

Transcription of Oral History Recording with Lois Abrams with the Warren Historical Society.

LA: Lois Abrams

MH: Marylyn Hendricks

LH: Larry Hendricks

Today is November 7th, 2015, this is Marylyn Hendricks. I am at Lois Abram's house in Warren at 178 Kent Rd, and I am going to be interviewing Lois right now.

MH: So, I'm wondering if you'll tell me your full name?

LA: Lois, you want all of them? Lois Katheryn Miller Abrams.

MH: Ok! That sounds pretty good! When and where were you born?

LA: I was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the only reason is my uncle was a doctor, who delivered me, but I was there for 6 weeks with my aunt and my uncle and my mother before coming home, which was East Chester, New York.

MH: And where was your family originally from?

LA: They were both from Pennsylvania, they were both, their parents, all their parents were Mennonites. Very early in this country before it was the United States, they came because of religious freedom, came first from Switzerland and Holland and were part of that group known as the Pennsylvania Dutch, they were Mennonites.

MH: Oh! And your father's name?

LA: Harold Miller

MH: And your mother's maiden name?

LA: She was Ruth Bear

MH: And you already said you lived in East Chester, is that right?

LA: Yes. That's where I grew up and went to school.

MH: And what brought you to and your family to Warren, and when?

LA: Well, it wasn't my family, my family actually lived in East Chester, my husband and I met at the National Arts Club in New York, I was singing with the National Arts Club Chorus, and he was a vice president there, he was an artist.... And I saw him walk through a rehearsal one time and I poked my neighbor and I said, "Who's that?" and that was the end of his bachelorhood. Ha! Ha! Anyhow, it was a wonderful meeting with a wonderful man. He was 13 years older, I really didn't have any intention of getting married at that young age, but I loved him, and I was really impressed with his work, I wanted to be a part of it, and I didn't think he was going to sit around and wait for me to get any older. So, it was decided we would wed. We lived in Manhattan, and every summer we would go camping up in Canada for the month of August. Way back in the wilds of Mont Tremblant, which was wilderness at that point. Somewhere along the line we thought it would be fun to have some land a little bit closer where we

could go camping on weekends in the summer and maybe go for vacation. So, we started watching the New York Times over a period of years, and in 1958 we saw an ad for a parcel of land in Warren, it was 10 acres, and then another parcel for 10 acres and another parcel for 15 acres, the price seemed affordable. I had been looking at estates with stables and pools and servants' quarters and whatever.

MH: Do you remember what you paid for your land?

LA: Oh, very very little, but I'll tell you How we paid it, we didn't really have any money to buy any major properties, and as I said, I was looking and my husband was very amused by my looking, and I'm reading him these wonderful estate ads, but he wasn't laughing that hard when I saw this property. It was within something we could afford. We came up to see it and the Realtor had bought 35 acres of woodland for his mother to have an income. He didn't want anything down, and it would be monthly payments to Lillian Belan over a period of 8 years, I don't know how many years, I think the monthly payments were \$50 something a month. And as I said, no funds down, and so we said, "How much would you want for the 20 acres?", and he came down on that price, and we said now, if we took the 35 acres, what would you want?" and \$50 a month for eight years, you can imagine it was not a lot of money and it was money we sent to Lillian Belan, and so we sign on the dotted line, and I come up here, there was nothing to see, I fell madly in love with it, in March!

[laughter]

MH: Wow, you were brave!

[laughing continues]

LA: No, I think I just liked the wildness of it all. It was, you know, it was trees, and some fairly new growth, because this land had been used for making charcoal for the kiln down in Kent. For making pig iron, I guess, that's what I understand. And there were actually circles of land here, that when we just dug into them were just black and had just very very young growth on them. Now today, you look around and we have quite a few old trees. But that was back in 1958.

MH: Yes, that was back when you got your land, but then you came and lived here for a while, right?

LA: The first thing that we did was, we built a tent platform. We thought we were going practically to Canada, not quite, but I mean, there was no 684, there was no I-84, there was nothing, we came up on Rte. 22 and when we got to Pine Plains or Dover Plains or one of those and cut across, we thought we had gone not quite to Canada, but we were halfway there. So, we built a tent platform, cut through a road where there had been an old road here on this once farmland and we built a tent platform and came up in the Spring/Summer. I know the first time we had come up, it had gotten cold, and it was Spring, but I feel as though it was Spring in Manhattan, by the time we got to Warren, there was snow on the ground, and we were *sure* we had gone halfway to the North Pole! Through Purdy's Corner and Golden Bridge and through some of those towns along the way. And anyhow, we built our tent platform, and we pitched a tent, and cleared enough to do that.

MH: What year was that?

