

JOSEPH FEHER

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

JOSEPH FEHER

(1908 - 1987)

Joseph Feher, a native of Hungary whose family was disrupted by World War I, began his art education at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest and the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence, Italy. In 1928 he joined his mother and younger brother in Chicago where he continued his education at the Chicago Art Institute.

Mr. Feher describes his life as a young immigrant in Chicago during the Depression years and tells of the variety of jobs that enabled him to survive. In 1934 he visited Kalapana, Hawaii, where he spent an idyllic eighteen months and developed a deep love for Hawaii.

In 1947 at the invitation of the Honolulu Academy of Arts he was able to fulfill a longtime wish to move to Hawaii permanently and continue a teaching career that spanned forty-two years. His numerous commissions include the design of the Hawaii Statehood Commemorative postage stamp and the design and illustration of many books, including Hawaii: A Pictorial History.

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INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH FEHER

At his home, 5032 Poola Street, Honolulu, Hawaii

February 15, 1986

F: Joseph Feher

S: Alice Sinesky, Interviewer

S: I was curious if you remembered very much about World War I. You would have been pretty young at that time, but I'm sure it made some impact.

F: The earliest I remember about my childhood--I must have been about three or four years old--when my great-grandmother leaned down and lifted me up and put me on her lap and I remember around her ear, her hair--she must have been very old and I remember the smoothness of her hair and the grayness. It was kind of a silver gray. That was the earliest recollection of my childhood.

But then the next scene would be when I was about eleven or twelve years old. I was raised by my grandmother and we, like everybody else in Hungary, had to make our own bread. My chore was to take the bread in a basket, very much like a baby wrapped in a towel, to take it to the baker and then the baker took the bread and put a number on it and the corresponding number they gave to me. And we left it over there. They had a community, large oven and they baked fifty or sixty bread every morning and then two hours later we took back our number and we got our bread. Those breads were about at least two feet long and about a foot wide and it smelled wonderful. And it had a crust on it--and, of course, the bonus was for this chore that on the way I could take some of the fresh crust--to break it off--and the smell. It was just really worth it. This may not be a very important occurrence, but it must have been important to me because it was repeated every week.

And, of course, my grandma, who was a most wonderful woman, she raised me because my father--I'm jumping around--you see my father was thirty-two years old when one day--that was the first World War--they took him in the Army and three weeks later they took him to the Italian front. Austria-Hungary were in war with Italy. About two months later he came home with shrapnel in his lung and he died at home and

left my mother with two brothers and a little sister of mine. The youngest one was eight months old, the little girl.

And, of course, Hungary was under terrible conditions. There was no food and everybody was undernourished, including my mother who didn't have enough milk for the baby, so the baby actually died from starvation. And I went to my grandmother and my other brother went to another uncle. In other words, the family was just...my father was almost thirty-three years old when that happened.

Well, a year later my mother's brother in America brought her out to America, but only with the smallest brother of mine. Me and my other brother stayed in Hungary for seven years before we finally came out to America to join her. That was in 1928 and, in the meantime of course, I went to art school.

My grandmother was very supportive about art, but my grandfather had his doubts, and he pictured an artist's life as I remember when he was telling me--an artist is just not a respectable, responsible person. He usually lives in the attic with broken windows, and a bunch of broken bottles are underneath the bed, which is unmade, and he has tuberculosis, at best. (laughs) So that was his idea about an artist and he did not wish that kind of future for me.

S: No, he probably thought you should be something wonderful like a carpenter. Something practical.

F: Yes, yes. As a matter of fact, I did go to a--I wanted to be the next best thing to a carpenter--a designer of furniture--so there is a school in Hungary, which is a wonderful school. It was a museum, but on the base of that museum were some carpenter and carpenter shops where they made copies of the specimens from upstairs--furniture from all ages--according to the way--in other words, that's the way you learned the basis of carpentry or cabinetmaking. This was a preparation for furniture design.

S: So they were doing reproductions of museum pieces?

F: Reproductions, but in the same manner that it was originally done. For instance, furniture without any nails, et cetera. Going back to Renaissance furniture where the nails were actually made out of wood. So I went there and as a novice they put me on--now I remember--I hadn't thought about that. I went over there and I was very enthused about it. I thought that right away I was going to make some furniture or at least have something to do with the designing. But instead of that, you see in this shop there was a tremendous iron kettle where they cooked the glue and because I was the newest they put me over there to stir the glue because the glue has to be stirred otherwise it bakes or

burns on the bottom. And that smell and the monotony of just stirring all day long, it discouraged me from the career of being a furniture designer. (laughs)

So I just told my grandma, who always supported me, that I just want to quit; I don't want to do this. And she said, "All right." My grandpa accepted because he was very much under the influence of my grandmother. My grandmother was a very gentle, quiet and very wise woman and my grandpa, who loved her very much, anything was all right that my grandma said, so I escaped from cooking the glue. But then I got into another situation. The next best thing in the same school was wood carving. But still it has to do with furniture because the old-fashioned furniture...you remember around the key holes there was kind of a rosetta and that was what I started out with.

There were about a hundred little oval pieces of wood on a large area and they had one sample and they told me to make these hundred oval pieces into a hundred rosettas. So I did it, but it was terribly monotonous. I wanted to do big things--I wanted to paint and I wanted to draw, so finally I escaped from that school and joined--but my grandfather didn't know. My grandfather thought that I was still doing this work. But in the meantime, instead of that, I went to an art school and I was drawing. I was the youngest; I was fourteen years old at that time.

S: But your grandmother knew that you had made this change?

F: Oh yes, of course, it was with her approval. And secretly I showed her the drawings that I made in school and she enjoyed it. Matter of fact, my studio was in my grandmother's kitchen. Of course, my grandmother's kitchen was a little bit different than the kitchens around here. It was a tremendous place. It included a large round dining table and a tremendous cabinet where she had her pots and pans and et cetera. She assigned to me a certain side underneath on the lower part where I could reach--that was my studio--so I had my drawings and it was hidden away from my grandpa. My grandpa always asked me about my job and I told him how much I liked it.

S: Now what city was this in?

F: That was in Budapest. And in the meantime--oh, by the time--I went to this art school and I wasn't quite fourteen when I heard in the art school that one of the bigger boys was going to Italy. So I told him, "I am going with you." I didn't have two cents and I didn't have any money, because I was on scholarship, so it didn't cause any hardship for my grandpa going to art school.

But going to Italy, that was another thing. But by that time, I was doing pretty well with my drawing. I went to summer school and I sold some drawings of mine. But anyway, fired up with the idea of going to Italy with this other boy, I went around and got enough money from selling some of my drawings that I had money for my railroad ticket. We went from Budapest to Firenze on a train and in the same school where I went was a girl by the name of Hirsch and I don't know if she was a baroness or not, but she had access ...her father was head of the Baron Hirsch Foundation. When she heard that I wanted to go to Italy, she took some of my drawings home--that was what made it really possible--to her father and then she came back and she told me that the foundation was going to send me--I don't know the amount of money--but maybe it was twenty-five dollars or something like that every month. I thought that I was terribly rich. And she did that on her own.

You see, at that time I was kind of--I wouldn't call it a wonder child [wunderkind], but I was by far the--I was only fourteen years old--wasn't really fourteen yet--but here I was with the average eighteen, nineteen, twenty-year old students and I not only kept up with them, but my teacher was very complimentary and I was kind of a--I was really a little boy--I was too small for my age, but that maybe was helpful because everybody wanted to help.

So this other boy and I we went on to Italy--not knowing the language or anything. Matter of fact, I had only one clothes that I remember very well--it was kind of a brown corduroy suit and long black stockings with button shoes--and on the border when we went, they questioned and they examined my passport because they thought I was a runaway because I was too small to go out of the country. But they finally let me through.

And of course, in Italy, I was in Firenze about eighteen months or so and I learned the language and I went from museum to museum and church to church mostly every day. I saw two or three churches every day mostly for the artwork, not because of my strong religious feeling. But anyway I made acquaintance with an Austrian boy by the name of Fritz Eisenhauer. Fritz was about nineteen years old, a spoiled rich boy, who all of a sudden wanted to--we became very good friends--all of a sudden he wanted to go home and he was impatient to wait for money from his home. So when I got my small, little stipend he asked me to loan it to him and he would send it back immediately. Of course, I did.

And that was just about the time I moved from Firenze to Venice, so I gave him the address in Venice in care of the postmaster. Anyway, I went to Venice and I remember I had a nice little room with a bed in it and my first trip was to go to the post office to pick up my money because by that time I

had hardly anything. So not speaking very fluent Italian I had a hard time, but finally he understood and he told me that I hadn't got anything. I went there for three days in succession and when he saw me he shook his head. I was just desperate. I didn't know what to do. Frankly, I didn't even know his address in Vienna. Well, anyway, that Saturday...in the meantime when I left Firenze I wrote a postcard to the Hirsch Foundation to please send my next check to Venice.

So that Saturday, which was almost six days, I had not a cent. I had ate a little panino with a ten centesimo that I found on the street. And I was afraid, you know in the meantime, my landlady who had two or three other kids and she was letting this room out--she asked me many times, but the way I figured that if I show her how hungry I am, maybe she will realize that I haven't got any money and then I will lose my room, too. So I always acted like I would be full of money. (laughs) When I think about it, how stupid I was. And then I saw on the street a very rich man--a friend of my uncle's--who was on the piazza--on the big piazza in Venice--and I shied away from him because--I don't know why--instead of going over there and asking for a little money and here I was hungry. I was really hungry. I could never do it.

