INTERVIEW WITH SHIRLEY CSURI
JUNE 19, 2003

Q. This is the supplemental deposition of Lee Csuri, recorded at Image Screen Studios on Thursday, June 19, 2003. I’m Robert Butche, Principal Historian for the Csuri Research Project. And I’m accompanied in this session by Lee Csuri. Good morning, Lee.

A. Good morning. How are you?

Q. Are you chipper this morning?

A. Fairly bushy-tailed.

Q. And I’m also sitting here with Chuck Csuri, of whom we have heard so much in this project. Good morning, Chuck.

A. Good morning.

Q. I want to start out this by identifying you and who you are and how you got involved in this project. I want to know when and where you were born, who your parents were.

A. Well that’s going to be a difficult question because I don’t know who my parents were. I was born June 1.

Q. That’s the most interesting answer we’ve ever had.

A. 1927. I can tell you who my adopted parents were. I was put in an orphans home when I was a baby and I was adopted when I was 2 ½ by Caroline and Leo Eckles.

Q. That’s Ecles?
A. Echols. And I was adopted from an orphans’ home near Troy, Alabama.

Q. Now where is Troy? Is that the southern part of the state?

A. Troy is I’d say about 100 miles from the Florida line. So it’s very south. If you were going the Beeline Highway, which cut all the way through the south, it would be about, it’s exactly 150 miles from Birmingham going south.

Q. So this beautiful southern brogue I’ve heard in your voice all of these years is genuine.

A. Well, I did work on it when I came to Ohio, but I couldn’t quite get it all out. But I used to stand in front of the mirror and practice saying “r’s” and speeding up my words. Because when I first came here I had a fairly important job in politics and I was 19 years old and a blond, and every time I opened my mouth some guy would say, “You don’t mean it, honey child.” So I worked at it. Let’s put it that way.

Q. Where did you go to school in those early years?

A. I graduated from high school in Sanford, Florida. I lived a good part of my life in Florida. I left Alabama when I was in the fifth grade. And then I went to John B. Stusson University for the first year.

Q. And where is that?

A. That’s in Deland, Florida. And it’s maybe 13 or 14 miles from Daytona Beach. And most people know where that is because they go and party there. And then I got married when I was just barely 18 years old.

Q. You were living in Deland at the time?
A. No, I was living in Sanford. We got married between school terms. I married a fly-
er, an Ensign in the Navy.

Q. And who was this charming guy?

A. It’s not him.

Q. Well, we knew that.

A. Okay. His name was Theodore Myer, and he was from Cleveland, Ohio, the east side of Cleveland.

Q. Myer?

A. Meyer.

Q. Theodore Meyer from Cleveland.

A. Right.

Q. And he was a Navy flyer when you met him?

A. Navy flyer and when the war was over, that was in 1945, he started at Ohio State in law school. So I wound up in Columbus, Ohio. And he continued to fly on reserve four hours a month. And on one of his missions, high altitude missions, his oxygen line went out and he came down. So I was widowed before I was 21.

Q. What year were you widowed?

A. 1948.

Q. And you had already come to Columbus as a married woman. And what had you done during those years that he was in law school?

A. Well, the war was almost over when I married him. So we had lived in Norfolk, Virginia. And then he was discharged we came here. And he entered school and I had, of course being 19 years old by then, I hadn’t had a job, a serious job
except summer jobs. So I had never met but one Republican when I was growing up in the south, and he was called Crazy Old Joe King. And so I thought it would be fun, since I had heard that Ohio was a pivotal state, and that the Republicans were very powerful here, to go find out what they were all about. So I marched myself into Republican headquarters and I said, “I want a job, please.” And everybody laughed. And I was given a job stuffing envelopes and one evening shortly after I got there, the Governor, who was a candidate for Governor, Thomas B. Herbert, he came limping out of his office because he had a bad leg from being a flyer. And he said, “Is there anyone, if I gave them a stack of letters and said yes, no, bullshit, whatever, could write me a bunch of letters?” And I said, “I could, sir.”

Q. What do you know, you spoke English.

A. And everybody looked at me like I was crazy and I just ignored them, and I stayed late that night and I wrote all of these letters and had them on his desk when he got there the next day. And when he came out he said, “You’re now executive secretary to my campaign manager,” whose name was Dale Donovan. And I thought that if I survived the looks in the room, that I might be able to work. And that’s how I got involved in doing a political job in Columbus, Ohio.

Q. Were you looking for kindred spirit conservatives at the time, or were you trying to find out what those funny Republicans were doing?

A. Exactly. That’s exactly. Because everybody in my family had been a Democrat. Of course, in the south everybody was a Democrat in those days.

Q. Yes, although it was conservative politics.
Absolutely. Whatever, whatever you could call it. Maybe conservative is the wrong word. Incestuous maybe. At any rate, the guy that hired me, came in to find that I had been hired, we got along terrifically. And he was moved when Tom won the election, Dale was put in as Director of Commerce, which was the plum job in the administration. So I had a very liberal education in banking and building and loans, and all of those good things that were under commerce. And then he would switch to the Bureau of Unemployment Compensation. So I went out there and we reorganized that, and that was a good experience. And then we went to Department of Liquor Control. But I could spend about three years telling you what I went through in the Department of Liquor Control. But that was very interesting. We were dealing one minute with a delegation from the church and the nuns, and the next minute we were dealing with a delegation of gangsters from Cleveland. It was fun.

This was a very colorful period for you. Here you are, in Columbus, Ohio. Your husband has been a student at Ohio State. By the time you’re 20, you’re widowed. You’d been married and lived in several cities. And you’ve gone to the opposition political party to see what they were doing. And you’d become an effective operative for them, mainly because you could read and write and use the language.

Right. Because I could read and write.

Was any of it because you were a cute little blond?

You know, that’s difficult to say.

These were all men, weren’t they, Lee?
A. Well, actually one of my best friends was the executive secretary to the governor, who was a very powerful lady. And there were some very powerful warhorse Republican ladies that I became friends with. But yes, mostly it was men.

Q. Were you working at the state when your husband was killed?

A. Yes, and he had become friends with Tom Herbert, because he was an ex-flyer and Ted was very charming. And so, when I was widowed, they were extremely nice to me, everybody. And in fact, it was just about time for the convention, and it was in Philadelphia. And I was invited to go the convention and handle all the junior people’s activities while we were there. So I stayed in a hotel there with the Warren family and with the Taft family.

Q. This was the 1948 Republican convention in Philadelphia.

A. Right, looks great for ’48. And Harry S. Truman was running. And I will continue this by giving you the punch line. This was the first year that I was allowed to vote. So I registered to vote and I had spent a great deal of time with Thomas Dewey while we were in Philadelphia and did not like him at all. I thought he was a very, very uptight, controlling man.

Q. Well the other candidate with him was John Bricker.

A. Absolutely. And I was not a fan of his either, I’m sorry. I liked Senator Taft but I didn’t think much of Mr. Bricker. At any rate, to make a long story short, when I got in the voting booth, I was in charge of some of the tallying at Republican headquarters that night. And when I got in the voting booth I voted for Harry S. Truman. And then I proceeded to count Republican votes, with feeling like I personally and solely had defeated the Republican party.
Q. The laugh we’re getting out of your husband suggests this is pretty much normal for his thinking wife.

A. Right. But I have to say that I met an awful lot of nice Republicans and had a good relationship with a lot of them. But Dewey was not one of them.

Q. But eventually you decided to get out of politics and state business and come back to the University yourself.

A. Right.

Q. Had you gone to a university before Ohio State?

A. Well, I wen to Stusson University, which is a theological place.

Q. Did you know you wanted to be an artist then?

A. Oh, I’d always wanted to be an artist, but I had been forbidden by my mother to do art. And I used to have to sneak around to do art and read. Reading was an addiction with me, because I was an only child. And would have been lonely if it hadn’t been for books. But books became my whole world and I wasn’t lonely at all. But she was determined that I should be trying to do something, because my father had gotten sick when I was seven years old and went into the hospital, and then died when I was 16. So, she had been raised as a Southern Belle, with all the wonderful arts, painting.

Q. You’re speaking of your adopted mother.

A. Adopted father and adopted mother. I didn’t know my real family. So she wanted me to be trying to earn my own living because here she was a young woman who was having to earn a living. So, I was required to take things that
would prepare me, like secretarial work which I hated. But that’s what paid me when I got up here.

Q. Well I see a strong parallel here in your experience and Chuck’s, with his family, his distance from his father and his father’s sense of insecurity in wanting Chuck and the other brothers to learn to be machinists, so they would have something to fall back on.

