PREFACE

This memoir is the result of a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted for the Oral History Project of the Fashion Industries by Mr. Robert L. Green with Mr. Henry Callahan in New York City on June 10, 1980.

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

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I: This is Robert L. Green. I am hosting and interviewing Henry Callahan as part of the oral history program for the archives at the Fashion Institute of Technology. In all fields there are names that pop up as the names that you symbolically associate immediately with that particular field. An example would be in dance, say ballet, Nijinsky; in modern dance, Martha Graham; in architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright; in aviation, Charles Lindbergh; and in the field of display as it is popularly known, or visual merchandising as it's more academically referred to, the name is Henry Callahan. Henry is an old friend and we go back a long way professionally, and it's always been fascinating to see how his talent keeps evolving, keeps popping up in various ways, in various directions. But one of the interesting things about Henry, although there's been a great deal written about him and much of what he's done has been publicized, there isn't a great deal known about how this man came into this whole world of effective creative activity --in other words, not a lot of profiles about the personal man. So we're going to start first,
Henry, if we may, with that inevitable question: tell me a little about your parents.

N: Can I go back really to the beginning, in other words, my aunt and my mother came to the United States from Ireland in the late 1880's. They were both trained as needle women in Ireland by the nuns, and they were exceptional. They came to Pittsburgh first, they started to do private dressmaking, and then one of their clients moved to Philadelphia, marrying a rich man, and suggested the sisters come there. Their name was Dougherty. They started a dressmaking business that was immediately very successful among the most distinguished people of the city. They sent for more girls, more cousins, more greenhorns, as they called them in those days, to assist them. The first thing you know they had one of the largest private dressmaking businesses in Philadelphia.

My aunt was the front gal. She was a very strong, a very, very unusual woman. Very comparable to a person like Diana Vreeland today. Very outspoken, very sure of herself, and one of those people who absorbed "chic," and an understanding of fashion just out of the air you might say. She would go to Europe every year, and go to Paris and stay at the Maurice Hotel and have the couturières bring their models to her, believe it or not. Then she would buy the silks and the laces and trimmings and bring the models back to Philadelphia, show them at a Fall opening.

My mother was the supervisor of all the workrooms. She was a very shy, very quiet young woman, whereas my aunt was a formidable person.
At one particular point my mother and my father met. My mother was convinced to go to California to join my father, and I was born in California. But, the marriage was not a success in any way. My mother couldn't find any clients in her business, and she had had a terrible fight with her sister in leaving her.

I: What did your father do?

N: My father was a very simple man. My father at that particular point, believe it or not, was one of the early male nurses. He was a male nurse in one of the hospitals. He was a very shy—much younger than my mother, a young "greenhorn" lad, a lonely man from Ireland, and my mother was a lonely woman of forty when she met him. So it was kind of a romantic interlude in their lives. I've always felt that I was a love child. My father left home, and my mother was left stranded in California. She came back to her sister in Philadelphia and I was brought up by these two women.

I was "teethed" on spools. ... I was really brought up in their workrooms, and I can remember all the sewing machines whirling around. They had about thirty-five dressmakers and about fourteen tailors working. I remember all the pins and needles, and I remember the First World War, and I remember dressing my teddy bear as a wounded soldier, and putting bandages on it. I was very confused about my identity at the time, and I remember one of the workroom girls made me a cape and I pretended I was a Red Cross nurse taking care of the wounded.

I: What year were you born, Henry?

N: I was born in 1913. So I can really remember the last gasps of private dressmaking, which really went down the drain when World War I was declared;
because at that time, there was a shortage of uniforms, and Philadelphia being the Quarter Master Corps headquarters of the Army, they needed uniforms immediately. So they sent out an SOS to every able-bodied person who could run a sewing machine, quadrupled their salaries, and overnight all the fourteen or fifteen great private dressmaking establishments in Philadelphia were out of business. That was the end of private dressmaking. My mother was very delicate and she had to have an operation, a hysterectomy. I, at that time, didn't know what it was, and she didn't know how I was going to be taken care of.

One of her customers was on the Board of Directors of a very fine, a very distinguished private academy in Philadelphia called Waldron, and she asked the nuns if they would take care of me for the summer. Well, then began an association with that school where I became a boarding pupil.

I: How old were you when you first entered the school?

N: Six years old. I stayed there just during the wintertime. I would be with my mother during the summer. I was more or less brought up by these unusual nuns, who really had tremendous, tremendous feeling of elegance. Their habits had trains and they had great ceremonies in the chapels and they dressed up all the statues and they made crowns of flowers for them on their feast days. I was brought up in an atmosphere of fantasy and drama that really, really influenced me greatly. I remember there was a sitting room in the convent, and one of the nuns came from a very distinguished family, and the family gave the furniture that had been made for their family in Paris to the nuns. It was all gold, and every now and then we could open the door and say, "Gee, look at the gold furniture!"

So it's all given me kind of a touch, between that and the ceremonies and
the altars, for a lot of (distorted sound) colorful ceremonials that I was able to more or less work into my career as it got along the way.

I: How long did you stay at the school?

N: I stayed there until I was twelve. In other words, that was my primary school and I went to a public school after that. I wanted to be an artist. . . . My family thought it was a little bit -- well, it was kind of wrong for a boy, for an Irish boy, to be an artist, because you drew naked women, you know. It was considered a little bit sinful. My mother wanted me to be a teacher or a writer. However, she encouraged me, and I had a natural feeling for art all during school even though -- since it was a boys' academy we weren't supposed to draw. We were only allowed to draw on rainy days. Drawing was really for the girls school. It wasn't considered right for a boy to be an artist, even among that group.

However, I persisted. I was drawing on the blackboards, and I was putting on plays for the kids and everything like that. Then when I went to high school I got involved with the drama group in school; and then I became associated with a marvelous free art school in Philadelphia called The Graphic Sketch Club, financed by the Fleischer Foundation. It's now called the Fleischer Memorial. I used to go there three nights a week, and it was an oasis of charm for me. It was something so special. It was a beautiful old church that had been completely redecorated inside with marvelous Gothic antiques very much like the Cloisters in New York. You could go to any studio and you were never questioned what medium you wanted to use. You could go into the classes at any time, and that's where I really learned to think in terms of -- or be encouraged to be -- an artist.
When I was graduated from high school I had hoped to go to college, but my mother fell down the stairs and broke her hip, and I had to go to work immediately. I went to live with my aunt in the center of Philadelphia, and I realized that I had to find some kind of a job. I wanted to be a commercial artist, so one of the alumni from our high school was the art director of Strawbridge's in Philadelphia. His name was Paul Segue. I thought, "I'm going in to see him because I think I can do the ads." I had been doing all the art work for our school yearbook -- all the pages and borders and things like that -- and I had specialized in lettering. I had taught myself all this. So I copied some ads in wash--like a toaster and an electric fan--and I took them in to him, and of course he must have smiled at my amateurishness. He said, "Well, I think you have some talent and I will try to find a job for you." So I got a job as the "washer-upper" and delivery boy of an art service. My hours were from four o'clock in the afternoon to eleven-thirty at night. I had to sweep up for the artist and wash the brushes out, and deliver all the drawings to the engravers. But luckily I had eyes in the back of my head and I watched how they did the drawings; and in six months I had learned to be a shoe artist, and had learned to be a letterer, and I apprenticed myself to one of the better shoe artists in Philadelphia. I left the art service and worked with him for free. But I was able to go out and get some accounts of my own. So at the age of seventeen, I was peddling my drawings . . .

I: Of shoes?
N: Of shoes, to the various department stores.
I: This was of ladies shoes?

N: Ladies shoes, yes. One of the art directors who took interest in me was with a firm called Allen's; they had two stores, one in Germantown and one in downtown Philadelphia. She gave me work and I had things going pretty well. I didn't get much money for the drawings but I was working. In June she said, "Henry, I'm not going to have any work for the summer and I'd hate to have you give up your art, but we have a job in our display department, in Germantown. Since you do lettering maybe you could do the window signs for them. Why don't you take that for this summer and then come back to your art in the fall?"

Well, I stayed in the field. I got so fascinated with working in the store and dressing mannequins and fiddling around, getting to know all the people, and doing signs and being able to do drawings and backgrounds for the windows, that this led to an opportunity with Bonwit Teller in Philadelphia, where I became "artist" at age eighteen, for the display department. At that time Bonwit Teller was the prestige store of Philadelphia. I remember when I got the job that I was so excited about getting it that I forgot to ask what the salary was.