But anyway that Saturday my check finally came from the Hirsch Foundation, which wasn't very much, but it was a lifesaver.

S: You could eat.

F: But it was a check, so I had to go to the bank. And by that time it was after twelve o'clock, by the time I got to the piazza. I finally got to the bank and the bank was already closed, so I began to cry and I was banging on the door. I was only fourteen.

S: Well, sure, you were so young to be on your own.

F: A very nice, white-haired gent looked out from behind the curtains on this door and saw me. He opened the door and when I tried to tell him, the little Italian that I knew I forgot because by then I was so excited and so desperate. But anyway he motioned to come in and he somehow--he was very, very nice--he must have been a wonderful man--because he was calming me down and wanted to help. He recognized the fact that I was really in a bad state.

And finally I explained to him. To him it was a very little check--it was nothing. But to me, it was life. Finally he took my passport and looked at it and said, "All right, sign the check." He wanted to cash it. And I couldn't sign it the way...my signature was entirely different than the way it was on the passport. My hand was

shaking, but he didn't get excited. He gave me a big piece of paper and put my passport down and said, "You copy this." And I tried to copy it and tried to copy it. I wrote it down a hundred times and I couldn't--it never was the way it was. When you're fourteen your handwriting changes and, anyway, I didn't have a developed handwriting. But he said, "That's all right," and he gave me the money.

And right away I went to a store and I bought some salami and some cheese and some bread and took it back to my room and, you know, I could not eat for some reason. But I had just enough money left for a railroad ticket so that afternoon I went back to my grandma. And that was my Italian ... (laughs)

S: Well, you were terribly young to be out on your own.

F: Oh yes, yes. Now when I see a fourteen-year old kid--and especially--you know, some fourteen year olds are very grown up, but I was very small. Oh, I forgot to tell you that this one suit that we talked about--that was my only suit. Naturally I was growing and as I stayed there--because it was over a year that I stayed in Firenze--meantime I had some real nice experiences because I made friends with some medical students from the university and we went down to Palermo, to Sicily, with this group. And they babied me because I was just a little kid. These boys and girls who were medical students they sort of took me--I don't know how you call--these football games have an animal ...

S: A mascot.

F: I was a mascot. Anyway, because I was growing, my shoulders in my clothes began to rip and, of course, I couldn't sew, so I bought some safety pins and I pinned together from the inside these seams, but every once in a while when I took a breath one of these pins opened up and stuck me. (laughs) That was my Italian adventure--part of it. And then, of course, I went back to Hungary and I made entry examinations at the academy.

You see the system in Hungary is that for two weeks you draw. Then your drawings are all...whatever you produced in two weeks is all in a pack. Then the teachers come around--in other words, instead of you choosing the teacher, the teacher chooses out of these drawings which students they want. I really was very fortunate because I had a choice between three or four teachers choosing me. In other words, they put their initial on it that if you want to, you can go to his class. So I went to a very, very wonderful painter. Csok was his name. He was my teacher for three and a half years at the academy. And after three and a half years--that was Academy of Fine Art and Teachers College and I didn't graduate--but after three and a half years they gave

me my grades and then I came out to United States. It was seven years after my mother came.

S: I wanted to ask you. Before you went to art school, was there a public school system that you went to for about eight years?

F: It's ten years. No eight years. Four years and actually the public system over there is it goes four years or six years. If you go to the six years, that means that you want to work afterwards. If you want to go to higher school like high school, then you go four years and another four years. And after the four years you go just like a high school, then you go to college or lyceum or anything higher--like, for instance, I did the academy. They made--I was the youngest at the academy by far--because usually they are eighteen years old. Well, I got there much, much sooner.

S: Did your grandmother and grandfather have other children besides your mother? Were there other aunts and uncles around at that time?

F: Oh yes, my auntie was at the house, but my uncle was, of course, grown up. He was an actor. And then my other aunt was an actress so--and my father, of course, who died. He was so young when he died. I have a very faint recollection of him. I have one photograph. When I remember him, he was always smiling. That's all I remember.

S: What I think was interesting was the first thing that you told me that you remember about your grandmother (means great-grandmother) I think it's interesting that the color of the hair and the texture and all was the first recollection you had.

F: That was my great-grandmother, that was the mother of the grandmother who raised me.

S: But color and texture were the first things you remember in your life.

F: Yes, yes. And it was smooth and so tight against the skull. It was just amazing.

S: But what an impression that made on you. But in spite of the problems and going hungry and all, at least you had some help and some recognition of your talent and some support. So in spite of hunger pains...

F: But you know when you fall into that, you're not really hungry. You're hungry, but you don't make a big deal out of it because that's the natural state. But before this, before the hunger, I remember, of course being in my grandma's kitchen I learned everything--how she does everything. Only

one thing I hated. Of course, there was no such thing as frozen food and she always bought the chicken or goose alive. And I had to assist her sometimes when she held the chicken and asked me to cut the throat--and I still remember--I still today don't eat chicken because of that. (laughs) It's so vivid. I still remember that. (shudders)

S: But that's what everybody did in those days. That's the way it was.

F: But you see, she cut her hand or something once. And here was my grandpa, my auntie, my grandma and myself--that was four people and she was a wonderful cook and when she cut her finger, for about a week I had to--that was in summertime--and I was elected to cook for the family. I went to the market and I bought...the only thing I refused was to cook chicken but outside of that I did everything. I made the bread and at that time I not only made it but took it down to have it baked and everything. So cooking was also...not that I was proud of that accomplishment, but it was no problem because I saw her doing everything.

The only thing I refused was to stuff the goose. You know, to produce large goose livers, both in Hungary and France and in Germany, they forcefully stuff corn into the goose. They hold it and the head comes up and they hold the mouth open and they just stuff it with corn and that's how they develop that large liver. A large goose liver is so big you know (measures six or eight inches) and then they have garlic all pushed into it and also sometimes almonds and then it's baked. And it's--that I don't like either. (laughs)

S: But at least the knowledge of cooking helped you over the years.

F: Oh, yes. I can still make about twenty different kinds of omelets. And potatoes I can make at least twenty different ways. So that's an accomplishment, I feel.

S: That's never lost. You were getting ready to tell me about coming to the United States.

F: Yes. Well, of course, my mother went to night school to learn English and she was sitting next to a German engineer.

S: And what city was she living in?

F: Chicago. And, anyway, the long story is that they got married. Herman Prinz was his name and he was a wonderful guy. He was a chess player, so when I finally came out later we were the only ones who really corresponded through this chess. I have to tell you about that. But to go back, anyway, she got married to Herman and then she brought us

out. By that time I was three and a half years at the academy.

So when I came out, I went to the Art Institute [Chicago] and they told me that the first year they don't give scholarships. I showed them my portfolio and told them that I have no means to pay, so they made an exception and I went to the Art Institute on a scholarship right away because otherwise I told them, "Thank you very much but I can't afford it." That was very nice.

And then I went around with my portfolio drawings looking for a job, because Herman was a very nice man, but I felt that I was too old to be supported by a strange man--to me he was. Anyway, I ran across a commercial art studio and, of course, that was right at the time of the big crash, the Depression, and art was the first thing that people cut out.

S: Of course.

F: But advertising was still necessary and still going on. So there was this advertising art studio where I met six people, six artists, and they were very nice. I couldn't speak with them; I couldn't speak one word of English, but somehow they liked my things and they were enthused about them. So they told me they'd give me a job, ten dollars a week. Now when I look back, I never did the ten dollars' worth of work, because what I did was...they let me be around and make drawings, but I always kept the drawings. But I got always ten dollars every week. Ten dollars was enough. I gave to my mother. I think she sneaked me back enough so that I could take the bus. (laughs)

S: Mothers usually try to do things like that.

F: But you know those six people became my friends until they died--over at least a good forty or fifty years. The last one just wrote to me last Christmas, but there were these six boys and they became my friends in Chicago and we were very close until little by little they passed away.

S: Did they stay in Chicago or did they spread around the mainland?

F: No, they all came from...Don Ruff was in Chicago, but he came from Omaha. Taylor Poore, he was my best friend, but he was from Oregon, Corvallis--I still remember. And Ed Boehmer, all of them were together and these six were friends all through these fifty years. It's really funny. It's not very interesting.

S: Yes, it is.

F: Well, anyway, little by little. That's sort of discouraging to me now that all of them--all but two out of the six are gone. And they're not much older than I--they were all at least four or five years older. But, you know, when you're old it makes that much more difference. Eighty or eighty-four somehow the years don't stretch--they are not as flexible.

S: Yes, twenty and twenty-four are something else. Eighty and eighty-four. Right.

F: And the older you get every year becomes a bonus.

S: And you remember the days when we thought forty was old, and fifty was old.