A. But you know that was fairly common in that time.

Q. Your adoptive parents weren’t very supportive of your artistic …

A. Well don’t you think that was symptomatic of the times though, coming out of the 30’s and the depression and all. So everybody was very concerned about making a living. I understood that. I never held it against my mother. But the minute I was widowed and could make a decision for myself, I quit what I was doing and enrolled at Ohio State.

Q. You were already in Columbus. You were well connected at the statehouse, to say the least.

A. Right.

Q. And you were admitted in what year?

A. This is always a problem. Let’s see, 1948 I went in, 1949.

Q. So the year after your husband was killed?

A. Right.

Q. In 1949 you registered as a student here at The Ohio State University and you were going to take courses in what was then the College of Education?

A. Right.
Q. Which was the arts area of this University. And you were interested generally in the physical arts, as you were not into music or dance, as I recall.

A. Dance was a love but that’s another subject.

Q. Okay. Did you feel at the time that ultimately you would be a sculptor or were you thinking of becoming a painter at the time you started your art career here at Ohio State.

A. Well I started as a painter. That was my first love. I really didn’t have any long range view. I started in just to take basic courses in art because I hadn’t had any training at all. And Chuck was my first teacher. And so it got complicated very fast. Got mixed up, let’s put it that way.

Q. Did you find that men were attracted to you in that period? Was it easy for you to meet them?

A. Yes. I never had a problem with boyfriends. That was no big deal.

Q. So by the time you enrolled at Ohio State you were able to make up your own mind about relationships? Losing your husband has not destabilized you, and you were able to understand how people worked together and what kind of person would make a good mate. Did you find such a person at Ohio State when you came here?

A. By luck, I did. Yes.

Q. Was it early in that first year?

A. Right at the get go. The first class. He was my teacher. And I really wasn’t prepared.

Q. He was a football. You weren’t really interested in that kind of guy, were you?
A. No, in fact that’s one of the stories that when I was in the liquor department I once
fired the entire first team. I did it. I just didn’t want to go into that, because as I
say, I’d had a weird life. But at any rate, I sent for a messenger. Their
scholarship was that they were supposed to be messengers, and I sent for one
downstairs and nobody came up. And so I got out of my room and went
marching down there and found them all pitching pennies or quarters in a line and
said, “You’re all fired, get out of here.” And I got back to my office. My boss
was out of town; he was doing some sort of campaign stuff.

Q. You didn’t know the fix was in for these guys? That they were allowed to sleep
on the job or study?

A. I did not know any of this. I was totally stupid. And before I got back to the
office, the hotline was ringing in his office, and it was the direct line to the
Governor’s office. And Tom Herbert said, “Lee, what the hell are you doing?”
And I said, “What have I done now?” And he said, “You just fired the whole
goddamn football team.” And I said, “Oh, is that who they were? I wondered
why they were all so damn big. I didn’t even know they were a football team.”
So by that afternoon I had phone calls from Jake Taylor, who was the business
manager for Ohio State University, who was on some sort of retreat with the
President on some island, somewhere out near Cleveland. Ernie Godfrey had
come to see me personally. And the President of the University had called me.
And I got stubborn after Tom had read the riot act to me. I said, “Okay, if you
don’t back me on this I’m out of here. To heck with this. They weren’t working
and I didn’t know that they were supposed to not work. Tell them up at Ohio
State to send the second team or basketball players or somebody, because this is obviously not working out.” And bless Tom’s heart, he backed me up. He called up there and said, “Send some others.”

Q. This is unheard of.
A. Absolutely unheard of. I couldn’t believe it. And so by the time I got to Ohio State I hoped that nobody would know who I was because I was not in very good standing with them.

Q. Did you know that this art teacher who liked to tap you on the head with a ruler was a former football player?
A. That’s another story too, because he walked in the room and I had been in the restroom before I went to class and all the girls were in there just giggling and gooing and I said, “What’s going on?” And they said, “Do you know who our teacher is?” And I said, “No, who is it?” They said, “He’s the All American football player.” And I went, “Duhhhhh.” That was my reaction, that I should get an All American football teacher.

Q. I just fired those guys.
A. Exactly. So then when he walked in the room, I thought, “This man can’t possibly say anything intelligent. He’s too gorgeous. To top it off he’s a dumb football player.” But then he opened his mouth and I have to say that he was one of the most wonderful teachers I’ve ever seen. He’s very inspirational, aside from being gorgeous. So that wasn’t a problem.

Q. Well, he had the big smile and the winning eyes. He’s tall.
A. He just had such a passion for what he was doing and for art. He was so enthusiastic that you’d have to be brain dead not to pick it up.

Q. Lee, what happened to this relationship after you met this gorgeous guy?

A. Well, we scared each other to death, because I have to say and I won’t dwell on this, that neither one of us had had a first marriage that was good. And I was going through a lot of difficulties, feeling guilty because death was the solution for me. And my good old Southern Baptist training was giving me all kinds of guilt complexes. But I was handling it. So I wasn’t ready for this at all. I mean, I didn’t want men in my life; I wanted to maybe be a nun for a while or whatever, you know. Just let me have a simple life and let me dedicate it and devote it to art. He was coming off of a bad marriage and didn’t want any woman in his life. So, we both were kind of resistant to this. And yet, when I went in I never had any real personal contact with him during the first part of the quarter, but then he turned out to be my advisor. And when I went in to figure out my schedule …

Q. Was that by accident, Chuck?

A. I don’t remember.

A. I don’t remember either. That may have been the policy at the time.

A. Yeah, I have no way of knowing. But he shared an office with Roy Lichtenstein, __________, and Bob King. And I went in to figure out my schedule and he gave me his seat. And so I was sitting down here and he sat on the desk. And he looked at my card and he read my name off and said, “Mrs.” And I said, “I’m a widow, sir.” And everybody in the room started laughing because he had been tapping me on the head with a yardstick and he didn’t know it and I didn’t know
it. So when I came out with, “I’m a widow, sir,” I thought Roy was going to fall off his chair laughing. And then we both got terribly embarrassed. So that’s the way it went. And you weren’t allowed to date students then. So, we couldn’t openly date. We walked across campus together to have a cup of coffee and were terrified that the morale police were going to come and get us.

Q. And how long later was it when you were married?
A. A year.

Q. So you were married in ’49?
A. Yes, ’49. Just before ’50, December ’49.

Q. And it’s a relationship that lasts to this day, which is 54 years later.
A. Yeah, it’s been a world class relationship. I know that’s not popular now, but it’s a great relationship.

Q. Well, Lee, let’s go on now and look at your career as an artist. You studied at Ohio State. Did you finish? Did you take a degree? What were your interests? How did you start out?
A. Well, I got a BFA.

Q. That’s a Bachelor of Fine Arts.
A. And I graduated summa cum laude.

Q. About when? ’52?
A. No, in ’50. I did the whole thing in two years because we didn’t have money. So I was taking 28 credit hours every quarter. And that’s not easy when you have three hour labs. But we did it. One of those years I wasn’t with him; one of them I was. It was an exciting time, hard work.
Q. Who did you study under?
A. I had some classes with Sid Shafitch.
Q. In what subject area?
A. In lithography.
Q. And that’s Chafetz.
A. You know who he is, don’t you?
Q. No.
A. No, okay. There was a course called materials and then you studied the disciplines that weren’t sculptural or painting, like silk screen, lithography, etching, things like that. I took that from him. And I had Bob King for painting and he was a very interesting teacher too. And very enthusiastic. He and Chuck were very good friends. He and Chuck were both disciples in a way of Hoyt Sherman, as Roy Lichenstein was. So I also had Stan Tartowich. I had Paul Bogatay for a ceramics teacher. I’m trying to remember. I had a guy from Indiana who was on leave here. He was a visiting professor. I never had Professor Fry. I had a woman by the name of Chalkis and one by the name of Abrams.
Q. Would that have been Jane Truxess?
A. Yeah, Jane Truxess.
Q. And what did you study with Jane?
A. I had a design class with her. It’s hard for me to remember all of them because you studied with a different one every quarter. Bob Cattrell and then I had a lot of history people. Professor Fanning, Ralph Fanning. He was, as I said, I have a
large muscle right here from taking his course. He was a real gentleman of the old school who believed that you ought to memorize a lot of things.

Q. Did you take courses elsewhere in the College of Education? Psychology or dance or any other areas?
A. I did a lot of English and Geology and Philosophy. I took two or three courses in Philosophy and one in aesthetics with Alezao Devass. It was a very rounded education.