A lady friend of mine—and we're still great friends—asked me, "Now how much money are you getting?" and I said, "Oh I think I'm going to be getting $25 a week." I had been making $9 a week at the other job. She said, "Well, you better go back and find out how much you're going to be paid." When I went back they told me they were going to pay me $12 a week. But I was so afraid that I was going to lose the job by complaining, and since Bonwit Teller was a prestige thing, I just decided to take the job.

There I learned by watching them decorating windows and dressing mannequins and arranging accessories. Then there was an opening with a firm called B.F. Dewees, and I went there as the assistant display manager, at
the huge salary of $35 a week.

I: Now how much time passed between the . . . ?

N: It was about a year.

I: You stayed at Bonwit Teller for a year?

N: In the meantime, I was taken down with rheumatic fever and I was very crippled for about a year; I had to walk on crutches and I had to overcome that. It was a big blow, but I went to Dewees and I worked with Dewees for about two years. And then I became display manager for a small shop called Lousol's, which was a fine specialty shop on Chestnut Street.

I: Can you spell Dewees and Lousol?

N: D-E-W-E-E-S, it was one of the fine old Quaker stores of Philadelphia. Lousol's was the combination of "Lou" and "Solo," the name of the owner: L-O-U-S-O-L, Lousol. That was a great experience because these were tough merchants who came up from South Street. They really taught me, at gut level, the appreciation of good merchandise. They had to compete with Bonwit Teller and the Blum Store, which were on Chestnut Street. All my life I had been around beautiful clothes—or the idea of beautiful clothing—through my aunt and my mother. I adored my aunt. Her stories of Paris, and her stories of clothes. Even though she went out of her custom business, she and I became great, great pals, and she often used to say to me, "Oh, isn't it too bad that I'm not still in business and you could come and work with me." She was quite something.

With Lousol's I really learned the importance of being in the stockroom, watching clothing coming in from the market, from the designers, putting it in the windows right away, and seeing it sell immediately. I learned this real
knowledge of merchandising fashion from these people, because they were really solid people.

I: You say, Henry, that you learned the real knowledge. But can you break that down a bit? What was it that you felt specifically that you learned?

N: I learned the enthusiasm of a buyer of merchandise. When they say, "Look at this beautiful dress," and they would point out the details on it that were interesting, and I would immediately be caught up in the same enthusiasm. I would say, "Gee, that's great. Let's put that in the window, and let's make that shirt look great, and let's make that collar look perky." They would talk about the details and they would talk about how Claire McCardell had shown it in the showroom, or the other designers like Nettie Rosenstein, people of that particular time.

I would have this enthusiasm in my heart when I'd be holding up the dress. I'd be figuring out how it could be shown to its best advantage, what type of a form should it be on, what type of accessories should be shown with it. So that even though the shop was competitive to John Wanamaker and the Blum Store, our windows had a tremendous amount of fashion knowledge about them. So I think I learned--it gave me the essence of fashion merchandising. It also taught me that since I had a very low budget to spend on windows, I had to learn how to make do and to make things myself. I learned how to use the hammer and the cut-awl and the saw and the paintbrush. Many times I'd work until four or five o'clock in the morning because I was so proud of my windows, and I was getting a wonderful reputation on Chestnut Street, and people were talking about my work.

I was very proud of being part of a fine store on a fine street. Does that answer that question?

I: Oh, absolutely. When you say that you were able to, for instance, show the skirt to the best advantage, or the collar to the best advantage, after it was pointed
out to you by the enthusiasm of the buyer, can you give me an example of how
you would show a skirt to its best advantage?

N: All right. That particular time was very much like the fashion era of 1980.
In other words, small waists and a fuller skirt. They were just coming in at
that particular time. We're talking now about 1935, and the Vionnet influence
was being dispelled, and there was a whole new thing of Mainbocher in Paris,
and Schiaparelli was big at the time; the mode was little waists, and doll hats
over one eye, and full skirts, like skating skirts. Well, I would exaggerate
those by putting tissue paper under them and make them big and wide, so they
were much wider than they really looked. I swirled them around—it's a kind of
technique that I originated, in my enthusiasm. I wanted them to be larger than
life, you might say. I could make a little inexpensive dress look like something
that was a lot more. . . . It was the beginning of, I think, one of the successful
techniques of my career, to make inexpensive clothes look terrific and thereby
sell a lot.

I: I like very much the term "larger than life" because one of the first things that
I ever learned in relationship to your work was that it always seemed to me
that what you were doing were wonderful moments of drama. When I looked at your
windows I always had the feeling that you had caught the mannequin in just the
moment of elation, of pride, of entering a room, of leaving a room, of celebrating,
and always the clothes looked as though they had a life that was supportive of
whatever message wanted to be sent.

N: Well, also, since we're digging into the past, during the twenties, there were
sections of the Sunday newspapers called the rotogravure section. It was
photographed in sepia, and photographs of special events were always in this
section. One of the greatest social events that intrigued me was when all the
Philadelphia debutantes were presented at court. There were photographs of them, whole pages of the new Philadelphia debutantes . . .

I: This is the British court?

N: The British court. And it was considered a great honor, of course. I was always fascinated because you'd see crowds of people trying to look inside the glass windows of the limousines waiting at Buckingham Palace, and you could see the girls in the back with their three feathers and presentation dresses. (distorted sound) So when I began to have the opportunity to work in a store that had fine merchandise and a fine presentation program, I tried to make the life in the window as fascinating as this—something that they could never be allowed to see, a private moment, but of great elegance; not just something that they would see everyday in their life, but something that was very, very special. You see, I'd had the experience through my family's background of knowing very distinguished people, how they lived. I used to deliver dresses for my mother to these grand homes, and I'd open the door to all these marvelous salons with luxurious draperies, and butlers would take the box and the woman would say, "Oh, yes, come on in Henry and let me see if this dress is right," and I would be ushered into her boudoir. I would see how really, really distinguished women looked. I wanted to always reinterpret that in whatever work I was doing in terms of the fashion world.

I: Which is essentially what the theater does, you see. The theater opens up for us worlds that we know nothing about.

N: Well, you see, at the time when I was starting out in display, everything was very much influenced by the Bauhaus. The window backgrounds were white with chrome bands, the mannequins were studied, they were done with a very cubistic
quality, made in Paris. The whole thing was very, very stark and very simplified. I wanted to bring realism and the theater into windows in the worst way. I didn't like those stiff mannequins, and I didn't like the severity of the background. I wanted to reflect life and I was constantly trying to do it. It wasn't until later, until I was able to go a little further on in my career, where I had the opportunity to do that. But I think that was my great contribution: bringing total luxury theater into that world behind the glass.

I: Of course, one of the wonderful things about being able to do that is to work with people within the store organization that understand that if you heighten and whet the appetite of the average person, they may be attracted to come into your store to just have the experience of looking, but that always leads to some buying.

N: Well, I often used to walk along Chestnut Street with my aunt at night, and we would go from store to store, and she would always fill in what I wasn't seeing in the windows. She would say, "Well, that dress would look very well on So-and-so, and she'll wear that to a great soiree." And she was always telling me stories about the lifestyle of customers, which she understood, and that's what made her business so successful.

I realized at a certain point that I needed New York experience to be successful. I applied for the job as display manager at Bonwit Teller in New York, and when I went to see the placement agency that had the job advertised, they said, "Look, you're just a kid. You're wet behind the ears." Well, I was twenty-one years old, but I thought I was pretty terrific, and she said, "You've got to have New York experience, or nobody's going to touch you."

So I went back to Philadelphia to plan my new life. One of the sales ladies from a firm called Dazian's, which is still in existence—we used to buy
theatrical fabric from her—I talked my problem over with her and she said, "Well, Henry, I'll keep my eye out, and maybe there might be something. Where would you like to work?" I said, "Well, I love the ads of Lord and Taylor. I think there's something marvelous about that store. Their ads are just sensational." Since I was still the artist in my mind—a commercial artist—I was very impressed with that because I used to buy The New York Times every Sunday; and also in Women's Wear Daily they would always talk about the different things that were going on at Lord and Taylor's, and it seemed like an interesting store.

One day she called me and said, "I think they have a job open at Lord and Taylor. Would you be willing to come over and interview?" I remember the night I told my mother—I was living back with her at that particular time. She had been back from the hospital and she was doing okay. There was a scene between my mother and myself that was straight out of a drama of Sarah Bernhardt: "Are you thinking of going to Sodom and Gomorrah?" The more she rankled against New York the more I wanted to go.

I: Were you an only child?

N: Oh, yes.

I: I see.

N: And I was brought up totally by women. That's the unique thing about it. But I went to New York, and I was interviewed for the job by an assistant to Dorothy Shaver. Dorothy Shaver was then vice-president of Lord and Taylor.

I: The year was?

N: The year was 1936.