F: You know in this art school it was funny--Anna Olmacher was her name--she was girl who was born without her right arm but she was a wonderful artist with her left arm. She was about nineteen or twenty when I went to art school at fourteen. And I was madly in love with her. I worshipped her. And, you know, after working with the charcoal--that was one thing--I could wash her hand because she couldn't wash it herself. I still have drawings that she gave me when she said, "I give this dream." She was engaged to a very nice young guy and one of the drawings that she gave me she said, "I have a drawing of a dream of someone else and I give it to this cute little boy--or give it to Joe--because he loves the dream et cetera, et cetera." And I don't know, it was a pity and an admiration kind of combined.

About six or seven years ago when Alice and I went to Budapest, we met her. You see she was nineteen when I left Hungary and she was seventy-three when I saw her. We met her. And she didn't hardly change. She didn't get married to that young man. The young man married somebody else. He went to Berlin and married a dancer. But she was the chief curator emeritus at the national museum in Hungary. Matter of fact, she sent me one of her books that she wrote about the history of Hungarian painting. And you know, it was amazing, I recognized her right away and her face was hardly changed--except her hair--her dark brown hair became snow white and her hair was also slicked back with a bunch in the back. But anyway, that was really an experience seeing her again, but also it was an experience to

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S: We have you still in Chicago working, right around the time of the Depression. We dropped off when you were talking about your six good friends.

F: Oh yes, yes. Well, then actually the very first time after I came, I met some people and they were--even, in spite

of the Depression--they were very well off. And I was making portraits and one thing led to another. In other words, from word of mouth I got busy. I still got my ten dollars from my friends every week, but then I had this additional income of a hundred dollars for a portrait--and that was a life-size portrait. Now at that time--of course, it wasn't really a very profitable thing, but at least it was steady--one after the other. I didn't like the portrait business, because people...in the first place, you have to satisfy not only one person. If there are five in the family, then you have to satisfy every one of them. Every one of them looked at the person that I painted from a different point of view.

And then there were two special cases where I remember. A Mr. C. H. Perry who owned a big factory of bathroom accessories. He sat for a portrait and he was a maniac about eyeglasses and he started out with some dark-rimmed eyeglasses and then it came a lighter rim, then it came a metal one and each time after the portrait was finished he brought the picture back to change the eyeglasses and I was still waiting for the hundred dollars (laughs) and I wondered how many more eyeglasses I would have to repaint. And then, of course, when you paint, the paint piles up and, of course, the original dark-rimmed glasses were much thicker than the later on--the metal ones. So I had to have some extensive reparation on the canvas. I had to scrape it off and then paint, but it was very difficult. And finally he came--that was the final one--where there was no rim on the glasses at all--just purely glass. So I really worked very hard and I almost ruined the whole painting because I had to scrape off all those rims which by that time were at least a quarter of an inch thick. So that was one.

The other one was Mrs. Comiss. Mrs. Comiss--her husband owned a department store in Chicago and they were very wealthy and very pretentious. And she sat for a portrait. She was an aging, very pretty, but very aging lady and after the picture was finally finished she acquired a new, an entirely different, dress--an evening dress. She wanted me to paint out the other dress to paint this new evening dress on. And, of course, it was in color completely different from the other so it would require to paint over--naturally it reacts--when you're in a red dress, your skin color becomes different than when you're in a blue dress. I remember it was a blue-green dress and when I painted the blue-green on it, then she became all of a sudden just the wrong color. So that required to paint over the whole portrait. And it was still for a hundred dollars. So I really worked for my hundred dollars.

S: So you earned every penny of it.

F: Then I went up to--somebody, some relation of one of these clients--who went up in the summer to Charlevoix,

Michigan. So I went up there to paint a portrait and that was a very pleasant change going from Chicago to Charlevoix. And it was a very adventuresome summer because that's when I discovered apple pie. You see, that was the apple season in Michigan and they had in this--Fountain City Hall was the name of the hotel where the clientele came from all over Texas and Arizona and from everywhere for people who had hay fever, so you could hear sneezes all over the place. But that really didn't bother me. But the most momentous thing that summer was the apple pie. When I discovered it, I had apple three times a day--morning, noon and night.

S: With or without ice cream?

F: Without ice cream. In the meantime I did paint that one portrait, which as I remember, was without any incident. The only interesting thing--you see, Charlevoix, Michigan was the place--I don't know if you remember that big case of the Loeb and Leopold. Well, Loeb's family had a big house over there and I happened--this little girl whose portrait I painted was a good friend of these Loeb's so I had a chance to see. At that time, it was a very famous case. Clarence Darrow was in on it. But, anyway, I had a chance, through portrait painting, to see Michigan. That was the only time I was up there--Mackinac Island. It's a very beautiful country.

S: Yes, the lakes and all--it's beautiful. Now where did you learn English? You said at the beginning...

F: Well, I learned after I arrived. That was interesting when I arrived--I spoke Italian--and as it happened when I came, I arrived from New York in the Illinois Central Railroad Station. As I came out there was a cab and I had my mother's address and the cab driver was an Italian so that was an interesting thing. I mean I was very relieved because I could speak to him and he was kind of surprised that I came from the old country. So we got along very nicely.

The only thing that startled me was that my mother never told me that in Chicago everybody is black. You see it comes--the Illinois Central Railroad is on the south side of the Loop--of the downtown--so when we came out we headed--she lived in Jackson Park so we went through the south side and everybody was black. Not only the people, but the policemen, every thing. So I just didn't know--how that she didn't mention it and how I will live in a place where everybody is black. I had never seen a black person before in my whole life.

S: Oh, really!

F: No. So that was the first time I see, and that was very startling. I just didn't know what's happening, and finally

when I got through this section and in Jackson Park there was that isolated place--there were still no blacks. So I thought the majority of people are blacks in Chicago, but there are a few white people.

S: There were a few haoles.

F: Yes. And then it started out the way I learned English. In the first place, the talking picture. The movie was still fifteen cents, I remember. In the afternoon it was ten cents and at night it was fifteen cents. And talking picture was very helpful. And also Andy Gump and Gasoline Alley--they are the ones where I learned English--from the funnies because I could see what they were talking about and that's how I learned English.

S: But you didn't go to night school as your mother had?

F: No, never did. And for two years I got along with either German or Italian. In Chicago, you know you could get, I asked, in desperation, I asked a policeman in German and he just answered me in German. He wasn't even surprised. And in downtown there was an old gent sitting on a bench and I didn't have a watch so I asked him, "Bitte schon, wie viel Uhr ist es?" and he just took out his... and said, "Halb nach eins," you know, just like as it would be in Germany. So I got along.

But among my friends, I couldn't understand one word what they said. Little by little--at that time--you see that was prohibition and I didn't drink in Hungary. As it happens, everybody in Hungary drinks wine with their food, but I didn't like wine--I never did--so I just never drink anything. But here, all my friends were drinking and then they always asked me to come to the whoopee party. And whoopee party to me--I thought whoopee party sounded like something very, very immoral.

S: Obscene.

F: Yes. Whoopee--that word--whoopee to me was just...and another thing in connection with this--I'd seen women standing waiting for the bus and smoking. And that's another thing, you know after I learned that not everybody is black in Chicago, but then I discovered that, my gosh, they're full of prostitutes because only prostitutes smoke in Hungary on the streets. And here they are all over. And early morning. I never realized that. (laughs) So my first impressions were not quite accurate. But little by little, I learned.

S: Did you end up going to any of the whoopee parties with them then?

F: Yes, yes, and I was really horrified because these young --McVicker and Ed Boehmer were just newly married--and here McVicker's wife--I was of course so much younger than they--I was eighteen at that time and they were much older--they were about twenty-two. So I remember at one place where McVicker's wife--she was drunk--she sat in my lap and embraced me and, my gosh, I was sober as a judge and I was just terrified, horrified--what will he think? Because as far as I was concerned, those things are not done. But little by little, I learned what's being done. My God, that was really an interesting introduction to American life.

S: Chicago of all cities.

F: Yes, but Chicago was really a very exciting place to me. You know, then during the Depression sometimes I had two jobs. I needed some money. Oh, by the way, I needed some money, so I needed a job where I made a little money. And at that time things got really bad. I mean people were rummaging in garbage cans and things like that and I was looking for a job. And finally I got a job being a designer in a Berkey-Garry-Stalk Corporation. They were out in Cicero and they were decorating movies and churches. And my job was to design ceilings and cut out of stencil paper stencils of different colors that the painters can just put up and paint. Well, I had that job, but then things were so bad that they let everybody go. There was no business, no decorating.

So they asked me if I want--the only job that I could have was to paint these architectural ladders--they were eighteen-foot large ladders--a whole mountain of them. They had to be put away, but before they were put away they had to be painted to preserve them. Anyway, I got I think--I don't know how much money I got--about twenty-five dollars a week or something like that. There was a tremendous garage--all the trucks were gone out of it. There was only this big mountain of ladders and about a dozen large five-gallon cans of green paint. And, you know, these horses--well, I'm supposed to climb up and take one down from the top--first one side then the other side, all by myself, and then take it over on the horse and paint it green and then turn it over and paint green on the other side. That's what I did for three months until all this mountain...and I hated that green. It was a typical kitchen green, you know, it was just sickening. Even if it had been violet, it wouldn't have been a pleasure. And in the meantime, these big rats were just walking around. That was my job for three months. I had an obligation to Europe and that's why I needed that money. So that was one job that I had. I finally finished it and worked myself out of a job. Once those ladders were painted then my services were not needed.

