a generator. It had to be turned on every time and it made quite a bit of noise; it pumped along. I found in this little paper here that I said that "after that we could have light for our ~~plxxyx~~ plays and we'd work at night." That was a good thing.

DB Was there ever an attempt to keep the school open year long?

EU There was some talk about it. But, you see, the winters are cold, there is much snow, and you didn't have access to it. They're having a fight now about the road. The road there doesn't belong to Oxbow nor to the ~~xxxx~~ cottages there. They want to have it closed so that only Oxbow people can come. I think that's a mistake. Besides, I know it is not a private road. Mr. Fursman and I talked about that. He used to

lament the fact that we couldn't make it private because there was a time when lots of people used to come and do things like, for instance, maybe build fires where they shouldn't have.

DB There's a clause or something in Oxbow's charter that it reverts back to the city of Saugatuck if the school doesn't open. Why was that put in there? Do you know <sup>that?</sup> why?

EU I did know. I think it was because the village was beginning to realize that it was good property. And it is.

DB Yes, I know.

EU That's what I'm afraid is going to happen too, <sup>now</sup> - I don't know. Because Tom Flack mentioned that the other day. He said, "My, this is valuable property." They want it for themselves though. Oh, another thing I want to mention that was very good that made the school as wonderful as it was when it started: Mr. Fursman advanced the idea that "if you wanted to build a house on our property here you're welcome to do it." And some of the nicest people built houses there. And they held them. They had to have a contract that they'd attend the school each year or supply somebody that would. And that was good. That was Mr. Fursman's idea. He had this feeling of wanting people around that were compatible. And they were compatible. We had one of the editors of one of the good papers in Chicago - I wish I could think of his name. He and his family came. They were rather prim and proper, the woman was. We didn't know whether they'd fit in or not but they did; they burped down a little bit.

DB So there were quite a few people who were not just artists; there were lots of people who were just -- 7

EU But they liked to associate with artists. These were educated people that liked to associate with the artists. That makes a difference.



DB Yes, it does make a great deal of difference. I think we should draw this to a close - it's getting late -- and perhaps do another on another occasion.

EU Oh, here's an Englishman that was here - Arthur Sharp. He lived in Milwaukee. He was very nice; I liked him very much. Lots of the early people came because Tom Talmadge brought them. Tom always ~~brought~~ brought the people you would call the more elite and could represent somebody. Tom had the money. He did an awful lot for the school. But I think that we always tried to pay him back eventually. At least Mr. Fursman was the kind of person who would do that.

DB Did you <sup>or</sup> did Fursman ever visit any of the other summer schools in the country to see what they were doing? <sup>EU</sup> No, but we knew about the one in the East.

DB Haystack in Maine?

EU That came later. We were the first one.

DB Provincetown?

EU We were the only school that provided <sup>these people with</sup> room and board and living. Eventually they didn't all live there; they came from surrounding villages; they commuted every day. But they didn't have the same spirit. The people that lived there were different. And at first when Mrs. Linz was there we had tablecloths. And we had a windmill and we had a woman that did all the laundry. The windmill ran the washing machine.

DB Very good. But you didn't actually visit any of the other schools? You weren't influenced by the other schools?

EU No. I don't think so. I know we knew of them. <sup>EU</sup> But I don't know



why we didn't visit them. Probably we were too immersed in our own affairs.

DB Okay. That's good. I think we should stop because it's getting very late.

END OF TAPE 2 - SIDE 2

END OF INTERVIEW