Q. Did you take any courses under Hoyt Sherman?
A. No, although we were friends and we did a lot of talking.

Q. How about Littlefield?
A. No, I didn’t take it with Littlefield, although again, I was friends with all of them. And Jimmy Grimes. I didn’t have a course with Roy either. But we saw each other almost every day and we had constant dialogue about art going on. So you might say that they were all teachers in a way.

Q. Lee, did you do only the BFA degree here at Ohio State?
A. Yes, I applied for a scholarship but it was against the rule for a faculty wife to get a scholarship because it implied that they didn’t pay them enough, which was true. They didn’t. But I was top runner for a Lazarus scholarship and they gave it to somebody with a point hour about three points below mine. So I wasn’t able to go on, to get a Masters.

Q. And where did you go with your art after you graduated from Ohio State? You had a lot of activities. You raised a family. You had a husband, you had other things in your life. But you’ve been an artist, have you not?
A. I was fairly productive all the way through. And I’ve been in regional shows and I’ve had a New York show. Shows around Columbus. We would show anywhere we could – restaurants, art leagues. So I tried to keep my hand as much as I could. But there wasn’t a great deal of opportunity for showing in those days.

Q. Well I know you’ve done some painting, because I think I saw one of your paintings at Paul Klohr’s residence.

A. Yes, you did.

Q. And there are probably others around town.

A. Oh yes.

Q. But your real interest was in sculpting.

A. Not until late in the game. I was a painter for many, many years, and then suddenly I just got very interested in three dimensional, probably because I had gotten very active in dance. And I did a lot of work with the dance department and studied with both ballet and modern. So that went on for many, many years. And did choreography with some of the people at Ohio State. And so I was doing both painting and choreographing. But I found I couldn’t do both. There was only so much creative energy and if you used it in one area, you didn’t have it in the other. So I finally had to just back off from that and say, “I’m going to be a painter or whatever.” And at that point, I think it was the dance that led me into interest in three dimensions. And that’s when I became a sculptor.

Q. Was choreography a deep interest?

A. Actually it was, and I was pretty good at it.
Q. The Department of Dance in the College of Education consisted of one person for many years.

A. Well, Helen Alkire, but Vicki was there almost from the get go. Yes, I worked with a lot of the teachers there that did group teaching after school hours and so forth. And then I actually enrolled in some classes at Ohio State. But I loved it, and I got a great sense of joy and exhilaration out of dance. It was very hard to give it up. In fact, I danced with an interracial group, the first one in Columbus. We did performances all over Columbus, and that was great fun.

Q. What was your level of production in painting over your career of finished pieces that you considered showable.

A. I have no idea. We’ve never counted. That’s the problem. If you don’t keep good records, and we’re both terrible at keeping them.

Q. But it’s more than a half dozen.

A. Oh yeah, into the hundreds, sure. But not like Van Gogh, who produced what? Nine hundred in about ten years. In less than ten years. Five years, I think it was. I wasn’t that productive, but on the other hand I had many, many things going on in my life. And nobody supported me to do that. I earned my keep by doing all of these other things, like cooking and cleaning and being a housewife. Every artist needs a wife, you know, including me.

Q. You’ve said that several times and it seems very appropriate to me, and it’s a shame you didn’t have one.

A. Well, I might have had a problem with two wives in the house! I’m also a control freak at certain levels.
Q. How much of your work remains in your control today? Paintings now.

A. I don’t have many of them left. I sold almost everything I did. I may have, maybe 10 or 15, that I still have. Maybe a little more. Thirty at the most.

Q. Were there particular favorites of yours?

A. They are a combination of favorites plus ones that just didn’t sell; either really big or didn’t appeal to people for their living room or whatever.

Q. You married an artist that was also a college professor, who was a producing artist who also painted. Was that constructive for you to be in that environment? Was it competitive? You’re not a shrinking violet. I can imagine you express your opinions very freely at home.

A. That’s interesting because both Chuck and I tend to be controlling people and yet right from the beginning I think the reason our marriage works is because we set out our own areas of control, and we didn’t try to control the other one in that particular venue. We’ve never been, I have never sensed that Chuck is competitive with me or vice versa. We’ve always been very supportive of each other. I’ve always been his biggest fan and he’s always been my biggest fan, and yet our work is very different. I think we’ve influenced each other. I think I particularly influenced Chuck in my interest in mythology, which I have been interested in for many, many years. A lot of my paintings from the beginning were mythological subjects. Rather whimsical depictions. And since he’s been back and working at painting, I think that my interests have interested him. But stylistically we’re so different. I never felt that we were in competition.

Q. Were you critical of his work?
A. Oh yes.
Q. Did you suggest ways that might be improved?
A. Yes. I mean, every once in a while I keep his feet on the ground, and he calls me and says, “What do you think?” And I say, “Technically it’s good but it doesn’t work.” I think that’s one reason Chuck has always stayed true to his art is because he’s always sought artistic criticism of his work. He hasn’t let just the techno people …
Q. So your sense is that he sees your criticism as being constructive, no matter how firmly you hold the views?
A. Well, I’m not unkind about it. I mean, I think he appreciates whatever insights I have and we sometimes disagree and we disagree and argue it out. He also is very critical of me in the same way but in a very constructive way. It took us a whole to work this out when we were first married. We used to paint in the same studio. And it was very, very difficult for him to let go of the teacher-student relationship.
Q. I’ll bet.
A. Yes, very, very difficult. And I’m being very conservative when I say that.
Q. But it was hard for you to give up the “I fire football players” attitude as well.
A. Absolutely. Absolutely. Well no, I think I gave that up quicker than he gave up the professor. I used to say to him that definitely when I was a student and even later, there’s a certain time when you are ready for criticism and you might invite it in if somebody’s nice enough to hang back in the bushes. So I did this to other teachers. I remember Bob Cattrell saying to me one day, I had barricaded myself
between paint boxes and had my easel and my painting turned away from him.
And he knocked on the box and said, “When am I allowed to see this?” And I
said, “Not today.” So you can imagine when we started painting in the same
studio, I knew when Chuck would start looking over at my paintings. One day, I
finally said, “If you open your mouth, it’s going to be terrible what’s going to
happen.” And he started laughing and I said, “I’m not ready. I’m not ready.”
And he started to say something. So I painted him in a very private part.

Q. Oh dear.
A. And that’s the last time he did that. It was very hot and we had no air conditioner.
So he was sitting there is his almost altogethers. So he understood that I felt very
strongly about this. So he learned.

Q. What art are you doing today? What interests you, Lee?
A. I’m doing a wooden sculpture that’s painted and it’s one of a kind. I don’t ever
repeat myself. Fairly good size pieces.

Q. What is fairly good size? Measured in many feet?
A. Well the last piece I did which is just about ready to go up at Inniswood Gardens
is about nine feet tall from base to top and pretty big. It’s in two pieces before it’s
put together. It took three people to move them.

Q. Is wood your favorite media?
A. Yes and why I don’t know, because I never took any courses in wood carving or
anything, but I just like the look and feel of it. I’ve been a big fan of wooden folk
art for years and years, and polychrome figures, and ships mastheads, and things
like that. They speak to me. So that’s what I took up when I started at a three
Clay didn’t feel right to me and I didn’t have the set-up for ceramics. It really takes a lot of equipment to be a serious sculptor in ceramics. So wooden was something that I could handle and between Chuck and me could layer this and get a big chunk of wood for me to work on.

Q. Is it true that when Chuck retired, you organized the show in Arlington, so he’d have to do something and couldn’t just sit around and watch you.

A. Actually, a year before he retired, I committed him to a show, because I knew that he would be a lost soul if he wasn’t doing something. He’s always been so committed to his job and his work, that I just couldn’t conceive of what he would do. He’s not a golfer. He’s not a reader. He reads technical things and that’s about it. So I said, “We’ll have a show in Upper Arlington.” And then this time kept getting closer and I said, “If you embarrass me we’re through after all these years.” And he laughed a lot but he got to work. Obviously I was kidding but he hasn’t looked back.

Q. As an independent artist can you form a view of the kind of work that he’s done since he’s retired?

A. It’s an incredible body of work. Absolutely incredible.

Q. Does it offend you that it’s digital and he’s not painting?

A. Oh not a bit. I remember when he first started with the computer work, everybody in fine arts kept saying, “But is it art? But is it art?” And one night at a party I just said …

Q. That was really just so much bullshit, wasn’t it? That wasn’t really even an intelligent question.
A. Of course. It was meaningless. From the cave man on, all these big murals on the wall, the first cave man that picked up a rock and made a painting on that, they said, “Well there goes the whole field right there. It’s the death of our …” It seems to me that’s happened every time any major new movement has come along. There have been naysayers who say, “Well that’s it.”