Then another friend of mine--they were renovating on Carl Street in Chicago--that's the near north side--some old brown buildings. You know...

S: Brownstones?

F: Yes, they were making studios out of them. Anyway, they looked at my portfolio of art and said, "Well, that's fine, but we don't have any art work. Did you ever do any carpentry?" I said, "Of course." The only thing I ever did in carpentry was to stretch a canvas to paint on, but I knew what a hammer was. My first job was--I got two dollars a day as a scab carpenter. And my first job was to climb up on the ladder--and from the ladder--two by fours they were putting up on the ceiling--in other words, hammering two by fours like this (demonstrates upward hammering) in this old building and all the guck comes into your eyes. And that's what I did for a little while. But I could not stand it. In the first place, you know to balance myself on this ladder and then to hammer like this when you're not used to it. So that was another job which I did.

And then, what happened? Oh, I know, that's when I came out--no, I got a job at A. B. Dick Company to do mimeographs and I was there for five years. The A. B. Dick Mimeograph Company. I was in the department of development where they tried out the different styluses and the stencils and things like that. I was there for five years and that's when I thought that I had enough and I was going to go out to Tahiti. That's how I came to Hawaii. Because I was going out to Tahiti with Don Ruff. We decided that we would go to Tahiti. We would be like...

S: Van Gogh.

F: Gauguin. Anyway, we finally came out to San Francisco and it was on the sixteenth or seventeenth of the month. We realized that every fifteenth there is a freight boat goes to Tahiti from San Francisco, but we just missed it. Well, we were so anxious to go somewhere, you know, to travel and we met an old friend of Don's who was with the American Newspaper Union who furnished articles for the various newspapers in the United States. But anyway, he was telling us about a place in Kalapana, in Hawaii, which is just like the South Seas--very primitive, no white man and all that. So we decided to come to Hawaii.

S: Do you remember what year this was? Was it the late thirties?

F: Nineteen thirty-four--that's when I was in Kalapana. And we came out and we stayed four days in Honolulu, then we took the Hualalai which was a cattle boat going from here to Kona--no, to Hilo--because we didn't go to Kona--we went to

Kona later on. We went to Hilo and we met a man by the name of Gabriel Pea, who was the unofficial mayor of Kalapana, and we went out with him and we got a little shack. I have a picture of it and I have some paintings that I did at that time.

Anyway, we stayed there for about eight months, but after six months Don, who was really a typical midwestern German-Irish, said, "This place, as far as I'm concerned, is just a bunch of niggers. There's no difference." And he up and left, and left me over there by myself.

S: Did he go back to Chicago?

F: No, he went to Japan and around the world--all the way--and visiting--later on I found out that everywhere he went--including Egypt and Italy and France and the Riviera--he always visited the American bars all over the world. He tasted the cocktails everywhere. Anyway, I stuck into Kalapana and I was there by myself.

Matter of fact, you know, Don had the attitude--he was a wonderful guy, but he was just a little bit twisted--he had the attitude that the Hawaiians recognized, because one day I remember when I came out later than he did, they told me, "Hey, Joe, your haole friend went that way." They never took me for a haole. Of course, I was darker--I have photographs--I was darker than the Hawaiians because I became absolutely dark. And Don was red-haired with blue eyes with freckles--so typical haole. So to them he was "your haole friend went that way."

S: Well, how did you support yourself? I mean what did you use for money all this time over there?

F: Well, before I left A. B. Dick Company I sold on subscription thirty paintings. I remember I had altogether \$800. Out of the \$800 I bought my ticket back and whatever left over to live. But I was here more than fourteen months. But at that time--and in Kalapana you couldn't spend your money. The only thing was I paid ten dollars a month for my house. So...(laughs)

S: So you were a rich tourist was what you were.

F: So by the time I got home--oh, I was absolutely broke before I left and I wrote back to Edison Dick, who was president of A. B. Dick Company, and he sent me by wire a hundred dollars right away. And you know when I got back--oh, I had an experience in Canada going back--because my ticket was to go to San Francisco and from San Francisco on the Canadian Pacific up to Victoria and then through there--that was already paid for. It was Golden--Golden is a watering station in the Rockies--and then down through

Minneapolis to Chicago. And by the time I arrived I had to rush up and ask my mother enough money to pay for the cab, because I couldn't pay the cab.

S: Well, when you were living in Chicago and working, did you live with your mother or did you have your own place or what?

F: Of course I had my own place because I got married. You see I went back to Hungary--that's another thing.

S: See we didn't cover that part yet.

F: You see, I went to school with her--to art school. We were very good friends--we weren't in love with each other--but we went to school together and during these bad times in Hungary with the hunger and everything else, they were very nice to me. And she was my friend and I could not see--here I am eating--and I knew that she was back starving, so I told her that I would come back in two years. That's how I got the job painting the green ladders. I was forced to because the two years were coming close, so I was desperate to make some extra money. Then we got married and she came out. We were still very good friends, but for two years we didn't even see each other. I knew then that it wasn't enough to get married--our relationship--but I gave my word, so I went through.

S: And this way she came to this country and became an American citizen.

F: So anyway, now I lost my...

S: Well, we got you back to Chicago where you had to borrow cabfare from your mother.

F: Oh yes, yes. Then I opened--oh, that was very interesting. I went back and Edison Dick--he liked what I was doing all the time--he had a real appreciation of art and he thought always that I wasn't exactly the right man to do mimeographs. So he suggested--he said, "If you want to open up a free-lance studio, the A. B. Dick Company will give you the same amount what you would make here but give you only half a day's work, so that the other half day you can build up a free-lance business." And he said, "If any time you get in difficulty paying the rent or anything, just let me know." So he's the one, who by himself, suggested and set me up as a free-lance studio.

And I had a beautiful little studio at the Diana Court building, 646 North Michigan, and I had my mimeograph--he gave me the mimeograph machine and everything else. And I had the half a day working for him, but he paid me as much as if I would be working over there all day. And then I built

up a free-lance business. And I did that--that developed into--I went over to 333 North Michigan on the thirty-fourth floor. By that time, it was after five years of being on Diana Court--with one of the boys that I first met when I came to America--Taylor Poore. He and Ed Boehmer--the three of us rented that studio on top of 333 and we were there for seven years. Finally, Taylor left and Ed Boehmer left and I was there by myself. And that's when I came out to Hawaii.

S: Well, when you made the first trip, when you came out of San Francisco with Ruff on the first trip, did you think that you would ever want to come back?

F: Oh yes, by the time I got back--I didn't want to go back but I had obligations and I had to go back. You see, I didn't have any money, but I had my job at A. B. Dick and I had all the paintings to pay for my trip. In other words, I gave all these people--they were all very--I remember I got thirty dollars for an oil painting. I had a bundle this big--rolled up--watercolors. And I paid--everybody was satisfied--very happy with the paintings. I sure would like to see them now--what I did there--but they're scattered all over. I don't know who has what. I never kept track. If only I had known to make at least photographs of them, but I never made any photographs.

S: No, you don't think that far ahead when you're doing that. But I can imagine coming back from Hawaii and hitting Lake Michigan in the middle of the winter.

F: Oh, I was so happy in Kalapana and also in Kailua, but then when I went back--I waited for ten years--and by that time I was known. And United asked me to come on their inaugural trip to make sketches to record their trip to Hawaii and then I came out--it was in 1946 when United first came out and I made ten watercolors for Patterson [William A. Patterson, the Hawaii-born president of United Airlines] and then he published that and United Airlines gave that as a Christmas present to executives.

Anyway, while I was here I visited the Academy [Honolulu Academy of Arts] and they asked me at that time would I come back to teach. So it was in 1946. Would I come back? (laughs) So that's when I up and packed and came out. And that was in 1947 and I've been with the Academy since then.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

March 1, 1986

S: I was wondering about--the day you got the money and you went back home the very day that came--I was wondering did Fritz ever pay you back the money that he owed you?

F: Oh yes, about three months later I got the money. But then I had an occasion to see him later on that trip when I was looking for my aunt. I stopped in Vienna. Matter of fact, we knew that this aunt was in Saarbrücken so I went over there and I went to some other cities looking for her because as I went she also changed her mind. You see, she was demented--she must have had--she was in the change of life and it affected her mind and she had this complex that somebody wanted to kill her, so she was going from one city to the other to escape.

S: This was the aunt who--was she an actress or a musician?

F: She was a musician. She was an actress when she was young and then she became--she was a wonderful pianist--she became the conductor of this small orchestra. But see, she had this persecution complex, which later on I learned sometimes happens when menopause comes around. Anyway, I went as far as Strasbourg and, in the meantime, she was writing back postcards to Budapest so it was kind of a--there was not enough time to really communicate between--I mean it's not like today and we didn't telegraph because I had to let them know my address in the first place. So by the time the letter came back or I received any notice, she was gone. So finally, I got a notice--my grandmother let me know that she was in Vienna in a hospital. So I went back to Vienna and I saw her.

S: And how old were you at this time?

F: I was seventeen. But I was small for my age. I wanted to take her home, but because I wasn't a grown-up they didn't let me have her. At that time--in the meantime--I did contact Fritz--Fritz's house--because that was the first chance I had to talk to him--and, oh my gosh, they lived in a beautiful large--almost palace--and they entertained me and everything else, but of course, I wasn't in the mood of jubilation. So I went back, and my uncle had to come and get my aunt to take back.