LA: It was '58 or it could have been the summer of '59, but I believe we bought the land in '58. When we cleared the road so that we could come in and built the tent platform down, not far from where my husband eventually built his studio. Shortly after that I was pregnant, we decided to build his studio, and

to come up and rent here, so that we could come up and be here in summers. We didn't give up our studio in New York, but the studio next to ours, the woman had gone off to Greece, and she gave us her studio apartment as a rental for a short period of time. So, we had two studios, I could be with the baby in one and Herb could work in the other one. But then she was coming back, so we thought, why don't we go up and rent something in Warren, our studio in New York today, which you couldn't touch, it would be thousands. It was a bedroom, pullman kitchen, a bathroom and a big, big story and a half high studio for \$50 something a month. Our rental here was a house, the second house in from the light in Warren, for \$45 a month, so for under \$100 we had a very nice house in the country, within walking distance of the Warren Store, and a lovely studio in New York on West 67th. That building is now a historical monument that you can't change the paint. So that was the cost of things, and when say things like that, my children they can't even fathom it. We then we rented this house and came up here. I guess it's when we decided, after the summer here, we would like to be up here longer, that Herb decided to build a studio. Which he did. That was our first building, put in our septic and our water, drilled a well, which we still have, same septic, same well, for now the house *and* the studio. And built the studio so he could work when we came up here, and we could come up on weekends, year-round when we chose. And that is how we got to Warren to begin with. We had *no* intention ever when we bought the land, of living here. That was the furthest thing from our mind.

MH: But you rented the house near the light in Warren, then you rented a house where else?

LA: Well then after the first year there was a house at Greystones, a caretaker's house that became available and that was such a perfect fit, because at that time I was about to have our second child. The Grey's had a son who was four days younger than our first, then Kathy, our first, our daughter, and they had a second son who was six months old when our son was born. So here were four children, could have been cousins/twins/what have you, that had companions. We were both artists- I should say our husbands are both artists- And it was a perfect fit. So, we rented a house from them, but still went back and forth to New York as we felt that we had to.

MH: Now I'd like to ask a little bit about Herb. Where he went to school and what was his full name?

LA: Herbert E. Abrams. I'm not going to tell you his middle name, because he had a problem with it. He didn't like it. And at some point, Eric Sloane convinced him to change the "E" to "Elmtree", that was more memorable. I was totally against it, I thought it was terribly Eric, and commercial, and, and.... But he did that briefly, so that there are paintings signed "Herbert Elmtree Abrams". Much to my dismay.

MH: And his family background? He was from?

LA: His parents were both from what was Russia at the time. His mother was actually from Lithuania and his father was from Belarus. They were German. They came to this country, his father in his twenties, and his mother when she was 16. And his mother had not one day of education in her life, she was put out to work for the farmers at the age of 5, then her parents, first her father, came to Torrington, then her mother came, and then eventually sent for her. So, he was one of ten children. He was the 9th of ten children. The first one to finish high school.

MH: Where was this?

LA: In Hartford.

MH: In Hartford

LA: At that point they lived in Hartford. They had a farm that they lost. He was actually born in Greenfield, Massachusetts, then they had a farm for the ten children, which they lost during the Depression. And then his father came to Hartford, and eventually became a foreman in a factory, but in the meanwhile, during the Depression, sold fruit on the street. He rather, than go in a bread line. So, as I say, the children all helped to support the family, but by the time they got down to the 9th, and he came home and said he wanted to finish high school. And that was ok, and they could manage that. And his father was actually able to, once he went on to art school, to occasionally send him a dollar. But for most of that art school, Herb worked his way through.

MH: And what art school was this?

LA: He started, he went after high school, he got a small scholarship from the teachers at Hartford High, who really were absolutely instrumental in convincing him into going on with education, rather than do what his brothers and sisters had done. He was very bright, he was one of the first in the National Honor Society and his class....

MH: Which art school did he go to?

LA: Well, first he went to Norwich Free Academy, which was Studio Art for a year, and he worked at several jobs to pay for that, and then as I said, had a small stipend from his teachers at school, and an occasional dollar from family members, which meant a lot to him. Because by that they were saying, by way of that "yes, do, go, we didn't have the opportunity, but we'd like to see you do it." And so then after that, he put together a portfolio, and went to Pratt. And he was, I believe in his third year at Pratt when he was drafted into the Army. They were looking for artists for camouflage, and he was put into Camouflage. He did that for a couple of years, he designed what is now the logo on the airplanes.

MH: Would you explain that?

LA: Yes, alright, this camouflage team was asked to design something that would differentiate it from the Japanese and the Germans. The Germans had a swastika, which at a distance, in a circle, I think, looked like a donut. The Japanese had the rising sun, a circle, looked like a donut. And we had a star in a circle that, at a distance looked like a donut. So, they wanted, -so, what he simply did was put on the two tabs on either side. So, at a distance, it looked like a straight line, a horizontal line, instead of a donut. That was one of his great successes in camouflage. He did another one that he was always very proud of. He said he painted airplanes invisible. There are people who knew nothing about camouflage who would say "Well, simply paint them blue and they will disappear into the sky!" As he said, you paint it blue, and it just looks like something dark in the sky, against the light sky. But what he did, he used, instead of having a shiny airplane, they flocked it. They put flocking on the airplane, which kept it from shining in the sunlight. Anyhow, they tested all of these, and they got, I guess 60 seconds, maybe it was three minutes, whatever it was, it was just a little more time before the plane could be seen. And that was another of his great achievements. What bothered him however was that his officer was getting the credit for these, I mean it did say his name, that he had done this, but the credit was going to the officer that he worked for, who simply was the administrator of these camouflage experts. And he decided at some point that there were two Armies, and he was in the wrong one. At the same time had put out something that they were looking for cadets, for the Air Force to become pilots. And he signed