I: You were being interviewed by the assistant vice-president.
She said, "Now, Mr. Callahan, you've got two strikes against you. One thing, you're Irish, and number two, you're from Philadelphia." That really rocked me. She said, "Well, can you give a demonstration of what you can do?" So they gave me a couple of mannequins and a corner at Lord and Taylor, and they gave me a girl to go around and get some accessories and said, "Okay, you dress those mannequins." I remember at that time black and beige was the big scene from Paris--this was in September, it was a new rage from Paris. So I went and selected black cloth coats and beige hats, and did the whole thing: dressed the mannequins in one corner and made a little arrangement of sticks, or something like that, to drape the accessories on--and they thought that was okay. So they decided they would allow me to join the staff of Lord and Taylor.

I: Let's go back, just for a moment. When she said, "You've got two strikes against you, that you're Irish and from Philadelphia," did she define what being Irish had to do with it?

N: I knew exactly what she meant because this was very "Philadelphia" too. At that particular time, unless you were French or English you were considered not to have any sense of style. Remember, this was just after the Depression and there were many fashion coordinators in the stores. At that particular time, Willa Cushman defined the fashion coordinator as a young woman who had a black dress, pearls, a John Fredrick's hat, and a British accent. So it was very snob, and I knew this. I remember going back and discussing this with my aunt. I was going to change my name--I was going to change it to Henry Emmet, and she said, "If you're going to take that job in New York, you just go there and make the name Henry Callahan mean something, or just tell those people to go to grass."

However, it was the attitude of that particular time. You had to be a very
special kind of person.

I: When you did that first group—the two mannequins, the sample that you were asked to give them—tell me a little about your feeling at that time.

N: Well, I was naturally very nervous about the whole thing, because Philadelphia and New York just seem miles apart. But I was amazed that our fashion trend in Philadelphia was every bit as good as New York's; so I knew which were the good fitted coats and which were the right hats.

I: Now, how did you know, Henry?

N: Because I had been brought up in the essence of fashion from the time I was born.

I: When you talk about the influence of style . . .

N: I had followed Vogue and Harper's Bazaar magazines.

I: All right, in other words . . .

N: I bought those magazines like kids buy comic books; it was part of my life and I had had not only four or five years background by that time in retailing, but also the whole lifetime before. I had been reading fashion books all my life, like kids use comic books—even cutting out the pages and making dolls out of them, and dressing statues of the Virgin Mary in little church cloaks and things like that. I mean "dressing up" was just part of my life. It was no trouble for me to pick the smartest coats from the stock and go to the hat department—and I remember having a terrible argument with the buyer. She said, "Those hats have just come in from Sally Victor, and I don't want them to get dirty, now if they get dirty. . . ." I thought, "That tough broad!" That was my first experience with tough New York buyers, but I realized I had to get this job done. They gave me another assignment. They said, "This isn't quite enough. You have to spend another day." It's kind of funny because the display director had very little to say about this situation; it was the fashion department really deciding whether or not I'd be there as an
assistant, or just as a trimmer, as they called them in those days.

He said, "Now, where are you going to stay tonight?" I said, "Well, I don't know." He said, "Well, the YMCA is at 5 West 63rd, and it's not expensive, why don't you stay there. Do you know how to get there?" I said, "Oh sure I know how to get there. 5 West 63rd, that's just off Fifth Avenue, everybody knows that." So I took the bus right up Fifth Avenue and I got off at 63rd Street and I saw this great big brick building and I said, "Gee it's a good looking Y, it looks just like a castle." So I ran up to the door with my suitcase and I opened the door and I said, "Can I have a room please!" The man said, "What are you doing here, this is the armory! Get out of here!" It was the armory! I had to go all the way across Central Park to the West Side, but I thought, "I've got a lot to learn."

The next day they asked me to decorate a glass case. They had glass display cases in stores in those days. Walk-in glass cases in the interior of the stores. In the coat department there was a glass case with headless dummies with coats on them. It was almost like it was in a museum. So, since this case was empty, I said, "Well, I'll decorate that case." I went to the stockroom and I selected three royal blue coats trimmed with black Persian lamb, and I put them in the case. I got some chairs out of the fitting room and made a nice little graceful setup, and all of a sudden I could hear this tirade going on in the stockroom. The buyer—who I didn't know—said, "There's some kid up here putting the same coats in that case that have been in there for a month, and I want them out of there! And here he comes along and puts them right back. What's going on around here!" (laughter) But anyway, I was able to show them that I could decorate a case. So I got the job and I started to work at Lord and Taylor.

I: What was your starting salary?
My starting salary was $45 a week, which was exactly what I was making as display manager of Louisol's. But I had to support my mother in Philadelphia, so I had to send half my salary home; and I'll tell you, it was really rough. But the funny thing is, Robert, with my first salary, there was a--believe it or not--a markdown sale at Lord and Taylor on white tie and tails.

I: That was your association with . . .

So, for I think $25 I was able to get an entire outfit, with a folding opera hat. So I had it in a box, and one of the assistant buyers—who kind of befriended me—said, "What did you buy?" I said, "White tie and tails," and she said, "What for?" I said, "Well, I don't know—I thought white tie and tails were the answer to everything." And she said, "Do you know any girls in New York?" and I said, "No," and she said, "Open the box and try it on." So I tried the coat on and she said, "Not bad at all—would you like to meet some nice girls in New York?" I said, "Oh, yes," and she said, "Okay."

So she called Mrs. Tappan of Tappan and Tew, and I was put on what they call the dance lads list, and I got invitations to all the debutante parties. And here I was without a penny in my pocket, waltzing Brenda Frazier around, and Marion Oates, Edith Gould, and all the debs of that particular time. But, you see, this was a desire for knowledge. I wasn't looking for social éclat. I was looking to find out how the people with money dressed for galas. And it was quite an experience.

I: Were you influenced by motion pictures? That was the great, marvelous high point of the Hollywood film world.

I was more influenced by Vogue and Harper's and the life of the fashionable people, rather than Hollywood. In other words, I always put Hollywood on a
different level completely. I was never as impressed with Adrian or with the movie stars, as most people were. I was impressed by Natasha Paley, by the beautiful photographs of Cecil Beaton, and all those wonderful people in New York. I used to stand outside the Metropolitan Opera House on opening nights and look at the people. I was interested in how the "top bananas" of the world looked and lived, rather than the movie people. I had them pegged; the same with theatre people. But real people fascinated me.

I: You saw the theatre and the drama in the real people.

N: Well, being in the world of make-believe, in display, you see, I put that all into my working point of view.

I: When did you first come in contact with the grand signora Dorothy Shaver?

N: She was kind of a legend at Lord and Taylor when I worked there, in the beginning. It was a while before I got to meet her. At that time there was a man called Mr. Perday as president. Suddenly there was a lot of excitement in the store one day, when we heard we were going to have a new president. All the girls were buzzing, they said, "He's absolutely heavenly looking, he's just a sensational man." And it was Walter Hoving. He came from Macy's, and he was announced as the president of Lord and Taylor. Of course we all wanted to see him. He was very clever because he got all the people from the advertising and the display department and the merchandising department together ... at once. He included us all together, and he had a meeting up in the store cafeteria. I'll never forget it: he stood up on the dais, and he was in a marvelous grey suit, and he looked like a movie star. He said, "Now, we're going to zero in on the nice people . . .

I: The nice people.

N: ... and if any of you have any doubts in your mind who the nice people are, we better part company very fast." And I'll tell you--it was really something--
we all found out who they were; they lived in the country, in Jersey (laughter), and in Long Island and all around. The perimeter of New York.

I: How did you depend on that? How did he define the nice people?

N: He just stated it—we had to figure that out. That was how brilliant he was. He didn't tell us, we had to figure by talking with one another. We got the message very fast: that it wasn't the showy people, it wasn't the uptown people, it was the nice people. He talked about lifestyle, understanding the lifestyle of those people; that we were going to have the kind of merchandise that they needed, and everything was going to be in the standard of good taste.

I: If you were asked to define the nice people, how would you define it now?

N: I would say they were the people who lived now, in today's world. . . . (pause)

I think that terminology has become totally obsolete for today.

I: Well, go back to the thirties . . .

N: I would say they were the people who were— the social register people, the people who were suburban people, family people. They weren't the nightclub crowd, in other words. They weren't the theatrical crowd; that was for Saks and for Bergdorf and for the uptown stores, the "crystal chandelier" stores, as Dorothy Shaver used to call them.

I: What income group?

N: I suppose it would be average. . . . The income wasn't important, it was the people who kind of wanted to look well dressed, within a framework of being attractive.