When she came back, I don't know if I told you, it was kind of a trying experience because she stayed with, of course, my grandmother but she had no faith in--she didn't trust anybody except me, and I had to taste in front of her all the food that my grandmother made. She even suspected her. So that was a horrible experience. I was always very fond of her and she was always nice to me ever since I was a child. So that's the time when I saw Fritz and he thought nothing of it, you know. He didn't think that anybody ever would need any money because he always had.

S: To him it was such a small amount that he couldn't imagine....

F: To me that was everything that I had. You know, if you have even ten dollars and you don't have anything else in the world, then ten dollars is your fortune.

S: Back to perspective again.

F: That's right. And I never told him what happened, because I didn't want to make him feel bad. But the other thing is, when I first came out from Europe and I met--after seven years--met my mother again and got acquainted with my brother who was four years old when he came to the United States--so he was really eleven years old and couldn't speak a word of Hungarian, and a word of German either. He was speaking English because he went to English schools. And my stepfather spoke English, so they could communicate. But my mother, who was hard of hearing, had a hard time to talk anything else but Hungarian and even Hungarian you had to yell for her to understand it. So I was really the only one--and, of course, my other brother who came with me spoke only Hungarian, so in this household nobody could speak to anybody. (laughs)

S: You needed a middleman all the time. (laughs)

F: I was the only one who--of course, I couldn't speak a word of English--but at least I could speak to my stepfather, so we became kind of an isolated couple ourselves because we were the only ones who could really converse.

And then the second bond was that he liked to play chess and we didn't have to speak when we were playing chess, and so every night--sometimes until four o'clock in the morning--we were just playing chess all the time. And we became very, very close friends. He was a wonderful man. So that was really an international kind of family, I'll tell you. And there is proof that people don't need a language to really live together.

S: Sometimes they're better off without it.

F: Yes, that's right. There were no arguments. I remember I was chasing my little brother who I couldn't speak to, but he did certain things, so that's the only--physical control could really communicate what I felt about him.

S: And he got that message.

F: Oh yes, yes. He was a city slicker, a real American boy. And my other brother who was very chauvinistically Hungarian--he never--he learned English, but he always worked among Hungarians. He sought out Hungarian machine shop

because he was a tool and die maker. So he worked in a factory in Chicago where everybody was Hungarian. Because iron workers, you find so many of them. So he never really became Americanized to the point where..., but he felt comfortable because he was in a Hungarian neighborhood.

S: But so many of the big cities--your big industrial cities--at that time they had all these ethnic cliques. I'm from Pittsburgh, and it was the same thing there.

F: Well, the biggest Hungarian population outside of Budapest at that time was Cleveland, Ohio, because there were all the iron workers. And in Indiana--Gary, Indiana--there were streets where all the store signs were all in Hungarian. But I got into an entirely different environment, so I was forced to learn English. Although for two years I couldn't understand when I went with my friends; I never knew what they were talking about.

S: What was your younger brother's name?

F: He was George. He's still in Chicago. He finally married a little Irish girl who was dancing in a nightclub. And she turned out to be--she's a wonderful little girl. She's an ex-nightclub dancer.

S: And the brother who came over with you then?

F: He, of course, was the tool and die maker. And then finally he was a tool and die maker in a Ford factory making micrometers and he married a Hungarian, of course, a Hungarian little peasant girl and they bought--at one point they bought a farm in Michigan and because he was so mechanically minded he bought this--he had a few little pigs and two cows--some things like that. It was a very small farm, but he electrified the farm. He put in more money--mechanically that farm functioned just like a most modern large area, but of course, that all costs--he ate up all the profit and he just couldn't make it, so he had to go back to being a tool and die maker. And he had five sons--they were waiting for a little girl, but it never came. Five sons. He lives now by himself in San Diego. But one of his sons is a mathematics professor at the university over there. And all the five boys turned out very well.

S: And what is the name of this brother in San Diego?

F: That's Steve.

S: Steve. But you were the only artist out of....

F: Oh yes, yes. I didn't fit in. (laughs) I was really the malcontent of the family.

S: Thank goodness for grandma.

F: Yes, yes. But you see my grandma had a distant cousin--I don't know--grandma's sister's son--we had a lot of actors and actresses in our family and also school teachers, but no artists. But this one person, my grandma's sister's son who painted--he was an amateur painter. He didn't amount to anything because he used the painting just as an excuse not to work, but he didn't accomplish very much.

But anyway, when I came back--to get to the chess playing--we used to play--that really brought us close together and that was really a regular routine. I haven't played chess since. When he passed away--the poor thing--he got leukemia and within three months he went down from one hundred eighty pounds--he was a big man--he was ninety-three pounds when he died.

He gave himself to experiment at that time because in Passavant Hospital in Chicago they were experimenting and trying to find some solution, some cure for leukemia. And even today--I think there is something now. But at that time they pumped him full of penicillin and everything else, but in three months he was gone.

S: I don't think they've cured leukemia yet, but it seems to me that they can lengthen your life. There's some type of remission there.

F: There's a new--I will tell you about this friend of mine who is going through this Boston experiment. This is a brand new hope for curing cancer--cancer of any kind, but it's a very embryonic stage. You have to have a certain--they have such a small, limited facility for this--because it's an expensive process--so you have to really qualify and have to be a certain type even to be experimented on. So he's one of the subjects.

S: I guess they would have very stringent guidelines to conduct this.

F: They take your white blood cells out of your body and combine it with something else and put it back--these white cells into your body. Just imagine what a complicated--first place, to live through the process. But this is supposed to reduce the growth and the tumors--destroy the tumors. He just went and just came back. It was too cold for the process of taking the blood cells out of him. So he has to go back again. He was there for four weeks, but he has to go back when the weather gets warmer so they can continue experimentation.

S: Well, now we'll talk about something more cheerful. Like your moving to Hawaii, all right?

F: There was Don Ruff--one of the friends--he hailed from Omaha, Nebraska, and he was a wonderful fellow, but he was kind of a typical American--Scotch-Irish-German extraction, pink skin, red hair, blue eyes, green freckles and he and I were very good friends. So we decided to go to Tahiti. And, of course...

S: Yes, we covered that.

F: So finally we came to Hawaii. We arrived in Hawaii and we stayed four days in Honolulu, but Honolulu seemed very busy at that time. And that was in 1934 compared to now--that was really the quietest and smallest town you've ever seen. But we were waiting for Tahiti and we were comparing everything to Tahiti.

S: Did you ever make it to Tahiti?

F: Later on. Much later on. Anyway we went on the Hualalai to Hilo and we met Pea and then we went--he drove us out and got us this house in Kalapana and next door was Father Everest. Anyway, Father Everest was a Belgian priest. [Reverend Everest Gielen SS. CC.] I think I told you about him.

S: No, we didn't go into anything on the tape about him.

F: Anyway, he was a wonderful guy. Don, after he realized that the Hawaiians were not what he thought was the South Seas Islands--he compared them to the south side of Chicago and he left me alone in Kalapana--and because of Father Everest I really loved it over there. Father Everest was a good friend. He was the one who was painting the church. [Father Everest painted the interior of Kalapana's Catholic Church with religious scenes using ordinary housepaint] We took trips around the Island and we stopped in various places Napuu, Honaunau and all the places where these painted churches are--all originated by the Belgians. There were five Belgian priests who came here after the first World War.

Anyway, after that I had obligations in Chicago so finally I had to go back. But I was as black as any Hawaiian--matter of fact, even darker. There was an interesting incident going back. Of course, I had a ticket; I was completely broke by that time and needed some money to sustain me going back to Chicago because I had a very slow ticket.

S: Yes, wasn't this where you wrote to Mr. Dick for a hundred dollars?

F: Yes. Well, anyway, I had a ticket on the Canadian Pacific Railroad and I went up to Victoria--I don't know if I mentioned this. I was so innocent about this--it was the first time. On the other hand, I was not only innocent, but I guess it was ignorance, but I thought that I had entry anywhere. I mean I never felt any limitations of any kind. So I took a cab and I was looking for a hotel. Did I tell you that?

S: No.

F: Well, that was in Victoria which is a beautiful island. Real British. And I told him to take me to a small hotel and this taxi driver went on and, finally, we came to a very nice little building--a very pretty building, full of ivy, and iron doorway and I asked him, "Is that a hotel?" And he said, "I think it is. Some kind of a hotel place." So I said, "All right," and I got out. And I went to the door.

I had a little misgivings because the doorway, you know, there was this wrought iron grillwork and besides that there was a glass and then some lace curtains. It looked a little too elegant to me to be a cheap hotel. And I rang the bell. In the first place, it was locked. And the door opened and a gentleman came with--I remember it was the first time I'd seen--he was immaculately dressed and he had a monocle and he looked at me like not, "Who is it?" but "What is it?" (laughs) And I told him, "I am tired and I would like a room and bath." And he was just stunned. And he said, "Please come in."