Q. I would like to rein in your thinking a little further here, because you experienced his traditional art period and studied under him as a traditional artist. And I’m asking you from your independent artist view, of his output since really 1991.

A. Right.

Q. And you’re telling me that it’s as good as he’s ever done?

A. Oh, absolutely, and certainly it has the added thing that it’s innovative. Nobody else ever did it before. That’s something.

Q. He’s got a thing about that, doesn’t he?

A. Yes.

Q. He insists on doing things that aren’t being done.

A. But you know it’s almost like it’s inside of him and he just doesn’t fight it. It’s not a conscious decision with him, I don’t think. I think it’s something he had to do. In that sense, I think of Chuck as being intellectual but he’s extremely intuitive too. And when the marriage of the two get together, which they have in his art, something magical happens. As I say, I think it’s the most important work that’s gone on in this country since the pop and ____ art movement. I just think they’re very slow to catch on. The art world, they are very threatened by something that’s this hard to do. And it’s extremely hard to do.
Q. Individually and as a couple you were very close to Roy Lichtenstein and his wife, Isabelle. And what you saw happen to the Lichtensteins after they left Ohio State when Roy did not get tenure, was that they went back to New York and they had a kind of success that Chuck would have liked to have had. What was the quality of Roy’s work during that period? What I’m asking you here was, did Chuck continue to grow as you’ve seen in this last twelve years? And did Roy continue to grow. I’m not comparing the quality of their work and their output, but whether or not as artists they matured similarly.

A. They both matured, there’s no question about that. Chuck did very innovative things, even when it was traditional art.

Q. Did you think that Roy’s pop art?

A. I thought it was very innovative. Well, I mean, it’s very clever work. It’s very clever work. Very decorative. I certainly understand that he deserved the reputation he has gotten. It’s organized. It does not have the kind of depth or complexity that I’m more interested in, but that’s just me. And I understand that there are people who really react to that.

Q. Was Isabelle an artist?

A. Isabelle was an interior decorator and had an incredible eye. She could put things together. So yes, in that sense she was an artist. She did very naïve child-like paintings, just because I think she was bored.

Q. By child-like, you mean stick figure sort of things?

A. A little above that. Our daughter did things that were more skillful when she was seven and eight than Isabelle did as a grown-up. But they were charming in that
sense. She was one of the most stylish woman I’ve ever seen. She could just walk in a room and wow you with just the way she looked, and the things she put together. Her house was exquisite. She had an extremely good eye.

Q. Lee, do you have a favorite piece, sculpture or painting or something, that you’ve done that you think directly represents the essence of you as an artist?

A. Not one. I have several that I think are really good.

Q. Would they be paintings or sculptures?

A. They would be sculptures. Fairly late work. I did a series about two years called, “You are what you eat.” I did two or three in that series that I think are really first rate. The lion and the vegan that Roy has, and a cat.

Q. The lion is the one that’s in your home that we videotaped.

A. Right.

Q. Absolutely gorgeous.

A. I think that’s a really nice one.

Q. That would be one of your top?

A. Yes, I tend to like the things that are slightly whimsical but have a great deal of complexity to them. And I think yes, that’s one of my favorites. I didn’t want to sell that one.

Q. Do you know other artists in your social set today that you think are doing good work? Would you identify them?

A. Oh yes, I don’t know so many artists that are producing work well enough to comment. I do have one friend who is a quilter. She does quilts, Deborah Anderson, that I think is a first rate artist. I had a show with her at the Upper
Arlington Community Arts Center. But I don’t really know that many people who are doing artwork right now well enough to comment on what their output is. There are a lot of artists that are well known that I like.

Q. Are there friends or people you worked with during your career who did interesting work, that you think is noteworthy, particularly if they were here at Ohio State.

A. I had a lot of admiration for Bob King’s work. I thought he was an excellent artist.

Q. He was a painter, wasn’t he?

A. He was a painter; did a lot of pastels and he was very good at that, and a lot of collages in his later years. And I think they’re very interesting paintings. He just died recently. I don’t know that he really pursued an exhibition career. For years he was a summer painter because of his teaching. And then when he retired, I think maybe the fire had gone out of wanting recognition or whatever. He didn’t pursue the exhibition game. But basically, we don’t know any producing artists right now.

A. (Chuck) So many of the people that were talented really never pursued a career, or gave up early in the game.

A. (Lee) And that quite often happens to University people. It’s something that you need to fight against. But it is hard to do dual careers and I understand that. That’s why it was probably the best thing that ever happened that Roy was.

Q. Are there other areas of your art output interests that you would like to discuss before we end this segment?
A. Not really. I really enjoyed producing the work, but what I do is extremely difficult physically. So my production is cut down because I can only work like about three hours a day because of arthritis and other things I have to do. I don’t have the energy. But I’m enjoying what I’m doing and I think it’s good work. I don’t think it’s on the level of Chuck’s in the sense of being any sort of breakthrough artwork. I think it’s good art. But it’s not what I would call great art. I think Chuck’s is great.

Q. That’s the end of this segment.

Q. Let’s talk about your life at the University. You graduated from the University and knew most of the people in the art department.

A. Right.

Q. By way of having been a student and having been married to a faculty member the last years. There are a couple of things we know from Chuck’s background that impacted his experiences at the University. One was the support from his brother Frank in encouraging him to draw and to help him get early experiences in that field. And the other was a negative impact of Chuck growing up in an environment that was not terribly intellectually stimulating for a lot of reasons. He found that intellectual stimulation at Ohio State and identified several people. But the one that really caught him in terms of their intellectual capacity was you. Did you find that intellectual stimulation, was that important to your relationship, and how did it impact your connection to the University? The intellectual side.

A. Yes, I think that it was a very different time then in the University. People really did get together and talk about their field. And we, several nights a week, Chuck
and I would share meals with Roy and Isabelle and Stan Tartowitz and Ann, and we would have a growing dialog about painting. And when we saw the Kings on Sunday for waffles, we had a dialog about painting. And there was a tremendous emphasis. It was a part of your life, to be with other artists and to talk about things that were important and what you were doing. That was also true. We had many friends in the English Department. We had friends in the Philosophy Department. And Engineering. When we got together, we simply talked about interesting things that had to do with their fields and our fields.

Q. Are you an intellectual artist like Chuck is an intellectual artist?

A. I think we’re both combinations. I think while Chuck is an intellectual artist, he is also a very feeling. His work is also very intuitive and very much about meaning. And I am the same way. It’s very important to me that the artwork be structured. But within that structure, it’s very important to me that it have meaning and quite often whimsy, because I tend to see the ridiculous in everything. But because my art is whimsical does not mean that I’m not serious about making it and about it being organized and working at structurally. So in that sense I think we’re both alike and while yes, he had to master a very intellectual field of math and computer science and all that stuff in order to get to the freedom or the ability to play, when he reached that level and started playing his work started being more interesting I think. And so in that sense I think that we both are intellectual.

Q. Lee, you’ve described the University environment as being intellectual during that period.

A. Right, very much.
Q. An environment where you could discuss ideas in your field or other people’s field, and you could share experiences and ideas. And Chuck has said on the record that while he found intellectual stimulation in the University and even in the department, and he found that to be satisfying to him early in his career, he’s also said that the intellectual relationship between the two of you has been very pivotal to his career. Because of your ability to deal with abstract ideas, your ability to deal with relations with people and dealing with people and knowing who to trust, or recognizing when that trust was no longer worthy. And lastly, and I think the most important thing he’s told me about you, was the fact that you were able to share the intellectual discovery of life together, and how much that has meant to him. What’s your view on that? What role has that played in your family life?

A. There’s no question but what all of those things are true. I can’t think of a single area of our lives that Chuck and I haven’t discussed deeply and frequently, and for the most part without conflict. I can’t remember ever being …

Q. Oh, in 55 years of marriage, there must be a couple of really rootin’ tootin’ arguments, aren’t there?

A. You know, it’s very difficult for us to stay angry with each other. Usually what happens is that, if …

Q. Is that love or tolerance that causes that?

A. I think it’s both. We both have the same sort of irreverent sense of humor, and generally I tend to say something that is so off the wall, that it cracks him up. It’s so exaggerated that, you know, and then it cracks me up. But we both are people,
I think, of great passions. We feel strongly about things and so we tend to express that strongly.