Then I began to get to know Dorothy Shaver a little bit better, because we worked very closely with her, she being vice-president in charge of advertising and display; we answered to her. We used to have a meeting once a month called
the Projection Council, which she was the head of. This consisted of the people from the advertising department and the display department and a few buyers, or a few imaginative people in the store. This was supposed to be the idea group of the store, where projects were submitted to this council. In other words, merchandising projects, certain parts of the store that needed promotion.

The ideas were more or less tabulated, and Dorothy Shaver would lead or chairman the meeting. And she would say, "Now we're going to discuss what can be done with the home furnishings division. They're going to have a whole new group of marvelous linens coming in, what should we do with these wonderful things? Should we do windows?"

And then we would all raise our hands and suggest ideas to be done with the merchandise. Certain people would do exhibitions, certain people would do interior display, and the art director would get excited and say, "I'll do a marvelous ad." So it was a sharing of ideas.

I: Like a think tank.

N: It was a think tank. At that particular point, I had been advanced to be assistant display director and also fashion coordinator of the display department. We gave a great deal of importance at Lord and Taylor to sportswear. At that time, Sally Kirkland had just left to go with Vogue, and she and a woman called Helene Maddock had just opened the first college shop. The first use of a type of men's sportswear for women, like tee shirts and sport jackets and kilts; it was a revolutionary time . . .

I: Sally Kirkland was running a shop?

N: No, Sally Kirkland had been the assistant fashion coordinator at Lord and Taylor, and she had been in charge of the college shop. That was one of her first assignments. She was one of the first American editors to be involved in putting together something she believed in. Dorothy Shaver was very clever.
about that, because it fit in with what Walter Hoving had said, "understanding lifestyle." They realized that college girls wanted to look something like the guys, casual like the guys rather than being dressed up in something kind of cutesy or juniorish. She was the first to get through all of that kind of Hollywood ra-ra stuff and get down to basics, and understand the lifestyle of certain colleges: Smith, Bryn Mawr, the Ivy League Women's colleges.

I: I'm trying to get through the secrets here. Did she come from magazine to Lord and Taylor?

N: No, she came from college to Lord and Taylor.

I: And then she went to the magazine.

N: And she went to Vogue after that. Lord and Taylor at that particular time was a mecca for idea people, idea-minded students from schools and colleges. It was getting a reputation because of the advertising being very special. They had a marvelous artist called Dorothy Hood—she was just starting at the time—and a marvelous art director called Harry Rodman. The ads were outstanding, they were the best ads in the United States, I think. Of course, there were many newspapers in those days—there was no television—and advertising, particularly Sunday ads, were the big thing. We had five Sunday papers at the time. So the power of the advertising department was great. It was very difficult to create the same effect in windows, and I was always trying to convince my boss to get more realistic mannequins, and to do more with the windows in terms of showing lifestyle in the windows too.

I: What I want to do is follow right now the way your career evolved, your career developed.

N: At that particular point in my personal life, I began to be going out a lot.
I realized I felt I was getting no place. I remember sitting up on a rock in the middle of Central Park on Saturday, very discouraged because my salary was peanuts, because I had to send half my salary home to support my mother. And I thought, "What am I doing here?" I almost started to cry, and I thought "Oh God, what's going to happen?"

That afternoon I got a call from a friend of mine who was a manufacturer of artificial flowers. He said, "Henry, they're looking for somebody at Bergdorf Goodman. I recommended you, would you go up and interview?" I said, "Sure." So I went up and talked to this very attractive woman who was in charge of public relations at Bergdorf. After I talked to her for a while, she said, "Well, you've been very highly recommended, would you like to come with us?" And I said, "I certainly would." She said, "We'll pay you $85 a week to start." Well, I was making $45, and I thought, "Oh, boy, this is terrific."

So I went back to Lord and Taylor and I told them that I was going to leave. Well, Walter Hoving had been very interested in me. I guess he knew what I was doing at the store, and he had heard good things about me, so he called me up. . . . (First of all, Dorothy Shaver called me up and she thought I was making a terrible mistake, but she didn't feel that she could give me any more money.) But Walter Hoving called me in, and he said, "I hear you're going to go uptown. What's the matter, don't you like us here?" "Oh," I said, "I love Lord and Taylor." He said, "Why don't you stay?" And I said, "I can't afford to." He said, "Well, if we pay you the same salary, would you consider staying with us?" I said, "I sure would." So I stayed; and that was my beginning because from then on I was able to do more work, and I was more enthused about my job, naturally getting more money. (interruption)
Then I began to realize that in my personal life, I was getting no place. And I thought, "You know, all the successful guys seem to be married. I really should get myself a wife." So I had met my roommate's sister on a vacation up in northern Michigan. I thought she was pretty great, and she came to New York to visit him over New Year's. We got all dressed up—I had my white tie and tails on, she had an evening dress—and we went out at one o'clock in the morning after finishing a bottle of champagne. We just went in and started to dance at the Stork Club, and from there we went to the St. Regis roof, and we went to the Waldorf Ballroom; we didn't pay a cent, we just went in and danced. And I had a marvelous time with her. She left two days later to go back to northern Michigan, and I called her up long distance and proposed marriage. I got married (laughs) without ever knowing the girl. But I thought that was kind of nifty, to be married. The war was just about to be declared, it was really a very . . .

I: This was what year?

N: This was—would that be 1944?

I: No, the war was declared in '41, Pearl Harbor was '41.

N: Well, then it was 1940, yes 1940. So I got married, and then my boss was drafted; since I had rheumatic fever, I wasn't accepted in the service. I'll never forget when they were trying to decide who was going to become display manager of Lord and Taylor. I went up to see Dorothy Shaver, and I asked her for the job, and she said, "Well, Callahan, I don't think it's for you, I think you're too emotional." I really felt terrible when she said that, and I really took it hard, and I said, "Miss Shaver, you've always been known for giving a person a chance. Would you give me a chance?" And she said, "I'll
tell you what, I won't interview for a month. Let's see what you can do for a month." So I was watching the calendar to the end of the month—and I did some very interesting things in between—and when I went up to see her she was very chintzy about telling me. Finally, in the middle of this conversation, when I was watching her eyes, she said, "Well, I think we will consider you."

Well, then things really happened, because I became display manager and then . . .

I: Could we go back just a moment? I'm curious as to what you would describe as an interesting thing that you did during that month.

N: It was the springtime, and we had navy blue crepe dresses trimmed with white eyelet collars and cuffs, and little white frilly hats. They almost looked Victorian, in the trim on the dresses. I went out and I bought a lot of cheap Victorian furniture—which you could get for a song at that time—and lacquered it white. I found a place in Greenwich Village that made cake decoration—all the flowers and things that you put on cakes. I completely covered the furniture with that and then sprayed it all with plastic spray, so it looked like it was made of meisen china. We had mirrors and chairs and everything like that, so it was a very pretty Victorian look (laughter) and looked terrific.

Another time, I did something with violets; at another time, something to do with a flower show in New York. I said, "Let's fill the floor of the window with water, and put a carpet of moss, and then put a beautiful gold chair in the center and cover that with moss, and then flowers coming out of the chair, so it's like a living room in a garden." Then I had mannequins made of chicken wire with beautiful dresses on them. That was the type of thing; in other words, it was fantasy.

Dorothy Shaver's sister, Elsie, was an artist, and she was a great champion
of mine. I got to know her just through things that we had to do with the store. She had encouraged me always; she kind of spoke up for me, to Dorothy. Dorothy had a great appreciation for talent. . . . Fantasy was at the beginning at that time. Remember the ads were being done by Vertès and Bérard and Eugene Berman; it was the whole part of the surrealist period in art.

I: Yes, and there was a kind of wonderful, sort of romantic elegance that was apparent in all those . . .

N: That was the whole thing. Schiaparelli was a champion of that in Paris, Cecil Beaton was doing all the marvelous photographs—he was a tremendous influence in my thinking. It had been done just before that time, so it kept going and growing into a trend.

I: Let's pick up the Cecil Beaton thing now. Did you know Cecil?

N: I never met him.

I: Really.

N: But he was a tremendous influence—his photographs, his thinking, his writing, his drawing, his feeling of fantasy as a person.

I: What was the essence of his influence on you? Can you give me an example of how you directly were influenced by Cecil Beaton? (interruption)

N: First was his use of plaster casts of Grecian and Victorian Cupids; and then using lace curtains and artificial flowers and stuff in the backgrounds of his photographs—in other words, interesting backgrounds. They were always in a kind of romantic feeling. His championing of the 1900's, that was very important to me because it was the period that I had heard so much about through my family background. Remember, my mother being forty years old when I was born, she was really part of the Edwardian period, very much so. My aunt was wearing taffeta
petticoats all the time, she was that type--she even had customers back in 1914 or '15 who wore dresses to the ground. They never wanted to change that Edwardian style. So I think the fact that Cecil used to make these photographs look like the Edwardians, I think that was more of an influence than anything else at that time.