up and took the exams and qualified and became a cadet and eventually became a pilot in the Army Air Corp which was much more to his liking. He decided now he was in the right Army. The reason they needed pilots so badly at that point, they were sending all of their, even their instructors, they were sending them overseas. This was getting near the end of the war, and so he went from his student pilot, as soon as he was licensed/qualified or whatever, the very next day he was in the instructor's seat. So, he never made it out of the country. The instructors had all been sent off to war. So that when he left, he was eligible for the GI Bill, which could not have been more wonderful, and that was how he was able to finish his schooling at Pratt, with honors, and then go on to the Art Students League, for many years. Of course, he was actually working at that point. He did some commercial artwork, which was unsigned. He did those little drawings for the newspaper that don't have any signatures on them. He worked with an art agency who sent him those, and actually, I did some modeling there for a couple of friends who worked there. I thought I was fantastic, but what they really wanted to do was drape clothes on me. But I was very Impressed with myself, until they told me one day that I looked like a three year old who was in her first day of ballet class.

[Laughter]

So that kind of ended my modeling career, my thinking I was going to go on with that. But I did fit into the clothes, and they were able to do their drawings for Lord and Taylor, or [...]

MH: Now, I want to go in two directions, I want to ask you a little bit more about the development of Herb's art and paintings, and then I want to switch over to ask you questions about the Town of Warren. Now, talking about Herb and the Art Students League how did he –obviously he did some commercial work- but then he began doing his own paintings, is that right?

LA: He knew that he did not want to be a commercial artist, and he had seen Frank Vincent DuMond, the work of his students, and the work of DuMond, who was a famous teacher at the League. So he signed up to join the class, the class was full, and he couldn't get in at the time. So he went off to Texas for a year, with... somebody who was going off to Texas, to work at, -oh I can't remember the name, it was something like "The Hunt", or... some millionaire that had great lands out there in Texas and Mexico and needed murals on his barroom walls or whatever he needed. Now I know at one point they nailed up terrapin scales all over something, but they had work out there, and he did some portraits out there by word of mouth, when he was out there but all the time waiting to get back to the League. That was just a diversion. So, he was able to get in the League, with DuMond, and to study with him until Dumond died. There is an article that he wrote for American Artist, I should have the dates for that, but I don't, but it's something one could find about Frank Vincent DuMond.

MH: How do you spell his name?

LA: D-u- capitol M-o-n-d

LH: "of the world"

LA: What?

LH: "Of The World"

LA: Oh yes! And he had art classes in the summer in Vermont, and up in Nova Scotia, and Herb went in the summers with these groups to these places, and as I say he was doing some commercial work, and supported in all of this with the G I Bill, which made all difference to-

MH: Now, he was selling paintings and-

LA: He was selling portraits, and he was doing pastels, and he was doing anything that anyone wanted to buy, and then I say doing commercial work on the side, that he never signed his name to, those were to keep the food and the roof over his head. But again, I have to say again, that our studio in New York, we never changed the name from the person that Herb had moved in with originally. And so, with the rent control, we never paid more than \$51.80 a month for the studio. Which now would be thousands of dollars for those studios, but that was what we paid the whole time we were there.

MH: But he sold paintings in Greenwich Village and-

LA: That was after we were married.

MH: Oh, after you were married, ok.

LA: And so, we were married in '54, and that's what he was doing, he was selling, he was doing some little portraits, again, by word of mouth, there were some stores that were selling his work, there were some boutique-y little places that put his paintings, small paintings, his portraits of children in the window and so he was by word of mouth. Someone spoke to him about going to the Village Show and doing that in the Spring and in the Fall, and we went back and forth about that and whether it was a good idea or not. And finally, he decided he would. He took two spots, right of the Muse there on 5th Ave, couldn't have been more perfect because he was slightly separated from everybody else, and there were actually people across the street, Number Two, 5th Ave who had cocktails parties and they would bring binoculars so that they could look out and see his work across the street and several paintings were sold and we got to be great friends with these people who, actually, moved to Heritage Village when they retired, and he was an editor of the New York Times, and they became very good friends. They owned several, and their daughter still owns, a large number of Herb's paintings. So, people began to know him, and know his work, and come there. Herb never would, absolutely not bargain for a painting. And there were some wonderful stories that came out of that. He decided how much he wanted for a painting and that was it. And somebody, many people, would come along, because I guess a lot of artists did bargain. And they would say "I'll give you such and such..." and he'd say, "That's very nice, but the price is ___". And so, then they would go away, and then they would come back, and one person said, but "You sold my painting! You knew I wanted it!" and he said, "well yes, somebody came along and paid the right price!" It was kind of a game he got known for, but you know, I think he was much better off than if he had bargained. It gave people the idea that they were getting the true value. That the true value was on the work.