And he looked around and didn't see any.... So I was there--it was kind of the border of Victoria. So he let me in and I didn't ask him how much it cost. At that point I had fifteen dollars in my pocket. And he said, "All right." He wrote my name down and took me up to the first floor, and the door opened and here it was very elegant--antiques, antique furniture, lace curtains and I--but I still didn't--I thought that's the way it is in Canada.

So later on there was a young man who came, Jeffrey, who worked in the summers at this particular place--otherwise he was a university student in Ottawa. But anyway, he explained to me that this is a home for retired British judges, and it's by no means a hotel and his uncle just didn't have the heart to send me away (laughs) because I had told him that I was tired, and they would like to meet me later on.

And I went down with Jeffrey--Jeffrey became a very good friend later--and here it was the manager--I forgot his name--I never knew it--he had a portrait in his living room, which was very elegant, by Romney--painted by Romney, eighteenth, nineteenth century English painter [George Romney 1734-1802] and he had antiques and art work all around.

Anyway, Jeffrey asked me would I give him the pleasure to go out with him because he wants to buy me a dinner, and he took me to a nice restaurant.

And the next morning Jeffrey took me to Emily Carr. Emily Carr was--she's passed away, of course, a long time ago--but she was the poet and painter of that region of Canada, a very famous person. She was very gracious. She was very old. She was a woman who--since then in Canada there is a museum, the Emily Carr Museum [the Vancouver Art Gallery houses an Emily Carr collection]--and her publications, her poetry, is taught in schools and everything else. And so I just fell into this. And she told me--she showed me--she lived with her paintings--she kept hundreds of paintings in that house where she lived and she was showing me.

She was the one who went up by herself in her younger days to the Queen Charlotte and King Edward Islands where there were reminiscences of the plague which killed off whole Indian villages. And the skeletons were still all around. And she was telling me stories of when she came and they left her there with some provisions and she stayed and she painted in these mysterious places including--she was telling me this story of some hundreds of cats on this island that were always following her. And she stayed there for weeks in this--all by herself--she was that kind of a woman. And she wrote her poetry and she painted her paintings. She was a terrific person. Anyway, I met her and saw her paintings. Jeffrey I heard later on--the last thing I got from him was a postcard from London during the war--he was an RAF flyer--then later on I have never heard from him.

Anyway, that was the story about Victoria. Then I finally got away, and got the railroad back to Chicago.

S: Did you just stay one night there or two?

F: No, I was there for three or four days. And of course, when I asked them what I owed, they said, "Nothing." They were very honored that I was their guest. I tell you, they were such nice people. They were just wonderful.

S: You've had quite a few instances of running into nice people like that.

F: Yes. I told you about the Italian doctor, and that cab driver in New York. I mean just out of nowhere people wanted to help and not only wanted to, but did help. So that's why when I can be helpful, I always--I am helpful. I try to do my best. I don't like to be taken advantage of, but when I see a real need, I'll do anything.

S: Well, that's what it's all about in the final analysis, isn't it? Well, I think we're pretty well caught up by now. At the end of the last tape we just had you invited back to Hawaii by the Academy and you were telling me that you moved over in 1947. It took you a while to get back here, but you made it.

F: Nineteen forty-six.

S: Well, you came over to do the airline sketches in 1946, but then you moved over in 1947.

F: Well, then I was only an instructor. I was teaching for several years. I always designed also the publications. The first commercial job, because you know the Academy didn't pay very much. I don't know if I should put this on the tape or not, but the Academy never could pay fabulous salaries because it was a nonprofit organization. And the nonprofit went that anybody who worked for it, he didn't have any profit. But I still had my free-lance designing I did for Chicago. For several years I still was doing work for the Chicago Tribune, Abbott Laboratories and Eli Lilly, and several other companies.

S: These were the people you had worked for when you were free-lancing in Chicago?

F: So I continued, and I picked up a few little things like--matter of fact, Dole Pineapple Company--that was a big job--Dole Pineapple Company had a big map of the Islands, a pictorial map and--but I did not get the assignment from Hawaii. I got it from Philadelphia from the agency because they knew that I was in Hawaii. So anyway it was very handy that I had all the research facilities around here. And that was a successful, but a very big job. They printed 300,000 of these big charts and distributed them all over, which also Pan American Airways used as a promotion for Hawaii. Anyway, that was one.

The symphony hour--that was another. At that time the [Hawaiian] Electric Company had a symphony hour program every month. So for four years or so I did every month a cover for them representing some musical composition. And what else? And, of course, in the meantime, I did have the Chicago Tribune weekly public service ads for them. But my main jobs were for Abbott Laboratories and Eli Lilly Company. But all that just enabled me to paint on weekends.

And I had some painting assignments also. In other words, United Airlines--four times I went all over the whole circle and I did four of their illustrated calendars. And also did some posters for them. And I did some portraits. But all that was to enable me to live up to my obligations.

And in the meantime, of course, I enjoyed teaching very much.

S: That's what I wanted to ask you about--the teaching part.

F: Well, my teaching schedule was pretty heavy. It was twenty-four hours a week actual teaching which means each one with the proper preparation. I taught a design class for three years, and then I taught basic drawing, advanced drawing, basic painting and advanced painting and landscape painting. Then later on I taught an art history survey course, and what else--among other things visual arts. That's about all, but that was enough.

S: About your teaching. About your classes. Now how many students did you have? Were they limited to small classes primarily?

F: Well, the average class was seventeen or eighteen.

S: Oh, that's a pretty good-sized class.

F: Oh, yes. It couldn't be any more. You see, when you have--in the first place the rooms were not--and when you have a painting class--seventeen people--that means seventeen easels. Well, if you put seventeen easels next to each other, you know, it's a lot of easels. So the average was--matter of fact, we always had to have a limitation. Sixteen was the limit, but we always allowed one extra so the average class was seventeen.

S: Well, what type of students did you have? Were these people who painted as a hobby? Did you have various ages? Did you have people who painted seriously?

F: No, the program was for high school students who wanted to have professional art training. It was a three-year course. But these students were not university material and they didn't want any degree; they wanted to be really artists. They have now some art courses at the Academy, but that is only ten weeks. And it's open to anybody--mostly ladies who have nothing else to do. Some of them very good; some of them just to occupy themselves.

But this was a very--in other words, we gave certificates and our students after the three years went to the mainland and either joined some university--they were accredited--Chicago University and also Pratt Institute [Brooklyn, New York]--or any other school. In other words, they got credit for this.

S: That's what I was trying to find out as opposed to just a hobby-type thing--this was more intense and so forth.

F: Now it's really a hobby school. But it's only ten weeks and it repeats every ten weeks. But at that time you had to sign up and also we were accredited by the Department of Education. In other words, it was just like any other--I don't know what classification you would call it--but it was an accredited school. And that was discontinued.

You see, when the the Academy started this art school--this program--that was in 1947 when all the veterans came back from Italy--the 442nd [the 442nd Regimental Combat Team]. It started out really as a school for the 442nd veterans, because the University [of Hawaii] had a very limited art department. Then later on the University built up its art department, and Chaminade College had an art department and also the Church College [now Brigham Young University] had an art department. So little by little the facilities were built up, so that we were not really needed anymore. It was preferred by students, serious students, from Japan and Hong Kong. We had many and from Korea--a lot of foreign students. And, of course, we were recognized by the Veterans Administration--that was really the original function.

But three years ago--all the other schools now offer facilities for people who want to learn how to be an artist--so the Academy discontinued that program because we were losing, not very much, but still \$15,000 or \$20,000 a year, because the tuition was so nominal and local boys couldn't afford any more--so it was discontinued. So I feel like I am graduated from teaching.

S: But you enjoyed it while you did it?

F: Yes, but altogether I taught about forty-two years, because I was teaching in Chicago, too. So I think that's enough for anybody.

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

F: Well, when I think about it, of course, I always had a need to paint and that was always--it's a very selfish kind of a--I always thought that it was only for me and it was a luxury. On the other hand, I took obligations and responsibilities very seriously, and I had to get those things out of the way before I could relax and enjoy my idleness. My idleness was to do whatever I want and it wasn't exactly not to do anything, but to do what I--paint or carve or do something or read.

Matter of fact, even today if I don't accomplish something, I feel guilty. I feel guilty if I just--not to do

something. That's not very good because you should be able to have a balance--at least an appreciation for the free time. But on the other hand, when you don't do anything, it doesn't mean anything to me. But anyway I am at the point where--I still enjoy my job at the Academy. And what I am doing ever since, as I said, graduated from teaching, I became--because I got to be older they made me senior curator. I am the oldest at the Academy, so I don't take that title very seriously because I feel that it's only a matter of time, not of personal achievement.

So anyway I am grateful for the time that I am given--that I get. But now I organize exhibitions. Every month, one exhibition. I take care of--besides being "senior" so-called in quotes "senior" curator, I am also curator of graphic arts which means drawings, prints and watercolors and pastels; any art work which is on paper I have to take care of.

That taking care of--what it means is to find opportunities to expose it on a monthly exhibition so that--to display at least a small portion of it and maintain a changing exhibition program. I have it now planned until 1989. I don't know, matter of fact, the other day I scheduled somebody for January, 1990. But (laughs) that was with tongue in cheek, because I doubt if I'll be over there by that time. But I will leave my files in order so that anybody who comes can follow up.

S: Now are these local artists we're talking about or international?