I: Also his whole impact was that he created a sense of theater.

N: Very much so.

I: Did you ever read any of his writings?

N: Oh yes, every book that he published I read immediately, because he was so much part of the fashion world. I think at that time, Vogue was a very interesting magazine to me. It was very personal because they wrote about the goings-on of people. At that time, Bettina Ballard was writing her column from Paris. Mrs. Chase was very much into the lives of the kind of people that I had always associated mentally with; whereas Harper's Bazaar was a little bit hard--a little bit artistic, you know. I didn't understand Harper's quite as much. I used to make fun of the Erte covers. I thought they were so passé at that particular point, whereas the ones in Vogue were so free, where they had Eric drawings, and Bérard. They were a great champion of Schiaparelli. I couldn't wait to get the newest copy; as you remember, at that time Vogue came out twice a month.

I think that everything Conde Nast touched had style. They really had their finger on a pulse of top drawer imaginative people in Europe. You got to know all these people through their reports; I did, in my fantasy mind. It was a very special world. I read back issues of Vogue now: they seem terribly pretentious, but at that time I thought they were just great.
I: Were there other influences? Did you read novelists?

N: Well, I think the movies naturally; things like "Gone with the Wind," and all the romantic things of Garbo--"Camille"--I think they were a tremendous influence. I went to the opera; I would stand every Saturday for the opera, when I first came to New York. I was interested in all the museums; I still continued to paint on my own. I think we all considered ourselves part of what is known today as the beautiful people of the time. There were all a group of young people--young men and women in the fashion world--who were all seeing each other all the time and kind of stimulating one or the other.

I: Who were the people who were stimulating you at that point--in your own peer group?

N: Sally Kirkland. . . . (pause)

I: Did you go to parties at Amster Yard?

N: Oh yes, I remember Amster Yard being built. I would certainly think that Ted Sandler was a great influence at that particular time, among the whole group of us. Lester was always a great friend. Through Lester I met a lot of people: Fleur--she was then Fleur Fenton, now she's Fleur Myer in Europe. And Alice Hughes was a writer at the time on the newspapers. Thyra Winslow, who was a writer. Sarah Little, who was a very cute, young editor at the time.

I: Did you have any contact with the whole world of interior design at that time?

N: All along I've had that, even starting in Philadelphia I did. My friends who were in interior design--we used to call them interior decorators then--were most generous to me, the most supportive, the most interesting.

First there was a man in Philadelphia called John Dougherty; and then when I first came to New York was a man called Robert Stevenson, who was both a decorator and a couturier. And of course Bill Pahlmann was a very exciting
person at Lord and Taylor with model rooms at the particular time. Sandy Jacobs, Jimmy Amster. I would say that my friends who were interior designers were the most generous in terms of telling me resources, encouraging me, and noticing whatever I did that was unusual; being very supportive and very good friends. Much more so than the dress designers; I always found that the dress designers were only interested in their own clothes. If you were showing their clothes everything was fine, but they didn't seem to care about anything else; they didn't seem to want to tell me where anything came from.

If I called up an interior decorator—"Where did you get this fabric, where did you get this floor finish, where did you get those curtains, where can I find bamboo, where can I find a good artist to do certain kind of work?"—they would tell me with no problems whatsoever, and they always seemed to know. As I got to know them more, I realized that the discipline that they go through in their training—the discipline they go through in pleasing their customers—was something that I needed to learn; because as a display man, I want to do everything quickly, with a tack hammer and some paint and some cardboard. But they knew the fundamentals of how things had to be made and properly finished, which was inspiring to me. Also, I think I understood the dress design people—remember, I had that from the time I was born. I knew the bitchery and the trouble of workrooms; it didn't fascinate me at all. But the interior design field, I had great respect for. Architecture, I didn't.

I: Did you ever have any interest in being an interior decorator?

N: I think I did, but not in terms of decorating houses; because I was doing interior decorating all the time in my work, creating window settings, backgrounds
for windows and everything like that. But I was so involved in the day by day problems of my job that I never thought in terms of doing anything else. I was so involved with supporting my mother, and supporting my wife and child, that I didn't feel I could ever take a chance and go into another field.

People have asked me why I didn't go into the theater, too. It's a problem that I begin to think about now. I somehow was so totally engrossed in the field of display--and particularly window display--and particularly window display at that particular time--that I didn't seem to have time for anything else. It was a great sense of satisfaction to see the crowds of people around the windows that we would do that were unusual. It's a very heady experience.

I: Let's go back to Lord and Taylor. Let's go back to the fact that you now have passed the test of the month, and Dorothy Shaver--in her own inimitable manner, I'm sure--finally says, "We will consider you." How much time was it between her saying that and your actually being appointed?

N: Right the next day.

I: Yes. Yes, she considered you very carefully and appointed you the next day. (laughs) "I wasn't going to tell you that particular day. . . ." It's so typical of executives at that level.

N: Well, Dorothy Shaver, you see, was very much--in personality--like the reverend mother of the academy that I went to. She never used my first name, it was always Callahan.

I: Never Mr. Callahan, just Callahan.

N: Always Callahan. She was, for me, a very forbidding person; it was very hard for me to get her to be relaxed. She was never funny or never very personal with me.
I felt that maybe I wasn't sophisticated enough for her; I didn't know how to kid around. I was very serious with her, and yet I tried to produce the very best work, because a nod from her, or a pat on the back, or praise, was absolutely sensational.

She was part of a period of women that were part of her time, like Edna Chase on Vogue, and Carmel Snow on Harper's Bazaar, and Virginia Pope on The New York Times. There were those kind of women around at the particular time. They were like Queen Marys, in a funny kind of a way. They weren't movie star kind of people at all, they were very analytical. And Dorothy Shaver used to make pronouncements. I'll never forget the time when she said, "Now Callahan, I want you to create a marvelous ambiance for this particular kind of clothing." So I said to myself, "What the hell is she talking about, is that a gazebo or something?"

I: What is an ambiance? (laughs)

N: Well, I had to find out, I'll tell you. And then another time, I asked her her opinion on an accessory color to go with a certain shade of something we were doing, and she said, "Well, I see it maybe with a touch of Naïif blue." Well, I had to find out what Naïif blue is, and now everytime I go to the Metropolitan and see the paintings by Naïif, there it is, that certain shade of odd kind of dark turquoise blue. She would make these pronouncements, you see, when she would come back from Paris. She would make these great pronouncements about, "Everything glitters in Paris this year," and we would all think, "Whewwww, what does she mean?" And then she would have examples to show us: "Now let's have everything glittering in all the windows, and just pile on all the glitter you can." We had to put rhinestone bracelets and everything....
She thought broadly rather than "ditzy"; she was not a "ditzy" kind of a person the way a fashion editor might be. She saw things broadly.

I: I think people who become presidents of stores have to be large conceptual thinkers, and delegate the details to other people. In other words, they have to think in total concepts: she'd come back thinking that Paris's overall statement was "glitter."

N: Well, one thing that she said, I think, that made her so special was the fact that she really understood how to appeal to women visually and in merchandise. She would say to me, "Now Callahan, if you're going to do anything to appeal to women, don't make it so damn neat and pile it all up; mess it up, look at the women how they love to be around a pushcart down on Delancey Street if you want to see real shopping. Look at how people go to a bargain counter. Make things look like a boutique, spread it around, don't pile it all up like in a men's store, that's boring. If you're going to do men's shirts and ties, put them all in neat, boring rows." She was always downing men being boring. She would always say, "Now we must have atmosphere, we must create little pockets of charm through the store."

There was another young man who came into an executive post at the same time, Edgar Talman; he was in charge of interior display, I was in charge of windows. He was very brittle and very sophisticated, very Noel Cowardish in his point of view; he had a marvelous articulate quality. He and Dorothy Shaver got along great. She was pitting him against me all the time. It was a very interesting challenge: I was doing one thing in the windows, and he was doing things inside the store. So we were kind of challenging each other too; we had a kind of a friendly love/hate relationship going. He had his own staff, and then I had my
staff.

I: How often did you change your windows?

N: Once a week. We changed them at night because we felt that there were 500 or 600 people a minute going by the windows on Fifth Avenue, and that would be a shame to lose one single minute of time, so the windows were changed during the nighttime. At that time at Lord and Taylor, the windows were on an elevator—which they still are. The window could be lowered down to the basement, and you could create the whole scene, and then just push it into the window and see it all and then send the display right up to the street. Or you could drop the window down at different levels and have all kinds of effects, which we utilized constantly to create depths and a surprise feeling to the windows.

I: Who created that?