MH: After you moved to Warren, there was contact with West Point-

LA: Oh, even before that, he was teaching at West Point when I married him

MH: Oh, and he was teaching what?

LA: He was teaching Art to the officers and officer's wives. They actually built a studio up there for him at one point. He was so popular, had a waiting list, and -

MH: And that was in the 1950s, right?

LA: That was in the 50s, and he, they also tried one year, because the cadets wanted it, to give the cadets a class. That did not work out, not because the cadets didn't want it, but because they would come one week, and their schedules were just so busy they couldn't come for two weeks, and then they'd come again. And it really didn't work out for them because of their schedule. But he taught the officers and the officers wives for twenty years until he finally gave it up, and he didn't give it up until he moved to Warren, where he was going once a week, he was driving to West Point, and when he became more well-known and very very busy, he didn't feel that he wanted to do that any longer, so he turned that over to Ed Deveaux, who grew up in Connecticut, grew up in this area. And one of the few people who had, in fact the only person who ever came and spent a summer with Herb in his studio. Of the many students that Herb had, he taught a class at White Memorial, he taught a class at Heritage Village actually, he would do one-time classes, when people would get in touch with him.

MH: But his contact, am I correct, his contact at West Point led him to go to Vietnam to make paintings

LA: Well, yes, but that was after, what happened was, we met and became good friends with many of the Westmorelands were friends, the Conners were friends, General Conner was/became in charge of personnel during Vietnam at the Pentagon and Westmorland, as we all know was in charge of Vietnam. But then he came back and was the head of the joint chiefs of staff. And we spent many, many times with them, and it was through them, also, we learned also many other people, he had done quite a few portraits. Three portraits for the pentagon of Westmorland, and of Creighton Abrams and of Walker. No, of Palmer, I'm sorry, Walker he did for something else. He ended up doing quite a few military portraits. Then he ended up doing 22 portraits for Johns Hopkins, and this was what would happen, we'd get to know a whole circle of people, when it came time that they needed a portrait, people would say oh, I know so and so- That's actually how he got to do the Bush portrait. The Carter portrait came through Toby Moffet, who was our representative here, and Toby said well, "I'm going to submit your work to the White House for their files." Well, when it came time for the Carters to pick someone, they went through the files, and this went over a period of years that they were choosing someone, and they finally chose Herb. Then the Bushes lived with this Carter portrait, whom the curator and several people were calling-

MH: And which Bushes was that?

LA: The senior Bushes. They lived with this Carter portrait, and when it came time for them to have portraits done, they had seen this, and also the curator at the White House and several other people were often saying, which we often quoted, that it was the best contemporary portrait in the White House, and of course we quoted that often! So, they called, no they didn't call I'm sorry, she said to- Barbara Bush said to her chief of staff, Laurie Firestone, is there any way we could get in touch with this artist? And Laurie Firestone happened say yes, I know him. He's been to my house. She lived in Middleburg, Virginia where some very good friends lived, and we actually went to a party at their house. She said yes! I've met him, I know him, so Barbara Bush said Well would you call him and make a contact? And that is how we got to know the senior Bushes, who couldn't have been more delightful. Herb thought they had just wanted him to do his portrait, and then, a little misunderstanding there, because Laurie Firestone called and said, you know Mrs. Bush thinks you don't want to paint her. And Herb said, oh, quite! I do! and we get another call from Brent Scowcroft "you know Mrs. Bush thinks that you don't want to paint her", and Herb says, well I didn't think that that was what *they* wanted. That's what they were talking about. So, he ended up painting them both, and we spent a lot of time in

Kennebunkport, they couldn't have been a more delightful host and hostess. It was a very interesting time. We spent a lot of time with the Carters in planes, we met them up in Boston at one point, and actually, we had a niece living in Manhattan and one night and one night, the Carters were supposed to be in Manhattan for something and there was nothing going on this one particular night, and they, Mrs. Carter and Jimmy Carter, were going to go to the theater. Well, she got sick, so we got a phone call from Madeline McBean, their personal secretary, and she said "would you have someone that you would like to spend the evening with him, he doesn't want to be with all of those politicians and secret service people and everybody that he has to spend time with, and she's sick, and he doesn't want to go to the theater alone. We happen to have a niece, who happened to live in Manhattan, and she prepared a beautiful dinner, and we invited our children to come, and President Carter came for dinner that night, and we had him all to ourselves, and it was great fun. He had given Herb a fly rod carrying case. To carry his paintings in, that he rolled up and carried on the plane. So, Herb had brought that to this party and said to him, to ask him to draw a fish on this, and he was going to sign it "to Lois and to Herb" and he said draw a fish! And President Carter said I can't draw, and they said oh anybody can draw a fish! So as Herb said, he drew the worst looking fish you can imagine. So that was one of Herb's most treasured things, and we had a wonderful time, and we got a very special chance to spend some very personal time with our children, and the President.