F: No, these are artists from all over the world; some local, some from our collection because the whole graphic arts gallery is really an opportunity to display some of the collections of the Academy. Otherwise, here would be 14,000 prints just in drawers forever and nobody ever sees them. So there are--and I try to keep an interesting program--seventeenth century one month, and then maybe a contemporary next month, and maybe then go back again to nineteenth century American. It's a varied program.

S: To give an exposure of all the holdings of the Academy on a rotating basis...

F: ...would take a hundred years because the collection is growing constantly. For instance, last year we got at least over 500 prints--500 items--which people donate to the Academy. And that comes in every year, more and more and more.

S: For example, like the James Michener. Does that come under...?

F: No, no. James Michener is a different thing. That's under Howard Link who is the curator for Asian art. No, I am only concerned with Western art. But the Ackerman Foundation, for instance, we got tremendous amount of contemporary British and American prints from them in the last three years, every year. And then there is a very nice, wealthy lawyer in Los Angeles who visited here not long--about four or five years ago--and I just happened to meet him and he came up to my office and we were talking. And since then, he sends at least fifty to seventy prints to the Academy every year, every year.

So that accumulates and all these prints have to be properly catalogued and put away with safety; in other words, it has to be protected with nonacid paper, et cetera. So this is one thing. Second thing, outside of the exhibitions, I design all of the publications and, not only design it, but also produce it. In other words, all the productions, I do.

And then I'm also available for outside--not only institutions, but also private, public--to inquiries--not to value but the expertizing of any art on paper. I get calls of course, many calls about value, but the Academy by law can't evaluate or anything because it would be against--it would be kind of awkward. When we receive gifts, the valuation has to be done by somebody else on the outside and proven, because the IRS--we could do a lot of harm. We could take a mediocre value and boost it up because he happens to be a friend, so that's against the law. But as far as identifying....

S: Authenticity?

F: Yes, authentication and identification--that's my function. Well, anyway, this is about it and, of course, the waste of time--I hope George Ellis doesn't hear this--but to me the waste of time is these meetings. (laughs) That I really don't see any...well, I suppose because I am reluctant and I am against meetings, I don't put myself out. When I go to a meeting, I can hardly wait until I can get away. I mean, that's the only thing that's on my mind; I can't concentrate on the current problem. But that's about all that I do at the Academy nowadays. But I enjoy it.

And I start every morning--usually I'm there at six-thirty in the morning. And everybody starts at eight until four--well, because I get there at six-thirty I always feel I have the right, well, I leave there at a quarter to four and that saves me from getting into an accident when I get on to the highway.

S: You do beat the rush hour--definitely in the morning.

F: But it's getting so now--that it used to be at six o'clock or five after six when I start here, there used to be practically no cars, but now everybody got the idea. So it's getting so that the way it used to be at seven-thirty that's the way it is at six-thirty. So I guess I have to get up a little bit earlier.

S: And leave the Academy at three-thirty.

F: Yes, well, just as well. But it's so wonderful--the early hours when there is no telephone. The only exception--people from the mainland call up the Academy and they don't know what time it is over here. So at seven o'clock I get calls. I have the kind of a phone that I can pick up the calls which come in and, of course, they're asking for the director or somebody else. Very seldom are they asking for me, but I act occasionally as a telephone operator and I tell them that it's too early yet.

S: I can't understand why they haven't figured out on the mainland yet--this happens all the time.

F: Well, at seven o'clock all these calls come. And at times I can answer, but many times it's a person-to-person thing and then they just have to call back or I leave a message and let them call back. Well, that's about all that's here, but otherwise life seems to be getting faster and faster and life is getting shorter and shorter also, as far as I'm concerned.

Just lately, have you--maybe we shouldn't--have you ever read Life After Life by Moody [Dr. Raymond A. Moody]?

S: No, I'm familiar with the book, but I haven't read it.

F: Well, it's not that I am--it's Shirley MacLaine.

S: Oh, yes, reincarnation--I've read Shirley MacLaine's.

F: Matter of fact, I enjoyed her first book [Don't Fall Off The Mountain] the best, I think, because she's not obsessed yet with these ideas. But she really is a very lively and anxious lady who--and very much alive and very brave and a little bit kooky, but...(laughs)

S: That's fine.

F: Yes, in other words, she is really an individual. By the way, she writes about her father [Ira O. Beaty, high school principal in Richmond and Arlington, Virginia] in the first book. Well, Selden Washington, assistant director of the Academy, is from Virginia and he was a student of Shirley

MacLaine's father, so it's kind of interesting. And Selden Washington is a typical Virginia gentleman. I have never seen anybody in my life who is so typically and so genuinely gentle and--he's a little old-fashioned and a little bit slow, but delightfully old-fashioned. Matter of fact, sometimes you can't believe it--you think that he's kidding--but he's genuine. He comes from Virginia.

S: Well, her parents, between Shirley and Warren, they certainly had two offbeat children.

F: Yes, yes, but the father must have been quite a character. And Selden Washington is a direct descendant of George Washington. He's white. You know, he was complaining to me, he gets calls always from blacks whose names are also Washington.

S: Well, isn't the mayor of Chicago now--isn't he Washington? [Harold Washington, the first black mayor of Chicago.]

F: Yes, yes, that's right. But they are always--you see, George was kind of ambidextrous and he had many friends.

S: Like, let's see, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. (laughter) That was quite a crowd.

F: But anyway, Selden is quite a person.

S: But you were referring to the book Life After Life, too.

F: And I'm reading it now and it's interesting. It gives you a certain direction even if you're not convinced. But I have no definite negative feelings about this whole thing--these experiences. It is rather, I believe that this Dr. Moody is an honest man and it's--after all, the similarities between these experiences--it is really curious that would be, that why that would be. And the fear of death--when you think about it, there is really nothing to fear about death. I am against pain; I don't like pain, but if it's a painless thing--well, it's over, it's over. You know, Peter Sellers when he related that experience when he had this accident, he went through exactly the same kind of thing and this tunnel...

S: And the light.

F: And toward the light. So why would that repeat and repeat? I am sure that all those people.... There must be something to it.

S: What's fascinating I think are the out-of-body when the spirit's floating and they're aware of the body.

F: He said that, too. So I don't know. It couldn't be a conspiracy.

S: No, I don't think that all these people could get together and work that out. No.

F: It's very interesting. Well, anyway, that's...but you know when I had that very serious operation last year--when was it? Two years ago--and when the doctor--my doctor was so shaken when he discovered that large tumor that he couldn't speak. He just came and sort of squeezed my hand and walked away. And I said, "Is there anything?" And he said, "Yes." "What?" He said, "A malignant tumor." And you know, it's a funny thing--I didn't feel any shock and even when I thought it over--well, that's it, that's it. I was so surprised at myself because I never thought of death as something which I would accept so easily. I thought nothing of it. So he said, "Well, we have to set up next week an operation."

And then I went back to work and they asked me, "Well, what happened?" And I said, "Well, they found a tumor, a malignant tumor." I think they were more shocked than I was.

S: But you know, that's similar to what you said when you were young and in Italy and the hunger pains and you said you know you're hungry, but you accept it because it's a natural state, so again on a much different scale, that was the state that was and you were accepting it.

F: Yes, but that was different because everybody was in the same boat. In other words, nobody had...

S: No, I meant when you were in Italy and you didn't have any money and you were down to your last penny and you said the hunger pains--and that was the way it was and you accepted it.

F: Oh yes, that's right, that's true. So, and oh, it was--I was very glad--it was a few anxious days when after the operation they sent the stuff to the mainland for the lymph nodes. You don't know what's going to happen. Then afterwards the doctor came, "Everything's fine. No effect on the lymph nodes." I was already--I certainly thought that was the next step.

S: You had resigned yourself to it.

F: And then, so it was really... I don't think it's very interesting, but it was interesting to me when after the operation that here comes a real glamorous blonde and she comes and says, "I'm Dr. So-and-So and I'm going to take your

staples out." I said, "You're kidding. You look like a high school kid." "No, I'm a doctor." And proceeded--and I couldn't get over it. I tell you, she was just like a kid. And besides, she was a real glamorous blonde with her locks of hair--blonde. She's a doctor! I couldn't believe it.

S: I know what you mean. I had to go into the emergency room for what is known as a felon and there was this young bearded fellow with blue jeans and a tee shirt and he could have been my son but he wasn't; he was the doctor who was going to take care of me. A lot of things have changed, but that's all right.

F: Just like this little girl. She was younger than Tira--maybe not, maybe the same age as Tira, but Tira is just--to me--she's just...

S: ...a kid.

F: Same thing with the eye doctor. Same thing. I went to Faulkner [George D. Faulkner, M.D.]. You know, Faulkner is my doctor, but Faulkner now only operates on cataracts and the examination is done by these little youngsters. And she came with a nurse and examined and tells about--just like a high school kid. And somehow I don't know why--I can't help it--but I don't have the real confidence.... Maybe they're just as good or even better than some old fool.

S: I like to tell myself that these young ones coming out have acquired so much more knowledge and they're up to date and they have all this sophisticated machinery to back them up, so I can trust them. You just mentioned your daughters very casually. Why don't you tell me something about them.