Q. Did you intellectually share with each other? You share ideas?
A. Oh, absolutely.
A. (Chuck) Every day.
A. (Lee) Every day. When he comes home in the evening I’m usually reading with a glass of wine and I’m mellow. I put the book down and we talk about his day and who he has talked to and what’s going on.

Q. Has that been a part of your family life from the very early years?
A. Always. And the dinner conversation …

Q. And is he interested in what you did?
A. Yeah, he always asks about that. And I tell him funny stories about MCL. Or I complain that I had a splinter in my finger and it’s so sore I can hardly use it, or whatever. But even when we were very young and the children were young, we used to sit around the table and our daughter would enter into this. That has always been a very important family thing, to talk about our needs and our desires and what happens and what we want to do and so forth. There’s always been a lot of communication in our family. Even with our handicapped son.

Q. Tell us about your children. You have two?
A. Yes. Our oldest child was born prematurely and he was brain damaged.

Q. And that’s Stephen?
A. That’s Stephen.

Q. And is Stephen named for his uncle by any chance?
A. His grandfather. And Caroline is named for my mother. (end of tape) … emotionally than intellectually. He seems to grasp concepts because we’ve always taught concepts around him, and we’re amazed sometimes what comes out of him that he has caught and understood what we were talking about. Even very abstract things.

Q. Did you know Stephen had this limitation at birth or was it discovered over a period of months?

A. Well we were pretty sure there was something wrong. He was very early.

Q. Was that a stress on your marriage? Was it something you came together on?

A. I think in a way it was very stressful for both of us, but it also was very, and this is going to sound so Pollyannaish, but it made people of both of us.

Q. Because it was a challenge to deal with Stephen?

A. It was also the fact that both Chuck and I are achievers and tend to be impatient with people who aren’t. So to have somebody plunked into our lives, that everything was difficult.

Q. Who could not be an achiever?

A. Who could not be an achiever, was very humanizing to both of us. In particular me. I can’t speak for Chuck but I tend to be very impatient. If I have one overriding fault that I struggle with all the time, is that I tend to take things in very quickly and I’m impatient if I don’t get it back.

Q. Did this relationship grow as a result of Stephen?

A. Absolutely.
A. (Chuck) There was so much sharing here; a mutual exchange of feelings and ideas, and discussion about how we had to deal with it.

A. (Lee) We even went into very deeply the way the brain works because Chuck’s answer to problems is to find out as much as he can about it, and see how we can use it. We were locking horns with doctors right and left because their attitude was to just accept it. And I finally really went at it with a psychologist one time and said, “Look, we have accepted that there is a problem. What we want from you is what do we do about it? You’re not getting the fact that there have got to be things that we can do that will optimize Stephen’s development.” And we finally got through enough to, well we tried a lot of things. We were very familiar with all the Straus work and the retraining of the senses. We went to the Doman Dolocato Clinic, which was very not accepted, was considered to be way out there, where you repattern the brain by creeping and crawling and doing all sorts of exercises, tactile and visual and all of these things, with our child. And we even involved Caroline in this. The therapy that Stephen was put through took eight hours every day and it took the entire family to do it. So, we went through years of, that was very difficult, very frustrating and very hard on all of us. Really hard on Stephen. It was physically painful for him. He would wear blisters on his knees and we had all kinds of things that we wrapped him in to keep that from happening. It was difficult, just very hard. And it was hard on our daughter because, here was a family who had a child that was different, and he was her brother and how did she handle this. And she was wonderful about it because we kept her in the loop always.
Q. People who know you are aware that Stephen is very deeply loved.

A. Oh, he’s a delightful guy. He’s wonderful in the sense that he has really, he’s not simple or simple minded in the sense that his life is constricted. It’s not as open obviously as normal life. But he cares very deeply about things and has a tremendous need to achieve.

A. (Chuck) And to communicate.

A. And to communicate, yes. We always discounted any team sport because we knew he couldn’t do that, but we always encouraged him to bowl which he could do alone. He’s a very good bowler, and yet right now, he is without a doubt the most competitive you would ever want to meet. He knows everything there is to know about Ohio State and the Reds, and he’s right on top of that constantly. He wants them to win and he knows what’s going on. And it’s a big part of his life.

Q. And what about Caroline? When did she come along?

A. Caroline is four years younger than Stephen.

Q. So she was born in ’57.

A. She was born in ’57.

Q. So Stephen is 50 now?

A. Yes, he will be 50 in September and she just turned 46. She was a delight in every way. She was a beautiful baby and extremely bright and extremely precocious. She walked at seven months. She started talking in sentences at less than a year. She was an incredible child. And to have that in contrast to what we had gone through with Stephen.

A. (Chuck) She went to University School in diapers.
A. She was the youngest one ever accepted in University School. She didn’t go in diapers; she wasn’t allowed to, but she would ask for diapers when she came home. But I mean, that’s how bright she was, that they took her into Campbell Hall at something like 18 months because she could already talk and do all these things. And she’s been a delightful child. She’s very talented. And it’s not easy being the child of two artists and a handicapped brother.

Q. How did Stephen’s development impact her in her life?
A. Rather strongly, I think. She’s handled it well.

Q. Did it hurt her?
A. Yes.

Q. Did it make her stronger? Did it set her back, advance her?
A. I think that it made it very difficult to have the sense of her own power. She always got the notion because of Stephen that learning was difficult. But learning was so easy for her that she was shocked when it was, because she saw us struggling with Stephen. So there was this fight. She was a good test taker because she always stiffened up thinking it was going to be so hard. And then she would ace it and be just flabbergasted.

Q. She was an excellent student?
A. She was a good student. She’s very, very bright.

Q. Did she get the artistic gene?
A. Yes, she’s very good artistically. And she’s also very beautiful. So she had it all.

Q. She was a model as I recall.
A. She was a model for years.
Q. Was that as a child or as an adult?
A. No, as an adult. She had already had a year of college when she went into that.

Q. And where are these children today?
A. Stephen still lives with us, still very much a part of our lives. And Caroline lives in Westerville with her husband and two gorgeous granddaughters.

Q. Let’s get names in here.
A. Her husband Kevin Ray and he’s a very talented guy. And a very loving guy. If we’d written a list we couldn’t have done better in a son-in-law. And two daughters. Hannah is the oldest one who’s just turned 12 and is very bright and very gorgeous and the love of my life. And Emily, who runs her neck and neck. She is really a whiz. She’s already ahead of herself in school and is accepted in the gifted program. And she’ll correct her dad and mother on the computer. She’s the little imp.

Q. Chuck’s career at Ohio State has now passed the 60 year mark. He had many offers. You’ve even talked previously on video about the kinds of offers that existed in New York and the implications of those. For any number of reasons he stayed at Ohio State. One of those in a number of reasons was the family.
A. Oh, absolutely, probably the biggest.

Q. And what role did that play and how was it manifested and how did you deal with it?
A. Well, we did a great deal of soul searching when the thing came up about New York and moving to New York. And we weren’t at all, part of the trouble …

Q. That wasn’t a place you wanted Stephen to be.
A. Exactly. We had our support system set up here. Stephen had outlets for his training and for his education. It seemed to me that it would be very disruptive to try to set up that same system. We couldn’t have lived directly in New York and accomplished what we wanted to with Stephen. And if we didn’t live directly in New York, there was no point in going to New York, because that was where all the activity was.

Q. Roy had gone there by then.

A. But Roy was a New Yorker. He had apartments on 57th Street and parking garages. He was a true baby of New York City. His playground was the Museum of Natural History. So it was easy for him. He could set up any kind of support system he wanted, because he had family there and the money to do it. Chuck and I, on the other hand, had no money and the only support system we had was here. And I pretty much left it up to him. I said I will do what you feel is what you want to do.

Q. But you’ve also said on the record, that the first sign of it going bad and you were out of there.

A. I said the first sign of a cockroach and I’m leaving. He knew I was kidding. I wouldn’t have but I wanted to express my reluctance.

Q. But he got the point that your sense of values was …

A. Well I think he was …

Q. Family needed to be part of the consideration.

A. I think they were even more important to Chuck than me. You have to realize that Chuck was very comfortable in the life that he had in the Art Department. He
was respected and he was doing good work, and that’s difficult to give up too. Just to say we’ll just start over, because we didn’t have a bank account. We were living paycheck to paycheck. He worked, I’ve forgotten how many quarters in a row because for the extra money for that fourth quarter. Because we couldn’t have made it if he hadn’t. Many years. It was not just pressure from me because I didn’t give him a lot of pressure.