MH: Good! I wanted to ask you about your relationship with local artists, The Greys, and the Liebermanns.

LAL: Well, the Greys and the Liebermanns were a family, and we actually lived in that house for 8 years before we built our house. And the reason for putting off building our house, even though we had the land, and we had the studio, was the fact that we had each other there, when they travelled, their boys stayed with us. I remember Thaddius one day saying very proudly, that his parents, that somebody asked him where his parents were, and he said, "They are in Syrup". I've always thought of Francine and Cleve being in syrup! Anyhow, it was wonderful. They children ran, they had the fields, they had the pool, eventually they had a tennis court, but mainly they had the chicken house, for some reason or another the place above the chicken house seemed to be quite a wonderful place to play. Also, the fields. So, they were family. The Liebermanns were Grandma and Grandpa Liebermann, and the kids could go down there and play.

MH: Was Alex Liebermann doing his big sculptures then or did that come later?

LA: Well, it started then, but that whole period of that 8 years, he had started to paint, and was doing the very geometric paintings that he did, the circles and triangles and primary colors, and he had just really started that, he built a studio, and I believe the 'stables' were a little bit later that that. And the big pieces, with the found metal, were a bit later, but while we were there, but this is over a period of the eight years we were there. They bought the house, I said to Tatiana, that house does not look like you, the house on the neighboring land, it was a Tudor, it looked like it belonged in Bronxville, and she just said [Lois imitating Russian accent] "I feex it."

I knew Tatiana, she would 'feex' it, and she did. Down came all the brown, this that and Tudor, and out went walls and up went glass, and white, and everything was white and glass, and all the trees came down, so then eventually the sculptures went up. But that happened over a period of time while we were there. It was a wonderful period. It was wonderful for the children because there, -you didn't run out in the streets and play the way I had growing up, or the way Herb had a child, and they had each

other to play with. And the Greys were very dear friends. So that was a very nice arrangement. But by the time the children were older, and house was pretty small, we decided to build a house. We also carpoled. We started it with nursery school at St. Johns and went from there to Rumsey. And carpoled all the way. We were just, for those years, we were one big family. And that was very nice for all of us.

MH: Now, they was a period where you were doing typing for authors?

LA: That came later, what I started with, when the children were going to Rumsey, I was teaching piano. I had taken piano, and music theory, and voice all my life, from the time I was four. I was teaching piano- Rumsey had lost their music teacher, and they asked if I would come and play the piano, and I did. I came and did that for them, and they said, well, would you consider teaching music, and I said I would consider it if you would send me back to school. Because I knew that they had a program, through the parents, that would pay for schooling and we still had our studio in New York, this is before we built the house, and so I went down for the summer. My children talk about it now, how I deserted them, how I left them. I left them with a very nice young lady, I don't know if anyone remembers the Aurvoiris. But Chrissy and Barbara Aurvoiri, Chrissy was the older one, they have since all moved to Florida, but they lived in Woodville. Chrissy had been a babysitter, she came and took care of them during the day, the children had chores to do, and Chrissy was a very good caregiver. I came home on Friday nights and went back on the train on Sunday night, when there was a train out of New Milford. It was great fun I went to Dal Croze in New York, mainly to study *teaching* music, and there were three, well known at that time, there was Orf, there was Dal Croze, and Cordie that had been internationally known figures, of teaching music to children, to cultures. And I chose the Dal Croze school and came back and taught at Rumsey. I did that for 6 years, and I had a music camp here and then we built our house, and I had a little music camp, which, Marylyn, you know about.

MH: Yes, our son Chris came to your music camp.

LA: I had that here from the moment we built our house. I had that every summer, but when I stopped teaching at Rumsey, I decided I had done all I could do, Kathy was at Kent School, Bill was in his last year at Rumsey, and one of the reasons for being there at Rumsey was so I could be there for the kids. And they and their friends spent a lot of time in my music room. And it was a wonderful time to be there and teaching. But by the time Bill was in the 9th grade, I decided he didn't need his mother hanging out there with his friends anymore, and I had gone as far as I could go, and I was advising them to get a teacher, and I said look to somebody from the Hart School. And so I stopped, and it was Arthur Miller, we had met them because they had children, and their Rebecca went to Rumsey, she was in my son's class, and they were part of this music camp too, Rebecca was. Well, he said to me, what are you going to do? If you stop teaching music, what are you going to do? I said I may not *do* anything. I don't know what I'm going to do. But I thought about it for a while and I decided what I'm going to do, since I know all of these famous authors, is I'm, -I'm a very good typist, I had done all of our office work, and I had taken secretarial work. I was a good typist, my piano playing kind of went along with that, and I decided what I'm going to do is type manuscripts. I thought it would be fun to do it for these people, and I sent notes out to the authors that I knew, and to Bill Styron, and to Arthur Miller, and to Francine and to Alex, and saying to all these people I was going into the business of typing up manuscripts. And I was sure that they had someone who did it on a regular basis, but if they needed somebody at some time that I would be glad to do it. So that's how I ended up, and I typed for Claire Bloom, and I typed for

Philip Roth, and I typed for Bill Styron, and Eric Sloane, and a lot people in the area, and it was great fun, because I was a good enough typist, that I could read, and enjoy reading at the same time my fingers were typing these manuscripts. I was a good speller, I had been a good speller all of my life, I could pick up mis-spellings and whatever, and it worked out very nicely.