N: That was done when the store opened in the beginning, in 1913.

I: Somebody was very bright to have thought of that, because it certainly gave a larger range of possibilities in display. Now trace for me the specific process of a Lord and Taylor window. Okay, let's say you have the beginning of the week, then what happens?

N: It didn't happen that way. First of all, there was a six month schedule planned by the person in charge of advertising and sales promotion, in which the windows were assigned to various merchandise managers. So the windows were assigned to expose their goods on Fifth Avenue. Based on a year's before performance—at a certain time of the year, home furnishings were right, at other times men's wear, at other times women's wear, and at other times children. Then, merchandise was reviewed in the market at the time of the fashion shows. I would be there with
the buyers and some of the merchandise executives . . .

I: You'd be at the fashion show.

N: At the fashion show. And we would say, "Gee, wouldn't that certain group of Molly Parness dresses make a great window!" or "Look at that marvelous idea of Traina Norell," or "Look at this marvelous thing that Nettie Rosenstein has here." Sometimes we would have a private preview, because the designer would've said, "This would make a great window at Lord and Taylor"; he would ask us to come in and take a look at it.

So this would have all been planned maybe six months before. And then the merchandise would be sent to the store; I would sit down with my staff, and plan the settings for the windows. I'll never forget one of the most dramatic things at the particular time: when Norman Norell did his first romantic evening dresses. They were great full skirts of Swiss embroidery, with very severe silk linen tops. They were very romantic looking; huge, huge skirts of this wonderful embroidered organdy. The dresses were terribly expensive, retailing for about $350 apiece, which was unheard of at that time. And I thought, "My God, don't they look great, don't they look like marvelous costumes that should be in a romantic setting in the old South, with that moss that hangs from the branches. I could just see a girl sitting back in a big canoe. So I thought, "How can I achieve that effect?"

I had a very clever assistant at the time; I said, "Paul, how can we do this? Do you think we can sink one of the windows and fill it with water?" And he said, "We can sink it maybe a foot, and paint it all dark green--so it'll look like depth--and we can get an old rowboat from the Park Department, and put it in the windows and put pillows in it." We did the whole thing; we got moss from some place that sells stuff for stuffing pillows, and we put branches in the window, and we
had a whole'romantic thing. I had kind of blue moonlight coming down, and it was a sensational window.

But that's how the window planning would be done. In other words, you plan the merchandise a couple of months beforehand, and it's all in stock; it isn't just the things that are in the window, there's stock behind it. And then signs would be planned by the copy department and the advertising department to tell the message, which was important at that time. Special mannequins might have to be made, because if you wanted to show romantic dresses like that, you would want to have mannequins with special, pretty hairdos, and pretty make-up, and that would be done in studios where you have these things made. Then, everything is brought together, and the mannequins dressed, and then the windows are lighted, and then they're opened. So each week, you're getting closer to deadlines. So you have to be able to constantly be shifting your thoughts from what is current to what is coming up, and be aware of this all the time. But it becomes like second nature after a while.

I: But the sequence was exactly what? In other words, you set your schedule of assigned space to the various departments. Then conceptually you'd work that out with your own staff?

N: Right.

I: And then just technically what happened in terms of the week that was theirs?

N: Well, that week that had been theirs had been planned, say, a month in advance. So the carpenter shop would have the schedule of all the planned construction of sets. The paint department would have its plan. You learned to do all these things automatically, because you have an assistant who's job is to handle the details, an assistant who handles the background, and then you have an assistant who
handles the fashion merchandise—to get the proper accessories and wigs, and all the things that are necessary to make the clothes look right. So each of these people is working constantly on each part of the project.

As soon as one installation is done, of windows, then your shop is ready with the things for the following week.

I: And when does it all take place?

N: Usually on Wednesday night. They would start at 5:30 and they'd be maybe finished at about 2:00 or 3:00, sometimes 7:00, 8 o'clock the next morning. Sometimes we'd be just finishing up when everybody would be coming to work.

I: Why do they select Wednesday night?

N: Because Thursday night, the stores were open. So Thursday was a nice big long day, and it seemed to be the best way to get the week...

I: Were you ever stimulated to buy something that would be effective for display, but not be held in stock?

N: Oh, many times. I would plead with the buyers, "Oh, why don't you buy that one dress and please let us show that." I'll never forget: the last dress that came out of Paris was one of the most beautiful Schiaparelli's that I'd ever seen. It's one dress that I can remember all my life, out of all the hundreds and hundreds of clothes that I've worked with.

I: Tell me about it.

N: Dorothy Shaver bought it. It was the last dress to come from Paris before World War II. We were going to send it to Canada, after it was shown to the manufacturers. Nobody wanted to copy it; I don't know why. When they sent the dress to Canada, then it could be sold out of bond. In other words, it was brought into the United States without paying bond, so it was a lot less expensive that way. But it was a black column of ribbed wool with a fishtail train in the back and a short
bolero of what Schiap called "sleeping blue," which was a bright turquoise blue completely done like broderie anglaise. It was all outlined with jet tassels—a turquoise blue jacket, encrusted with black jet. And then she had shown it in Paris with a little monkey hat, a little tiny pillbox with a great big tall ruche in the back, which I had copied in the millinery department. I'll never forget that mannequin standing there in the corner window and saying, "This is the last dress out of Paris." (Just before the war.) That was something very special; we didn't have anything behind it, and I think a lot of people wanted to buy it, but we couldn't sell it because it was in bond.

I: Now that was Miss Shaver's decision to do that?

N: I pleaded with her—she didn't think it was a very good merchandising thing to give a corner window, but then I convinced her it's okay, because we'll also use the Schiaparelli Sleeping Perfume bottles in the front of the window; maybe we'll sell some perfume. She was very specific that whatever we do in display should make sense. There should be something there to sell. She was very proud of the reputation of our Fifth Avenue windows. At that time, you'll remember, Lord and Taylor just had the one store on Fifth Avenue.

The biggest problem we had, Robert, at that time, was making Thirty-eighth Street and Fifth Avenue exciting. Because, after all, there was a lot of action up around Radio City—Saks Fifth Avenue, Bonwit Teller, Bergdorf Goodman—and we really had to really press hard to get attractive people looking at our display. And we really achieved it; that store really had a reputation. Between the Pahlmann Rooms that the people came to see and all the unusual things; having special American designer collections: it was a very exciting store.
I'll never forget at one point right after the war, Paris sent over an exhibition called the salon d'elegance; it was an exhibition of miniature figures dressed in all the French clothes. It was held at the Voullard Houses, behind St. Patrick's. There were miniature figures, about eighteen inches high, all dressed in copies of the couture things by the midinettes. They were done on incredible mannequins that were made of wire, and the faces were plaster. They were done by a Catalan sculptor, and I thought they were absolutely fascinating looking. His agent came to us and wanted to do mannequins for us, life-size ones. Dorothy Shaver said to me, "Well, Callahan, now wait a minute. Have you fully investigated American sculptors? Before you make up your mind to use a European sculptor, why don't you just get yourself busy and do some digging in this country?" That was where she was so great. She encouraged me to really think. I went out the next day and I found a sculptor--her name was Janet Risa--who did something a lot more interesting than this man. But that's how she was stimulating: she would always say, "Be original."

Of course part of her fame, that has lasted, is the fact that she was responsible for, really almost single-handedly, creating the whole American designer world.

I'll tell you a funny story about that. When I would meet with her once a month, I would usually try to have an idea ready for her. I had to propose the ideas to her because she wanted to be pretty much part of everything that was going on. Anything going in the windows in a big way had to be okayed by her. This was when she was president of the store.

What year did she become president?

She became president about 1945. Because then Hoving went up to Bonwit Teller. I realized the guys coming back from the service were going to find girls--their wives--a little older, and maybe a little bit drawn, and not as pretty as they
were before. Wouldn't it be very important for us to get behind the cosmetic industry and do some marvelous windows showing how you could be more young and beautiful. You know, that type of thing. So I got hold of the cosmetic buyer, and I said, "We've never done cosmetic windows at Lord and Taylor. Couldn't we do a group? Nothing but mouths, nothing but eyes in another window, nothing but nails in another window, nothing but just lovely blushes on faces in another window." And I said, "You know, I think that these American girls are gonna look so good to the American guys coming home, after all those blousy French dames, and all those depressing-looking women in Europe. They should look wonderful. Can't we do something about the American girl? Look at the glorification of the American girl: Florence Ziegfeld and Earl Carroll."