F: Well, I have two of them. That's Tira [Mrs. Paul Simpson] over there; the oldest one when she was very young. And that's Nesta [Mrs. Myron Kealamakia]. Tira is the paralegal. I think I told you she was trained as a therapist for crippled children and then she was working in this hospital in Colorado so much--she had forty-three children to take care of as a house mother--in other words, their education, their recreation and everything else. So she doesn't want to have anything to do with children now.

S: You said your daughter was on her third career. That's Tira?

F: Yes, she is the one. But Nesta--the little one up there--she is in her first career and she is a mother. She was very talented as an artist, but she doesn't have chance--she was teaching these kids and producing them. Finally she put her foot down and that's all. Her husband wanted to have seven kids, but after three she said, "No more." And she

raises chickens, and they have two cows which is with the herd of the father-in-law.

S: Where does she live now?

F: In Kamuela.

S: Oh.

F: The father-in-law has a big ranch with lots of cows and they have two of them with the ranch. But anyway she has--the smallest one now out of three children--the smallest one is, I think, is two years old, and the little girl is four, and the little boy is going to be six. Every two years. And the husband was gauging these children according to how much vegetables they can grow in the backyard. (laughter) I tell you he is a maniac, but a good husband. Not exactly a genius; just a good, honest Mormon who takes care of his family and takes himself very seriously. And it's fine. And Nesta is very happy.

S: That's what counts.

F: And the little boy is six years old and reads very well by now because Nesta started to teach him when he was four and they're all going to be good Mormons and they all know the Book of Mormons. They have only one misgiving; that we are not Mormons so that after they die we are not going to be together. (laughs)

S: Well, that may resolve itself. And where does your other daughter live?

F: Tira's here in Honolulu. She's a paralegal.

S: Oh, you said she'd been in Colorado. But she came back here?

F: Yes, she went to school in Colorado and was working over there. So she's now doing very well.

S: She's not married?

F: Yes, she's married. She has a very nice boy. I like him. I warned him before--I feel sorry for him because Tira is a real smart cookie and very headstrong. And he is such a nice guy, I hope--but he's bigger. (laughs) But I think he can handle her with kind of a glove--you know, with kid gloves. And he's a very gentle person, but very smart. And he works at night--he's a computer expert or something, and in the daytime he goes to the University. He's taking this business course. So they both are very busy. They get together Sundays; they see each other.

S: But at least you get to see the grandchildren sometimes.

F: Yes, Nesta comes bringing all three of them over here, and they are just wonderful kids. They all look pure Japanese, but I got used to them. (laughs)

S: Well, when you live in Hawaii. (laughs)

F: I tell you, but isn't it funny that Tira looked like a pure Japanese baby when she was born? Now you would never think of her looking anything like Japanese. In other words, she's grown out of it. And Nesta is taken for a little Hawaiian girl all the time. She was working--Nesta is still working at this Mauna Lani hotel as a--what is it? You know, the guard in the swimming...

S: Oh, a lifeguard.

F: Yes, she's a lifeguard. She was a lifeguard at the Mauna Kea Beach hotel, too. She's an excellent swimmer and she looks Hawaiian, and people from California photographed her as a typical Hawaiian girl and all that. (laughs)

S: There are some things we just don't bother trying to explain to the tourists as long as they're happy.

F: And, of course, Alice is really something else. After the girls left, Alice was kind of loose around the house--she really didn't....

S: I know the feeling.

F: So then she went and learned to be a registered practical nurse. After she got her diploma--she graduated with A against twenty-year old kids--then she was working for two years at Kapiolani Hospital, but because of her nature they really gave her the dirtiest jobs; a shift from eleven to seven and all that kind of thing. She was the newcomer so they...and she was always very accommodating.

And then this other job came up. Now she's registrar in this high school. Seems to me the teachers and the students and everybody call up here all the time for anything wrong because the director of the school--she's a very accomplished--she's a teacher at the University Teachers College and she's the director of the school, but she's kind of a--she's a very neurotic person. So everybody with their problems instead of going to her, they go to Alice because Alice always tries not to get excited; she's even and helpful. So that's it.

And now, I don't know, I really would like to spend a few more years at home instead of going to the Academy. I

would miss it, but on the other hand, I have so much to do. So one of these days soon I think I'm going to retire.

S: In quotes, because what you'll be doing will be working on the mahogany and--you will be working--but you explained the difference. What you will be doing is working but doing exactly what you want to do.

F: Do you know that I have an order now--here this exhibit [Genesis] is not finished yet--I mean I still have to hustle. They put me up on 1987--January, yes, the end of January--to open up with an exhibition of the Hawaiian creation chant in pictures. Kumulipo. I didn't even think about it yet and I already have the exhibit on the docket. I don't think I will--matter of fact, I try to figure out how can I do it by working and how can I reach the deadline because I figure at least twenty paintings to have scenes out of Kumulipo.

It's a wonderful story. I'm familiar with many aspects of it, but of course, I just have to digest it over again and come to some kind of a unity of--you know, having a story like this presented visually--it's not a small thing.

S: No, I think it would be a little more extensive than Genesis. I mean Genesis is pretty cut and dry and we all know.

F: Yes, it's only seven days, but Kumulipo is much more complicated. It's the same thing, but it's in a complicated way. Because, you know, it's funny--the birth goddess' name is Papa--just the opposite--when I heard it it was kind of funny--why not Mama?--but it is Papa. And Wakea is the father and through their communication the result was the birth of the islands.

The islands were born physically like a child out of Papa who came on the surface of the earth. In other words, she was the source. It's a wonderful concept, you know, the source of the energy--the volcano and everything else--because that's the way it actually happened. It came from the depths up to the surface. And then it involves the god Maui and all the other gods, so it's really Hawaiian mythology. It should be very interesting and fortunately I'm not unfamiliar with it.

S: But it's still going to involve a lot of work.

F: Oh, yes. I don't know--that pushes many things away that I wanted to do. But I will do that first--get it out of the way so that I can get to the things that I really want to do. I don't know what will happen when the last time comes. I don't think I ever will be finished.

S: No, no.

F: You know, just recently I read somewhere somebody asked an artist, "When do you know that your painting is finished?" He said, "I never finish a painting: I abandon it." And that's the way it is. Because, my God, you give me another year and I could work on these seven paintings and constantly--because there's always more to see and more to do on it and you never finish it.

S: So it's a good thing that somebody imposes deadlines on you for something like that because you could go on.

F: You know, my teacher way back--I still remember--he said, "There's two people necessary to finish a painting: a painter and a man with a hammer who hits him on the head when it's finished." (laughs) And that is really so.

Who was it? Paul Klee [1879-1940]--he was a wonderful violin player. His studio was in Switzerland and he had his little paintings--he never painted very large ones--these little paintings all the way around on various easels and in the center he liked to sit down and would play the violin and then he was looking around and, every once in a while, he'd put down the violin and he'd put a dot on, a line or something and then he went back. And sometimes for two years, some of these paintings were on these easels and he was living with them. In other words, he constantly fashioned them and caressed them and modified them. And that really is wonderful. Unfortunately, I can't play the violin, but I can play the mandolin. (laughs)

S: Yes, but if you go at it like that you could--if something strikes you, you could go around on a daily basis changing everything. You could do a hundred paintings and then spend the rest of your life in the room going around.

F: That would be a wonderful experience because whatever you did--you see, when you paint something inside of you conducts you to do a certain visual image--to create a visual image--and then sometimes you don't have time to enjoy that. I mean it comes out of nowhere and life is so busy that actually you should be able to have the benefit of enjoyment of whatever you did. But most people just work and somehow they don't have time to enjoy what they did. They just have to sell it or--in other words, they get it out of the way and go to something else.

A more leisurely kind of life would be--that's why I think the real wealthy who have--I don't know, of course, they aren't creative--that's the trouble--but they have time to enjoy other people's creativeness. But the creative person sometimes doesn't have a chance to enjoy their own creativeness.

S: No, because they're busy creating all the time.

F: Yes, yes, that's right. So I don't know how it will be in the future. I mean what will involve in this life? It would be interesting to know what will be two hundred years from now. Well, according to Dr. Moody, maybe we will see it.

S: We could, we could.

F: You see, that's why I would like that. Now--is it all gone? My gosh, you have a lot of useless information on that.

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 2

Mrs. Tira Feher Simpson died in a jet ski accident at Maunalua Bay, Honolulu, on Sunday, June 29, 1986.

Joseph Feher died June 8, 1987.

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THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Watumull Foundation Oral History Project began in June of 1971. During the following seventeen months eighty-eight people were taped. These tapes were transcribed but had not been put in final form when the project was suspended at the end of 1972.

In 1979 the project was reactivated and the long process of proofing, final typing and binding began. On the fortieth anniversary of the Watumull Foundation in 1982 the completed histories were delivered to the three repositories.

As the value of these interviews was realized, it was decided to add to the collection. In November of 1985 Alice Sinesky was engaged to interview and edit thirty-three histories that have been recorded to mark the forty-fifth anniversary of the Foundation.

The subjects for the interviews are chosen from all walks of life and are people who are part of and have contributed to the history of Hawaii.

The final transcripts, on acid-free Permalife bond paper and individually Velo-bound, are deposited and are available to scholars and historians at the Hawaii State Archives, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii and the Cooke Library at Punahou School. The tapes are sealed and are not available.

August 1987