Q. I’ve never heard him once express any regrets.

A. No, and I think that what I tried to do to be productive about it, and to help him deal with it was, I said to him, “You have to make the University work for you. Whatever you do.” Because when he got interested in the computer thing, that could have only happened in a University. That could not have happened in New York. It just wouldn’t have. So in a sense the fact that he decided not to go to New York was the making of his career, just like Roy not getting tenure was the catalyst for is career. Chuck’s worked just the opposite. He had to have the support of a University and the people that the University provided in order to do what he’s done. So I don’t think he’s ever had a regret, from the time he got involved in that, he’s been like a kid at Christmas. You wouldn’t meet anybody that was happier in what he was doing. Moans and groans sometimes, but it’s part of his personality.

Q. How well did you know Chuck’s parents?

A. I never met his mother. She was dead by the time I came into his life. I knew his father just slightly and he was a wonderful and kind and gentle man, who was
extremely high on Chuck. But I understand that Chuck was his mother’s favorite. She must have had good taste.

Q. So she was gone before you met Chuck in ’48?
A. Yes, she died when he was a freshman in school.
A. (Chuck) I think my junior year in college.

Q. Your dad died around 1960?
A. (Chuck) 1960.

Q. What’s the future for Stephen? What does it hold for him?
A. I don’t think that he will ever be able to live on his own. I think that he will always have to have a support system. Minimal. He probably could do a lot more than he now does because we do tend to protect him.

Q. He is the number one priority in your life, is that correct?
A. That’s difficult to say. No, I think our marriage is the number one priority.

Q. You told me that in many ways Caroline played second fiddle, that you regretted that that had to happen. And I computed that to mean that Stephen was the main priority.
A. Well, he made demands that couldn’t be ignored, whereas Caroline was so efficient.

Q. Have you ever said, “why me?”
A. Have I ever said, “why me?” Oh listen, we get so angry with him sometimes we could kill him, and I’ve said I could kill him. I don’t mean it. But of course, we are both terribly frustrated quite often by him.

Q. Where have you found the strength to do this for 50 years?
A. Bob, you do what you have to do. I mean, I just think it’s that simple.

Q. This was something you had to do.

A. Exactly. He’s our child and our problem. I’ve never seen the appropriateness of your problems off on society. I think that as long as we are able to take care of Stephen, we will take care of him.

Q. As an outsider it’s clear to me that there’s reason to believe this has strengthened the relationship.

A. Oh yes.

Q. Would that be true?

A. Absolutely true.

A. (Chuck) It’s had a very positive effect.

Q. You have both developed avenues where you can get away from it for some period of time and go out and be in the other world that you live in.

A. Absolutely. Thank God for the Arc Industries because he’s picked up by bus early in the morning, Chuck goes off to breakfast at Bob Evans and reads the paper, and I read the paper at home, and then I do whatever I’m going to do in the morning. He doesn’t come home until 4:00 in the afternoon, so we have a lot of freedom. The one place where there’s a real bind is the spontaneity of just doing something. It takes planning everything. A vacation is so hard that I’m exhausted before we get there.

Q. And that’s because you include Stephen?

A. No, it’s because we have to make arrangements for Stephen. It included Stephen most of our lives, so we feel that when we go on a trip, that we’re entitled to have
a honeymoon from Stephen. But we don’t take many trips. We haven’t been anywhere in three years now, because we lost our support system. We used to have a friend whose grown son would move in with Stephen and Stephen adored him and they did all kinds of wonderful things, so Stephen was happy as a clam while we were gone. He goes to Recreation Unlimited every year. We sign him up for that and pay the full fee, and it’s not cheap. So, we feel like we’re doing everything we can for him. But we do tend to skimp on ourselves. I would like to do more than Chuck would like to do. He is more focused on what he’s doing. It’s very hard to tear him away from it.

Q. I think we’re done with the family life segment. Is there anything else you want to add? End of segment.

Q. I think the next segment will take probably 15 minutes or so, and I don’t want you to get hypoglycemic but I don’t think it’s worth breaking and coming back for 15 minutes. Can you handle it okay?

A. Sure, no problem.

Q. I want to talk about Chuck’s career in the segment. In your independent views, the kind of view you would express to him in private. If you don’t want him to sit here, Bill will take him in the other room. But I definitely want to hear your point of view, not your shared or negotiated point of view. I want to be able to hear from you exactly what your ideas are. And we’re going to talk about his career at Ohio State. We’re going to talk about what he’s doing today. We’re going to talk about the people he’s known and how they’ve affected lives and so on. But as
with the rest of this, it’s your viewpoint that we’re after. And I don’t see any
problem with him sitting here and listening.

A. No, no. We’re very open.

Q. I have the feeling you’re not exactly a shrinking violet. As soon as we hear from
the control room, we’ll take off. That was a really good segment. I will remind
you, under the agreement with the University, everything said here today is
private. There will be a transcript generated from this, that you will be able to see
and read, add to alter or adjust. This is not like the video stuff where what you
say goes. This is an opportunity to leave your comments, your ideas. And that
takes generally six to eight weeks before that comes out, the transcript, and at that
time you can deal with it and update as you like. But nobody else knows what
was said here today. It will be released to research in the archives immediately if
you approve it, and delayed if for some reason that you would want it delayed.

A. When the woman from the Roys Foundation was here interviewing us about Roy,
the early years, she wanted me to talk about Isabelle and Roy’s relationship. And
I was pretty forthcoming about it. And recently we got a letter from her saying
that she wanted to include some of my comments in this brochure. And that I had
said to her …

Q. Lee, I’d like to move on now to the University life, to Chuck’s life at the
University rather than his activities. He started out as a student, became a
professor, was one of the youngest ever to earn full professorship at The Ohio
State University, and tenure, at around the age of 30 as near as we can tell from
the records. He was in a department with other people who were very demanding
and had opinions and ideas of their own, particularly I’m thinking now of Hoyt Sherman, whom you knew personally. You did not take a course under him as I understand, but you knew him well as both a teacher and as a faculty member with your husband. And Chuck and Roy, as I understand it, were very supportive of Hoyt Sherman. But Hoyt did not have the ability to be reciprocal in that nature. What do you remember of this man and his behaviors and capabilities?

A. Well, Hoyt was a very bright man and very charming in many ways, but he also was a man who postured a lot.

Q. His Dixie affectation of …

A. Of Harvard, English. England English. And he also I think was a very self-involved man. He was not as supportive of his wife and children. To compare him to Chuck there wouldn’t be any comparison. He was detached I think very much from that. And even not very passionate about …

Q. Rachel was very passive in that regard and probably put up with it.

A. I think Rachel was very cowed by him because he did come on like gangbusters. I could understand how he could … he belittled people and that’s very intimidating. And I have a feeling, having seen him do it to other people, that he probably did it to her. I don’t know but at any rate, along with that, having said that, he was a very interesting man. I’m trying to be even-handed here. I think that he had great insight into what made a work of art. I think he was intellectually pretty much on the money. I think that he had difficulty because his argument was circular. So he would have difficulty with anybody who was linear. And he and I used to go like this because I had more of a … when he would start speaking about
intellectual things, I wanted him to stay logical. And he quite often didn’t. But nevertheless, I admired him.

Q. Did Chuck have confrontations with him as you did?
A. I think that he was intimidated by Chuck. I think Hoyt was intimidated by Chuck. I don’t think he ever took Chuck on. He took Roy on. I watched this happen and he would take on Stanley, whom he thought was an idiot. Things like that. But I think the fact that Chuck was such a strong person kind of made Hoyt back off a little bit from it. Also, I do think that Hoyt respected Chuck’s work.

Q. There’s evidence, and I’m thinking now of testimony that Rachel has made, that Hoyt turned on Chuck at about the time he became interested in computer art.
A. Oh sure.
Q. That he used the term “turncoat,” that he was no longer supportive of Chuck being supportive of his particular vision of art. And Chuck’s taking some note over here that being called a turncoat is not something he would have considered anything other than a compliment, is that right?
A. Yes, I think both Chuck and I were very ambivalent about Hoyt, but that’s not to say that we didn’t have a lot of admiration for him too. And I think he was extremely important in both of our development. So I don’t want to make him sound like this ogre. I don’t think he was. I think he was even a very talented man but I think that he had an ego that got in the way of his being just or fair with other people. I don’t think he really ever heard other people.