MH: And you also typed my master's paper.

[laughter]

MH: I didn't realize I was in such good company!

[more laughter]

LA: [laughing] I didn't ask for credentials when you came to me.

MH: Nor did I! Tell us what you remember about-

LA: Oh! oh, no, I have one other story that goes with that. Was Claire called me one time,

MH: Claire Bloom

LA: Yes, and she said, Philip is in London, and I have to work on this part that I'm doing, -now, is it a Stravinsky...? A Soldier's Life? There is some musical thing, where there is dialog, is it 'A Soldier's Life'

LH: Yes.

LA: And he usually goes over this with me, and he's away, would you do that? And I'll pay you the same hourly rate that I pay you for typing. I said, Sure, I would have done it for free, it sounded like fun. So of course I put on all of my famous acting skills, just like my famous modeling skills, and I would read to her the part to come in and say her thing, and I was simply smashing, I wasn't invited to perform, so anyhow, at the end of it all this, after a couple of hours that we put in, she owed me something like \$35 dollars I think, and she gave me a check, and the interesting thing about all this, is she put "for dramatic coaching" in the memo, signed 'Claire Bloom', to this day I can't believe I cashed that check!

[Laughter]

LA: Anyway, that was one of my more famous moments of fame. My modeling career, and my dramatic coaching career.

MH: Ok, let's move on, what do you remember about Eric Sloane?

LA: What do I remember about Eric, well there are stories I remember, I thought about this Marylyn, that I'm not going to repeat! Ha! Ha! Ha!

MH: I won't tell anybody!

LA: Well, seeing as this is recorded, I was, back when we were on Melius Rd, and Eric lived in what became the Sloane house, later became the Bornstein's home, very good friend of ours, I was very good friends with Ruth, his wife, his 8th or 9th, I don't remember.

MH: Ruth Sloane

LA: Ruth Sloane, yes, and she was just a delightful, wonderful person, and then that fell apart, and I guess I really don't want to talk about that, they divorced, and I felt very sad for Ruth, it seemed to be Eric's way that he did not last forever with any one wife. He was such a dynamic person, I didn't know how anyone wife stood him for that long of a time. He was an incredible person. Herb's first encounter with him was walking into the Warren store back in the early days, and Eric was coming out and they somehow introduced each other, and he knew Herb's name, and he said, I'm going to tear down a barn, do you want to come and help me? You can have half the wood for frames. Herb, who wasn't really making his own frames at that point said, well thanks? But um, blah blah blah blah.... But he was just a dynamo, and I'd prefer not to tell any negative stories about Eric. I did do a lot of typing for him, later, after he moved over here to what is it?

LH: Carter

LA: Carter Road, yes, and actually, Kathy baby-sat for Mimi's grandsons, Cha-cha's boys, for a summer.

MH: That was his next wife?

LA: Mimi was his next and last wife.

MH: Ah, ok.

LA: And they bought a house, or they built a house out in, not Albuquerque, but um

MH: Taos?

LA: Taos, and Eric complained day and night about Mimi and the house and the expenses of the house, and the staff, and Mimi's dog, and somebody finally said to him, look, you've divorced all these other people, why don't you divorce Mimi? Well, he said, she makes a grand presentation. So, I guess, near the end, she was out there most of the time, and he was in Warren. But she was coming for the summer, and Cha-cha was coming for the summer-

MH: Cha-cha was her daughter?

LA: Cha-cha was Mimi's daughter by a previous marriage. -With the two boys, and Mimi was still out in Taos, and Eric got in touch with my daughter and said, Cha-cha was coming with these two boys, and would Kathy please come 7 days a week from 9-5 or 9-9 or whatever it was, to take care of these boys, and he would pay her well to do that. Kathy said, yes, that would be just fine for the summer, she was looking for a job, it was before she was 16, because I think at that point, she was being a lifeguard at the beach. So, she must have been, 14-13 or so. Well, when Mimi got here from Taos, and heard what Eric had done, she immediately called Kathy and said we don't need anything like that, Cha-cha *wants* to spend time with her boys, and we want to have time with the boys, and it will be just fine if you could come, I don't know, 4-5 days a week, and it was much shorter hours. So, this wonderful job that Kathy saw herself earning thousands of dollars, over the summer, suddenly became much smaller when Mimi got there, and informed Eric and everybody that the boys didn't need full time care.

MH: Do you have any recollections of the Warren store, when it was there?