So I went with the sketches of the windows to Dorothy Shaver, and she just kind of became mesmerized. She said, "Have you discussed this with anybody else?" We said, "No." She said, "Just leave all this with me and we're not going to do anything about it." A week later, we had our first projection council, and she sat at the end of the table. She said, "Now. I have an idea. We are going to promote the American look. All these girls are going to be greeting the men returning, and we're planning something marvelous." And that's how the American look started. That's how clever she was. She took the germ of the idea, but she made it into something bigger and broader than I would have ever thought of.

I: That's fascinating. And that produced the whole direction that she really established, which was the American designer. She gave validity to designer names in America.
But she did it basically with the Lord and Taylor American look: "We salute the American look." And then she put in how Clare McCardell would do it, and how this one would do it, and how that one. . . . But it was basically a Lord and Taylor idea. She always figured that out. She said, "I don't care what *Vogue* is doing, I don't care what *Harper's Bazaar* is doing, I don't care what Bergdorf or Bonwit's or what the market is doing, or what any designer is doing: we tell them what we want. They are a service to us." That's where she was great, in terms of being an editor. She was not "ditzy" in any kind of a way.

I'll never forget another time when she said, "I've been to 21. And I noticed that the girls wanted to take off their jackets, when they were sitting there and having dinner. They wanted to show off almost as if they had a beautiful evening dress on. It doesn't look very good. Now I want you buyers to go out, and I want you to get good-looking dresses that look like an evening dress: over the table fashions. And Miss Browning, I want you to get marvelous hats, beautiful big glamorous hats. And So-and-so, I want you to get ankle-strap shoes; they just look very seductive to me. And we're going to really make these men who are coming back from the war so proud of their wives and their girlfriends." Oh I don't know whether she called them "sweeties" or—she had a very nice name for it anyway: their enamorata. And she said, "Now I don't want those covered up with jackets; no jackets on those dresses and I want you to find them." And the buyers said, "Well, they don't exist, Miss Shaver." "Well, just see that they exist. And I want them all here for our next meeting two weeks from now. Can that be done?" It was done. And we started a fashion that way, you know.

I: That was the birth of what?
N: Well, that was the birth of a kind of a short evening dress, really.

I: Were those cocktail dresses?

N: Yes, cocktail dresses. And she said to me, "How are you going to do the windows?"

I: Yes, cocktail dresses. And she said to me, "How are you going to do the windows?"

N: I said, "Well, I think I'll have them all sitting around tables, in a restaurant."

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N: She helped, or encouraged, to create a fashion. The buyers in the store at that time were not given windows just because a designer on Seventh Avenue showed a collection, as it is today. They were given windows or advertising because they produced an unusual idea or because the idea came from the idea "think tank."

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N: And therefore it was an original Lord and Taylor point of view.

I: And therefore it was an original Lord and Taylor point of view.

N: It's interesting—it goes back to Walter Hoving's nice people. It really is,
because it is: we are going to devote ourselves to finding and presenting the merchandise that nice people want. And of course the intelligence of someone like Shaver was to examine what it was that nice people were signalling. In other words, making it possible to develop a dress that they wanted but wouldn't have been able to articulate themselves. By taking off the jacket, they were saying, "We don't need the jacket as the dress." Interesting, very interesting. But she is associated in many people's minds with American sportswear.

N: Very definitely. Sportswear was very new at that particular time, and I think that both she and Walter Hoving were knowledgeable enough about the buying habits of New Yorkers to know where they could make a big niche in sportswear. They knew that the uptown stores--I'm talking about the Bergdorfs and the Bonwits and the others--were hitting very strongly on dressy business: evening clothes, for instance. And putting a lot of emphasis, as she said, on the crystal chandeliers and the glamour. Nobody was really getting down to the basics, you know. They felt that sportswear was showing a great progress from the success of their college shop and the fact that they had some very good buyers at the time. Helene Maddock was one of the greatest sportswear buyers I've ever worked with. But it was a time of classic sportswear; a time of the proper kind of coloration for cashmere sweaters, for the quality of shetland, of tweeds, tweed suits, country clothes. Country clothes were the answer.

I: Can you see it as part of the development of suburbia?

N: Absolutely! It was all beginning at that time. Although we talked of the Rumpson Road--now where the hell is that today?--that was Rumpson in New Jersey or Connecticut. When this buyer would say to me, "Henry, I can just see these suits,
out walking on a Sunday after lunch." And she would talk about Fortnam & Mason in London. And then she'd say to me, "Now Henry, you should know all this, it's like the Main Line in Philadelphia." So even though these casual things were sold to school teachers and people from the Bronx, perhaps, we always imagined them going through the moors, in Scotland, or shooting in North Carolina. We were pretending that our customers were from the creme de la creme of sportsville, of Bernardsville, New Jersey, that kind of thing.

I: Yes, of course. I think it's partly what still goes on. I think that we design things, and we present things to customers, allowing them to live out their fantasies. I once said that if all the ski sweaters that were designed were on the slopes, nobody would ever take off. Most of the skiing is done to the supermarket.

N: Well you see, you, with your background of men's wear, would understand the validity of what we're talking about now — more than anyone. Because you've seen it happen, and of course you've seen that change now with the trendies, and how laughable that is almost becoming now. Trendy stuff only goes so far; but there is a certain kind of a look, in men's wear, of a gentleman and a true man. It goes on and on and on with a certain slight variation. That was why I think their sportswear approach at Lord and Taylor was so great. The fantasy part came in dresses, like the Claire McCordles, and then later with Ann Fogarty with the petticoats.

I: Going back to the sportswear for a moment: You see, I always felt that Lord and Taylor was bright enough to understand that if you buy a small house in suburbia, part of your fantasy is that it's your country estate. In Bucks County, where land is being sold to developers, you have houses that are rather expensive, but they are very close to each other; they're on half-acre plots. But everybody that lives in those houses thinks of it as their Bucks County estate. They think they
live in the depths of the country, even though every tree around them has been removed to build the houses. But the clothes that they wear supports that country image, and I always thought that Lord and Taylor understood that perfectly.

N: When it comes into interrelating it in the display field, we learn to wear the different hats. When we did country windows, then we understood that country background. The backgrounds of the windows, the type of mannequins and setting, reflected that. Then when we turned into suits and coats—which were a big thing—we understood how people looked on the street. Our settings looked like things people would do; they'd be walking their poodles in Sutton Place, or they would be going to a marvelous bank, or to their lawyers. Then when they were going in evening clothes, it would be boxes at the opera, or it would be something very grand; cocktail clothes would be in a fine restaurant, or a marvelous wedding reception. Each week, we tried to surprise the people with something completely different. That people would say, "OHHH! What's new?" rather than making it a plain, simple background. It took a lot of effort, and a lot of time, a lot of good sense to achieve all this.

I: The reason I made reference earlier on to the fact that your windows had a theatrical quality: I was thinking also of the nature of the response of the customer, the person on the street. Certainly you must be aware that people used to time their lives to go and look at the windows as they were unfolding.

N: Absolutely. Of course at that time it took a while to develop that particular following, on that particular part of the street. Because at that time, we did have a good neighbor, Franklin Simon, and across the street Arnold Constable, so there were more stores in the area. But it was an effort to get people who
were the movers and shakers of New York to come down to that area, and to get the buyers interested in getting the best merchandise they could, and to get the loyalty of the Seventh Avenue market. That was the biggest thing we achieved; in fact, we were able to get new, interesting merchandise from Seventh Avenue before the uptown stores—before Saks, and before the Bergdorfs, and before the Bonwit Tellers—because everybody was competing for that. But we were able to do it because they thought our windows were going to look better; it was a great showcase for the designers' clothes.

All this took time to build up, Robert; it didn't happen overnight, but it happened over a period of years. By the time I left Lord and Taylor to go with Schenley Distillers, the pace had been set, really. Because of this think tank, or projection council, the advertising and the visual promotion—interior and windows—all had a unity of excitement about it. That's what made the special, special thing that happened; and the merchandise was imaginative. We never did these things with just dreary, dumb merchandise; it was always well thought out and well planned. They buyers had been trained, at that point; when they were selected, they knew that if they wanted to be successful buyers and get promotions, they had to produce the most interesting goods.

I: Let's let your mind wander conceptually at the moment. What I mean by that is that, there was a whole period when window display, when I was growing up as a kid, was completely consistent: you knew exactly what you were going to see. We saw the same mannequins in the same positions. What was the moment in society that changed it from just this sort of boring windows to the kind of visual merchandising that you're talking about?

N: I would think it was at the time of surrealism, when Dali's art and all the artists' surrealism began to be the influence both in the fashion magazines and being
talked about. I would credit the first interesting thing that ever happened on Fifth Avenue, in terms of windows, was when a woman was made display manager at Bonwit Teller's. Her name was Helen Cole. She went to a mannequin manufacturer and said, "Can't we make mannequins look like some of the prominent ladies of New York?" So they did very loose interpretations of the Duchess of Windsor, and whoever the prominent people were at the time: Natasha Paley and even Alice Hughes. They were done by a woman called Mary Brosnan. And then also, Helen was the first to use theatrical lighting in the windows: colored, highly intense spots that you take for granted today.