Q. You think Chuck’s ego was less than that, or do you think he manages it better?
A. I think Chuck has a very powerful ego but it’s in relationship. He has a hierarchy of values and his ego is not at the top. His regard for human beings is at the top and I think Hoyt’s was reversed. I think his value system was that his ego was at the top. And I think he was very good at self-promotion, Hoyt, and Chuck has also been very good at it in certain ways, and yet in other ways, when it comes up to the point where you’d have to prostitute yourself or something, Chuck says, “Okay, that’s it.” I’m not sure Hoyt would have made that stop if it had been to his advantage not to. But that just may be my being fanciful here. I do know that Chuck has never sacrificed his principles in order to get ahead.

Q. Chuck has described an environment in the University that in some ways was aggressive and some ways passive. And that at least in the case of Hoyt Sherman, when he saw Chuck as this turncoat, he was aggressive and you could identify it.

A. Oh yes.

Q. In many ways, my view of Chuck’s experience has been one where he saw the passiveness of the University as being more sinister in some ways, if we just ignored him or didn’t think much of what he was doing. Were you aware of that passive quality in his reaction to it, and did you share the reaction?

A. I thought the University just has, I don’t know how to express this because I am very high on the University in certain ways that they develop your mind, but in certain ways I think the University is very uncreative. They don’t seem to, they are as invested in the status quo as any business in the country, and the pecking order is maybe even fiercer. Because I think the power in a University becomes more important even in business because there’s not money. If you can’t achieve
in money, then you grasp for the power, and I think that’s what is so important in
the University. And that power has never been anything but a tool to Chuck. It’s
a means of being able to do what you want to do.

Q. He’s used it many, many times.
A. Oh absolutely. And he’s very good at it. Primarily I think because he’s so
passionate about it. He can be an incredibly intimidating person, if he wants
something and you’re standing in his way. This is not a passive man.

Q. I’ve seen the look.
A. Yes, this is not a passive man and he can be scary. We once had a dean who said
to him, “I’m a human being too,” because he was so incredibly intimidated by
Chuck’s passion. But he did get tenure. The point that I’m making is, Chuck
tends to be able to write off. If he’s not functioning productively in a situation,
he’s able to close the door and move on, which I think that a lot of people can’t
do. And so in a sense, he rose above the pettiness. He never the let the criticism
from the Art Department get in his way. He just went right on.

Q. But he felt the institution was lethargic in what he was doing.
A. Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

Q. The more he focused, the more they defocused.
A. Exactly. And the more belligerent they got. I mean not just passive, they became
very belligerent.

Q. Who are you talking about now?
A. The whole department. It was like he was like such a threat to them. He was
getting attention, he was drawing interest of students. Students were getting
excited about what he was doing. The rest of the University was getting excited about what he was doing, and they felt very threatened. The Art Department had always been a very contentious department. There was a split right down the middle politically in that department. There were Shermanites, and there were the others. And they used to go into faculty meetings and all but rang each other’s necks. There was a lot of passion there. And suddenly Chuck just sort of slipped out of an in-between and off on his own tangent, and he earned the ire of both sides then. But I have to say that the other side, as embodied by Manny Barkin, who was head of Art Education, was so high on Chucks’ teaching ability, that he ignored all of this and said, “Come in our department,” which was I thought an incredibly generous thing to do. Given the structure. And I just think that that’s what happened. He was able to see the possibilities and to run with it and just say, “I just have to close the door here. I can’t deal with it.” And he was also, while this was happening, he was also asking my opinion of the way people were acting. And I think I had a very clear idea of what was going on. He was sort of above it but I could get down in the trenches and see what was going on and say, “Watch this,” or “You’re vulnerable, watch your backside here,” and stuff like that. I was a little bit more schooled in dirty politics than he was.

Q. There were issues in your family life that made it difficult if not impossible to move on, which meant that Chuck put up with some things he might not liked to have put up with. The disinterest, the derision, the fact that he was out raising money and therefore the University felt they didn’t have to really support him because he was adequately able to do it for himself. He projects an attitude of
feeling the University mistreated him in these years. Can you share that view? Do you have that same sense?

A. I have a dual sense. I have a sense that in certain areas they did mistreat him, and other areas they have mutually used each other. And that they have been very impressed with his ability to raise money, to get the students involved, to see the students as successes from his program. And I think that it’s a love-hate thing. I think the University is very proud of him, but I certainly think that in the early years they could have been more supportive. There were always a few people who rose above the University and were able to nudge him in the right direction. And he has to give them credit for that. It’s not that the University mistreated him. As an institution, they could have been more supportive but there were individuals in the University who were very nurturing.

Q. I think the word individuals applies on both sides. Chuck was obviously overlooked or hurt or slighted by some people at this institution.

A. Right, right.

Q. But his sense is, as I have learned it from talking to him, is that it was the University, the institution.

A. It’s the institution.

Q. Who has slighted him. I’ve listened carefully to his argument and I cannot agree with it independently. I think the University overall treated him very, very well, but some people shit on him from time to time. What’s your view?

A. I think that’s true. I would tend to agree with Bob, that that’s true. As an institution within their ability to treat him well they have.
Q. Within their ability.
A. Within their ability, yes.
Q. Which is limited because they didn’t understand him or where he was going.
A. Exactly.
Q. Now I’d like to speak about one particular incident. And I’d like to get your input on it. In the 1980’s, there was a rush of funding into higher education and the Regents had a lot of money to throw around. In 1985, the Regents started what they called “The Distinguished Scholar Program.” Nineteen of the 33 in Ohio were at Ohio State. One of them was established in the College of the Arts and the Chair was filled by Mehigh Nadeen, came here in 1985, was here for two years and left under mysterious circumstances in June of 1987. Do you remember this event? What’s your view of it and its seriousness and what did it mean?
A. I don’t have a gag rule on me, so I can be perfectly honest.
Q. Please do. I want your view and not his.
A. He was crazy. He was clinically crazy. The man was literally didn’t have both oars in the water.
Q. You’re speaking now of Mehigh Nadeen.
A. Yes. He came into this University with a kind of European “I’m above it all” attitude, and proceeded to appropriate everybody else’s work as his own. And at every level. He was unfriendly, he was paranoid, he thought everybody was out to get him, and within a very short time everybody was out to get him, because he was a very untrustworthy man.
Q. He came from the University of Wilburton in Germany where he took his degree, where he became an expert, he thought, in the field of graphics. He went on to Rochester and then came from Rochester to Ohio State. That much we know. He wrote nine books in seven languages. No books came out while he was at Ohio State.

A. He wrote nine books which were self-published. Did you know that?

Q. No, they do not all appear to be self-published.

A. Really? Well I understood that they were not very legitimate.

Q. They may not be.

A. Nobody checked on his background. I hear it’s every bit as spotty in Europe as it is here.

Q. An average job tenure was 18 months for him. He was changing jobs more often than some people change their underwear.

A. Exactly. So the trail wasn’t very easy to follow.

Q. But he was here 2 1/2 years, which was a little longer than average. So you’re saying that this guy was in some ways a crackpot, dishonest?

A. There’s no question but what he was a crackpot.

Q. Did you meet him or know the man?

A. Oh yes, I’m the first person who entertained him. We had them over before they had been here two days. His wife was also clinically crazy. I mean the two of them together were dangerous, to each other and to everybody else and to their children. If you go to Bexley where they settled, and scratch anybody in the community who dealt with them, they were all terrified of them, because they
were really, really off the wall. The secretaries in the place where he had an
office were scared to death of him. He kept a gun in his desk, and he had a
temper like you wouldn’t believe. He would call people idiots. He was a terrible
man. So when he had been here a short time and Chuck leaned over backwards to
try to be nice to this guy, when he had been here a very short time he went off to
Europe to a conference and proceeded to take credit for everything that Chuck
and the group had done. He showed all of these films and he showed them as his.
And people in the audience stood up and said, “This is Chuck Csuri’s work.”
And his answer, as I understand it was, “Oh, he has a big reputation there because
of his football.” That was his reaction was that Chuck was just an ex-football
player who hadn’t done anything. And it was just appalling.

Q. Did he scare you?

A. Oh, I was ready to kill him. I mean, I was very angry at Tom Lennahan who had
gotten him here.

Q. And Bob Brokomer?

A. Well it was hard to be angry at Brokomer because by that time he was not in good
shape physically. I think it was ignorance on his part. Nobody knew what this
guy was like until he got here. The president and vice president who hired him
never bothered to check on him.