LA: Oh many! My very first one was when we first moved up here, I had Kathy who was a year old, and when we were up here for the first summer, and the store was the Col's, Mary and Luke Col's store, and I would call up, and of course I was used to Manhattan, I would call the local man and I would order some

groceries. So, I called the Warren Store, and I needed such and such, and Herb was away part of the time, he would be traveling to West Point and other things that he had to do, and I would call and say I needed such and such, and they would say fine and 5-6 o'clock these groceries would arrive, and I had a charge there and I would pay them at the end of the month. I thought this just worked out really fine, I didn't have to worry about a babysitter or taking my baby to the store, which was in walking distance. So, one day, I told somebody about the wonderful delivery service, and talked to one of the Cols, it may have been Sonny, their son, and he said 'Lois, there was no delivery service', I was bringing them up to you after work, because it was on my way!' So that's how I learned there was no delivery service. Another thing that I found out early on about Warren, was that there was no diaper service either, but what were you supposed to do with your diapers, [Lois giggling] and they informed me that one washes them and hangs them up to dry. Of course, I didn't have anything like a washer or dryer to begin with, of course we eventually got a washer and I'd hang them up to dry on the line. Of course, that's how I knew we were really living in the woods, at the back end of the world. No diaper service, no delivery service from the grocery store. [laughter] So those are my first impressions of Warren. The Cols were lovely people, and it was wonderful to have the store that close, then store was taken over by Warren and Arlene, Warren Chappuis married Arlene who was the Col's daughter. They took over the store, and the main thing that I remember about Arlene and Warren is that they had the house that Maier's- that was their house, Warren and Arlene Chappuis lived there, and when Kathy was a baby, and when we were in the tent still, coming up in the tent, and she was a baby, and we were building the studio, well, I had left her in a, not a rental car, but a second hand car that we had bought, *just* bought, and I had left her in the back in a port-a-crib, sleeping, and when I came back to the car, she had managed to open an ashtray that I didn't know was there. And there was brown tobacco dripping down her mouth, and there were all these dead butts from whoever, I don't know, in her crib. And of course, I in a panic, called Arlene Chappuis, because she had a little boy the same age as Kathy. We had put them in the playpen together a couple of times, and she gave me the name of George -oh, it's terrible, I can't remember the name, the pediatrician up in Sharon- Haydoc!

MH: [simultaneously] Haydoc!

LA: Yes, Haydoc, and I was in this panic, he wasn't that panicky at all, she probably didn't get that much in her mouth, even though it looks like a big mess, but I remember that. And then Arlene, I would go over and visit with her, and we would put the two babies in the crib together, then later they actually went to the Warren School, to the kindergarten together. Because the children both went to Warren before they went to Rumsey, they went for a year up to the kindergarten, but then Warren and Arlene bought what became Superior Foods, it may have even been Superior Food before they bought it, in Litchfield. On the Green, and they, I don't know if they had the two stores for a while, or if they gave the store then to Sonny Col, and his bride, I think her name was Caroline, I'm not sure. But the main thing that I remember about her, is she wanted to be the perfect housewife, and I remember all of talking to her very seriously one day, when she said she vacuumed the house every day. The first thing she did was vacuum the house. We all informed her that wasn't necessary. They were in the house, that the Sietz later bought.

MH: just around the corner from the store, yes?

LA: Yes, and that famous story about the fire, may have been that house, or the store, I'm not sure, but someone called in to the Fire Department and was all excited, screaming 'the roof is on fire' and they

are saying 'just be calm, just be calm, tell us about it', and they said, 'No! Not my roof, Your roof!!' And I don't remember if it was Sonny and Caroline's or the store, but at that point, whoever was taking the phone call lost it totally and began to scream for the Fire Department, and that was the story, but whatever, that was after we were here, and that was, I believe that is when Sonny and his wife were living in that house. So, then they had the store, at some point, there were two different butchers, one was Jim Rosa, he was a butcher there for a while, and I don't remember if he was the butcher with Sonny and Caroline or if that was later, with Abe and uh....

MH: I know that he was there with Abe

LA: He was there with Abe? When he actually came, but Jim, the fun part was, when Jim and his wife were, and I can't remember her name now, these names just escape me, but, this was a lot of years ago, this was half of a century, And we came here, and we were going to register as independents, and somebody said to us, a clerk or someone, said if you do that, you won't be able to vote in any of the primaries, so we decided at that point we would register as Democrats, and we found out, the Democratic Party, I think, was less than twelve of us. Because we would have a committee meeting, and then we would have a meeting, and then we would have a caucus, and we were all the same number of people. Somewhere between six and twelve of us, and Jim and his wife were two people, and we were two people that were there, and the other thing that I remember was that when they were going to have a Democratic Primary, I was the one who was staunchly in favor of Jimmy Carter, never knowing that they would one day be friends of ours, but I was the only person in the Democratic Party who was supporting Jimmy Carter. and so, I had my own personal caucus, until Jim came over and said he would caucus with me to get Jimmy Carter on the Primary ballot. He would not have been on the Primary ballot in the town of Warren without me. So, I have reminded him of that many many times, how important that was to his election that he made the primary ballot in the town of Warren-

MH: I'm so glad you did!

LH: I voted for him!

LA: You wouldn't have been able to if I hadn't gotten his name on the primary ballot! So, anyhow, that was some early stories with that. So, Jim Rosa, and then it was Brad Johnson.