Q. Yes, I can tell you the University records support that there was no checking
before he came here. I can also tell you that the University records support that
all areas of his employment at the time of his leaving have been closed by the
University and are not open.
Q. They seem to be in a department called Legal Affairs, which is not open to public scrutiny.

A. Well the man was guilty of plagiarism.

Q. How do you know that?

A. I know it for a fact. He took all of Chuck’s work and went into Europe and published it.

Q. All of Chuck’s work?

A. Just about all of it, yeah. And I’m not under a gag rule.

Q. How would he get ahold of it and publish it under his own name?

A. Chuck just let him have the stuff, thinking he was …

A. (Chuck) He distributes reports in the group that other people read our reports.

A. And so he just took it all and went over and presented it as his work. And we had affidavits of all of this. The reason he left here was that he was being threatened with a plagiarism suit. So that’s why he left.

Q. By whom?

A. By the University. Their Legal Department. Chuck went to them and said, “This guy is not going to be in my area. I am not putting up with this.” And so they brought the lawyers in and they saw what was going on and they said it was clearly plagiarism. So they were able to go to him. He couldn’t talk about this; he’s under a gag rule, but I’m not. Nobody put me under a gag rule. But that’s what happened. And furthermore, he came from Parsons School of Design here. And when they tried to find out what had happened there, everybody clammed up.
And then he went from here to the Design Center in New York, Head of Design in New York, and he lasted there less than, I think it was two or three months.

A. (Chuck) He’s now in the California system.

A. We don’t understand why these people … you see, I really, I object to Ohio State not releasing this information. Because when people come looking for a record, they don’t see that this man is a manic, because nobody is telling them. I think that’s immoral.

Q. Okay. It’s not just Ohio State; it’s every institution he’s been at. And he’s been at nearly every institution …

A. It’s everybody. Parsons recommended him highly. They wanted to get rid of him.

Q. That’s how you get rid of people.

A. Exactly.

Q. Okay. So we’ve established that this guy had a problem and the record supports it. It’s while Chuck was running ACAD in the late 80’s, in fact just before he retired, that most of this happened. And there are two questions here, one of which is, was this guy misbehaving and did he mistreat Chuck? Your testimony and the record supports that that is true.

A. Oh, absolutely.

Q. Was his appointment an affront to Chuck?

A. Yes, absolutely.

Q. Would you tell us why?
A. The reason it was an affront to Chuck was that Chuck was the only guy in the entire world that fit the job description of his eminent scholar. He could have been given that eminent scholarship and resigned as Director, and could have been an asset to the University for years and years to come. It would have been a perfect place for them to get the best there was. Instead, they advertised and got this man who really wasn’t an expert in graphics at all. His expertise was in …

Q. Was that intentional effort on the part of this institution to affront Chuck?
A. No.

Q. Or was this stupidity, or was it because Chuck had a BFA instead of a Ph.D?
A. Partly it was snobbism.

Q. Which would be the last, which would be the degree.
A. Exactly. Even though the Art Department had voted that a Masters was the determining degree. And that Ph.D.’s were meaningless. I mean, we turned out some Ph.D.’s that were laughable. I’m pretty passionate about this subject but I think that he was betrayed by Lennahan, who was his Assistant Director and was very unhappy with Chuck at that point.

Q. In his testimony he never mentioned Lennahan.
A. Well of course, he’s being very kind. But I’m telling you that if it hadn’t been form Tom, Mehigh would not have been here. And Tom wanted to be Director. He wanted Chuck to anoint him as his heir apparent, and the real fact of the matter was, and I’m talking about somebody that I care about, Tom Lennahan was a good friend. We loved him. But he was intellectually lazy. He was an extremely bright man. He had no drive whatsoever and he had very little creative
ability. So Chuck in his wildest dreams would not have chosen Tom to be Director. And I think Tom knew this by that time, because you had been pretty open with Bob Arnold.

Q. Did you know Robert Cranston Knocht?
A. Oh yes.

Q. And how did you feel about him?
A. Well, he’s the only genuine sociopath I ever met. Does that say anything to you?

Q. Wow, I hope nobody every asks your opinion on me. You’re hard on people.
A. No, I’m serious. He is a textbook. I minored in psychology and he’s like somebody wrote down the traits. The man has never seen, when he looks meaningfully into your eyes which he does to women, all he sees is his own reflection. That man is without a doubt. He’s pure evil. Nobody who has ever worked with that man has been treated good. He has screwed everybody over that has ever worked with him. I can’t think of a single exception. Not one. Not in his entire company here, to Cranston Csuri, and anything that his Washington company, everything.

A. (Chuck) Certainly his former wife.

A. His former wife, he screwed her over. His second wife he screwed over. And he’s now living in Bermuda with twins who are like 15 or 16 years old, women. The man, he’s dangerous, he really is. He said to me, one of the first times I met him, I had heard that he had been married before and I had met his wife who was quite a sweet lady and he said, “If I thought I could get by with it, I’d put a contract out on her.” Isn’t that a pretty good definition of a sociopath?
Q. That certainly would appear to be, yes.

A. He’s brilliant. He’s never touched anything that hasn’t made money for him. He’s like an idiot savant.

Q. Well Cranston Csuri didn’t exactly make him a lot richer but it didn’t help you either.

A. It didn’t make him any money but he came out of it smelling like roses. He got a lot of publicity. He got a lot of reflective grandeur for being innovative, an entrepreneur and all this stuff.

Q. As we close here let me tell you that in the interview that Jim Tressell conducted of Chuck, which was pretty interesting, one of the questions that came up was about his career at Ohio State, and Chuck said, “I’ve had a sensational career at Ohio State all told.” Would you agree with that?

A. Oh yes, I think so. Yes.

Q. There were negatives but the positives far outweigh them.

A. Absolutely.

Q. Do you sometimes have the feeling that Chuck sees the negatives as outweighing the positives?

A. Well, I often describe Chuck as a Hungarian with the soul of a Russian.

Q. Oh dear.

A. He tends to, I’m a Pollyanna compared to Chuck, so we’ve made a perfect marriage in that sense. When he’s been down and he can be more down than anybody I’ve ever seen, I get my cheerleader outfit out. I mean, I keep telling him, “Well look at this and look at this and look at this.” Because I’m really
going to be honest with you here. I am very threatened by his depressions.

Because of my background I need to feel that the people around me are happy.

Q. You ought to be able to make them happy. And his depression you can’t make him happy.

A. Exactly. So I tend to try very hard to keep him from being unhappy.

Q. Do these depressions last a long period of time or are they short-lived?

A. No. He usually snaps out of it very quickly. His depressions have more to do with his running into a situation where he can’t change it or do what he wants to do, and he will get down for a short time and then I’m pretty good at getting him to go around them. To think of another way.

Q. One more short question and we’re done.

A. Okay.

Q. What do you think about the University, the DVD history of Chuck’s life, and what the University is doing with it?

A. I don’t know what the University is going to do with it and I reserve judgment until I find out. I think it’s wonderful that they’re doing it. And I am very grateful to everybody that’s been involved, because I think this man is a great man and that people should know that. And it’s always been a source of anxiety to me that nobody is ever going to know him the way I know him. That they’re not going to see what a terrific human being this is. Not just an artist but as a person. So maybe this scratches the surface a little bit to tell other people what he’s like.

Q. Did he share with you what Jim Tressell had to say about his life?
A. No, he came home and I said, “How did it go?” And Chuck said, “Well, he was complimentary.” But you called me that night and shared which I really appreciated.

Q. I thought that he might underplay it.

A. Yes, he tends to underplay things like that.

Q. And has he told you that on one of the busiest days of the year with the youth football camp, that Tressell has committed to come to our party on Monday?

A. We were both stunned at that, yes. He even said he was honored.

Q. If you ever wonder if Tressell is genuine, there just can’t be any doubt.

A. Yes, exactly. I told somebody that the other day when I was telling them the story of his agreeing to be interviewed. And I said, “You know, you keep hearing such nice things and if you want to know if he’s the real goods, he’s the real goods.”

Q. Well, Chuck, you’ve heard her independent opinion and it certainly is different than yours in many areas. What do you have, if anything, to close with? Any questions, any comments.

A. (Chuck) No, just a fantastic admiration for my wife.

Q. Do you still love this woman?

A. You got it.

Q. As much as ever?

A. Absolutely.

Q. Well congratulations to you on your great life together.

A. Well, thank you.

Q. That’s a cut and a wrap.
A. Thank you.