MH: For a while yes

LA: And I don't remember a whole lot of stories about their butchering, other than they were and they did and whatever....

MH: Was the gas station working then?

LA: The gas station was across the street, what was his name-

MH: Massey,

LA: Massey, Les Massey, they were delightful people, she was such a dear, he had the gas station, I think it was Esso? And then Mobil.

LH: There is a photo with an Esso sign

LA: oh, ok, and then I think it became the Mobil. Nothing succeeded down there. Well, the store succeeded in those days, because people weren't running out to the major markets. There was a Grand Union in New Milford, but there was no Stop n Shop, or any of those big stores. Even in Litchfield, it was Superior Foods on the green that Warren and Arlene had bought, there weren't... people were buying locally, and very grateful to have the store in town, that they didn't have to go out to cities anywhere. And getting together at the Warren Store, and there were always people in there, in the morning, getting coffee, and talking and I seem to remember there were stools, like bar stools, and a coffee machine

MH: Well, we heard Eric Sloane used to hang out there, and people would come to meet him, and so forth

[Lois Abrams agreeing]

MH: Well, I've exhausted most of my questions, I just wondered to ask if there was anything you'd like to add to anything that we talked about?

LA: I'd like to mention a few of the people in town that I feel were really important, I know Minor Ohmen did some work for us, he had that little house on the corner of Reed Rd, and 341, and I believe he was a plumber, I'm not sure, but I know that there were people in town, that we really trusted. Bob Feller, he was a carpenter.

MH: His wife was the librarian, wasn't she?

LA: I don't know, I don't remember her, but I remember him. The other thing was when Herb went to build the studio, we had been staying at the Riverview Motel on Route 7., a couple of times when we came up here in the beginning. And when Herb was talking about building a studio we were staying there, and we went to the Bulls Bridge Inn one night to eat, and we ran into some people, and we ended up having drinks with several people, and he turned out to be an architect that had worked on that -I've looked for his name since, I've totally forgotten, but he lived in Gaylordsville, he was an architect that worked on the Empire State Building and we were talking, and Herb was telling him about building the studio, and he started doing drawings and helping Herb to design something that would be the way he wanted it. And he said come see me tomorrow and told us where he lived. Well, we called, I guess, the next day, and got his wife and then she said come over. When we got there, we realized that maybe he had had a little more to drink after that, or maybe before that, and it seemed that he didn't possibly have a clue who we were.

[Laughter]

But nobody was saying that, and we went into another description of what Herb was doing, but that's part of how Herb was able to do the drawings and design his studio, was he did have the help of this wonderful man, whose name I've forgotten, who when he found himself with this young couple that seemed to feel that he had offered to do drawings, or help with ideas to building the studio. So that's sort of the beginning about how our studio got built. They were absolutely charming, I think she brought us tea or coffee, but how much he remembered about the night before, we never knew, and we never questioned. It's just sort of a fun story about the beginnings of Herb's studio. Then the next thing that happened was we were looking for a carpenter, and we wanted it built now so we could stay here, and Herb could work here, but nobody was available, and everybody said Oh Bob Feller, you have to get Bob Feller. Warren Chappuis came up to us and said, well I could recommend my father, but if anything

goes wrong, I never said this to you. So Max Chappuis, and Harley Strong, both of whom had a hearing problem, came and built the studio with Herb's plans.

LH: Harley, I believe, had on the side of his truck "House Doctor" I think, didn't he?

LA: I don't know, I don't know, I don't remember that the main things that I remember the few times I came and watched them it was so terrifying, and I remember they had this big beam or something, and Max yelled, and they were trying to level it, and he yelled, "Harley! Down on your end!" And Harley answered back "Up a bit?" and Max said "Yes! And nail it" and I remember hearing that, that was not told to me! And I came home and tried to forget the whole thing. That winter the snow, -the roof sagged, the weight of the snow. We called Bob Feller, he came, and he righted many of the wrongs, some of them never have been righted, and to this day, there is not a standing 2x4 that is on foot? On center? Or whatever it supposed to be. It is anyone's guess how wide apart each of them are. there is nothing constant about it. We have 16 inches, and 14 inches and 13 and 12 and whatever. But that wasn't really a problem, the problem really was the roof, and Bob Feller came and did a wonderful job with that, and to this day the building is quite sound thanks to Bob Feller. I'm trying to think of any other people in town who were important, I did run for Clerk, Town Clerk, at one point, and went into Hartford and took all the exams and did everything I was supposed to do. We all knew at the time I was doing this as a favor for the Democratic Party, because we were still about 12 people, as opposed to the rest of the town, and there was no way, I think it was the first time that Pricilla Coords ran. I ran as opposed to her, we may even have gone to these classes together, we both kind of chuckled about it. And I said, well if you ever need me to fill in for you, I'll be glad to be down there! I can't really think of any....

MH: Well, if you think of any other stories we can always come back.

LA: Well, I can think of other stories, but I don't like to tell gossipy stories, I let them stay in the realm of gossip