What year was that first introduced?

I would say that would be 1939. When was the World's Fair? It was just before that, about 1938, '39; '38 particularly. And then Jim Buckley—who was with Lord and Taylor and then went to Berdorf Goodman—he and Bob Reilly, who's now with FIT, did the first truly surrealist windows at Berdorf Goodman. I'll never forget: there was a Chopin Festival, I think, at Carnegie Hall, and they put the top parts of grand pianos in the window and filled part of it with water. They had branches of flowering quince coming out, and the mannequins were made of chicken wire covered with music sheets. The mannequin clothes were floating chiffon and they were hung from the ceiling. There were butterflies flying through the air; it was absolutely ethereal. It was like a Chopin nocturne, really beautiful.

A little bit later, when Dali had his first show in New York—I think at the Modern—he designed the windows for Bonwit Teller. That was the time that he put a wax mannequin in the window that had hair hanging down the front of her, so it was covering her private parts. Somebody who was top banana thought it was disgusting. She was standing in a bathtub lined with mink. They asked to have the mannequin removed, because it was shocking the people. And Dali came in from
lunch and he was very upset about it, and he overturned the bathtub, but the bathtub went right through the glass in the window.

I: Oh, he just went into the window in a fit of temper.

N: In a fit of temper, and threw it, and it went right through the window. And of course, it made history, because it got in all the papers. Luckily, nobody was killed. (laughter) That was the beginning of a new kind of excitement in doing kind of crazy things in windows.

I: This became the influence that spread not only through New York, but obviously through the country.

N: Well, not so much, but it was talked about. And then they began to do columns—Lester started to write his column in Women's Wear Daily about reporting on windows as something exciting. Almost like a theatrical happening. But it was the beginning of that—these were things that happened over a period of several years.

I: Of course. All right, that's the Dali experience in surrealism. What, in your career, was the first window that you did that you found yourself thinking that you had really broken ground, or done something fresh and new and original? (long pause) Perhaps you didn't feel you were doing things that were that original, but that were wonderful interpretations of directions that had already been established, but done within the realm of the taste established by Lord and Taylor.

N: I have to think about that because that's a hard one. Some of these things happened that—everything seemed to happen so gradually, Robert, that it . . .

I: Evolved, yes.

N: Everything seemed to evolve. It's hard to think of the highlight when you think
of week after week after week; which one would be one's favorite, or one great thing at that particular time. It's hard to--I think maybe it was after my first trip to Paris.

I: Which was in what year?

N: That was--would it have been 1949? 1948. To see all the things I had dreamed about, finally, was great. And I couldn't wait: I thought, "I can't wait to get back to the United States to reinterpret this!"

I: Now this was a professional trip? In other words, you were sent by the store?

N: I was sent by Dorothy Shaver.

I: But you had never gone . . .

N: I had never been to Paris before. I had been to Ireland when I was a kid, but this was my first trip to Europe. It was right after the war, and Paris was so exciting. I didn't sleep for three days, I just walked every place.

There was a great show at the Louvre called the "Ateliers Du Gout" or "Shops of Taste" at the time. And then they had a Quinzane de la Rose on the Rue St. Honore; all the windows were done in rose themes. I had been to my first great afternoon soiree at Arturo and Patricia Lopez. And I had met Christian Dior, and I had met Jacques Fath, and I had seen my first Schiaparelli show, and the Column Vendome, and the Place De La Concord, and the Follies. And it was just sensational.

I: Did you feel that display in Paris was far advanced from display in New York?

N: No. I thought it was different. I thought the department stores were kind of nothing; but the little specialty shops, just the facades of the stores, the old feeling of Paris, the romantic things of the past, the little chairs sitting in the parks, the ropes of roses between the statues. And Versailles;
and the way trees were cut, the way flowers were arranged, the way curtains were hung on little clips, the way the signs were done. The things of the Left Bank, the marvelous way candies were piled up in a window—the things that had nothing to do with fashion. Because, as you know, in Paris, they just put things around in the couture houses, didn't use any displays at all; except they had some remarkable windows at Balenciaga. They were marvelous figures done of birch bark that were extraordinary.

I: My first reaction to display in Europe had nothing to do with fashion; it had to do with food, flowers, and candy.

N: But there's one story, since we're talking about Paris, I have to embroider a little bit. I was always fascinated by Elsa Schiaparelli; well, finally I was asked to lunch there with our representative from Paris for Lord and Taylor. After lunch in this extraordinary room with these marvelous tapestries and things around, she served coffee in beautiful First Empire coffee cups. Well, on the table was a flexible fish that looked kind of marvelous, and she said, "Pick it up and see what the head is." The head was really a cigarette lighter, but somebody had broken the top of it and she didn't know it. When I picked it up, the head dropped off and went right through the coffee cup and broke it. Well now that wasn't very amusing to Madame Schiaparelli....

I: Nor to you.

N: ... and I was mortified. So on the way out I asked her housekeeper what her favorite flower is, and she said, "Well, anything white." So I sent a dozen lilies and a note saying that I was so happy to meet her and I was so embarrassed about the coffee cup that the flowers would not in any way be enough, but I'd be more than happy to decorate her window in the Place Vendome. So she called me the
next day and said, "I'll take you up on that decoration of the window." So I said, "What am I going to do with this window, what am I going to put in it?"

So I went over to see... At that time, Bettina Bergerie and Hubert Givenchy were doing her windows. Hubert was just a young man running the boutique, and they both were terribly snobby. They said, "We do the windows here, and if you want to put something in, you just find out." I thought it was terribly rude of them. So I said to the vice-president of Lord and Taylor, who was in Paris at the time, "So what am I going to do?" She said, "What are you going to...?" I said, "I'm going to make a mannequin out of chicken wire, and I'm going to make it like the Fourth of July, and I'm going to make it red, white, and blue, and it's going to be 1900." She said, "Well, how are you going to do it?" I said, "I don't know."

And I suddenly looked up and I saw the window curtains of the hotel window—old lace curtains. I said, "I'm going to take those curtains down and make a dress out of them, like Scarlett in 'Gone with the Wind.'" She said, "You can't do that." "I'm gonna do it." So I went out and I got chicken wire and I made the mannequin. I put the dress on and I hung it up to dry from the chandelier. I went out to lunch. All this took a couple of days. I came back and the concierge was purple in the face: she said, "Yank, what have you done, what have you done?!" So I asked for a translation. They said there had been a murder in the Hotel Doring. And she had just gotten a wonderful maid for that floor from the provinces, who was afraid to work in the hotel because she had heard of the murder. She went by my room and she heard the noise of this hair dryer that I had, drying this mannequin off. She opened the door and here was this woman hanging from the chandelier, and she said, "My maid is still running across the Ponte Neuf." (laughter)

So anyway, I got the mannequin over into Schiaparelli's window, and she
called me up the next day and she said, "Mr. Callahan, I hope you have a sense of humor." I thought, "Oh! No! She doesn't like it." She said, "By the way, the window is divine; but I overheard two American women outside my boutique and one of them said, 'Now that's what I call a window display. You'd never find anything like that done by an American.'"

I: Awww. What a wonderful compliment in a strange, marvelous, distorted way. Henry, we're going to stop here.

(BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I)

I: This is the second part of the Henry Callahan oral history interview. My name is Robert L. Green. Henry, as we were talking, one of the thoughts that I had that we should look into was the whole process of budgets in relationship to window display. Your whole point, as you developed your attitude towards windows, was that they were reflections of your own sense of fantasy, and your own sense of the way in which marvelously rich, elegant gracious people lived. I kept thinking, "Well, I wonder how much money he had available to him to create this illusion." What was the budget situation?

N: Now we're talking about the Lord and Taylor period, which would be from 1936 to 1955. The budget situation was always based on usually the figures of the year before, which were based partly on the proportion of sales and profit; budgets that usually were set by the sales promotion director, and the head of display, and the comptroller of the store. As prices increased, budgets usually increased proportionately, like fifteen percent each year. I would say maybe the first year of my tenure as display director of Lord and Taylor, the budget might've been in the neighborhood of--exclusive of salaries--the money that would be spent would be in the neighborhood, maybe, of thirty thousand dollars a year.
I: For the entire year??
N: For the entire year.
I: This is fifty-two windows?
N: No, this would be maybe four important windows--yes, four times fifty-two, because there'd be four windows involved. A lot of people thought that there was a lot of money being spent. A lot of it would go for the Christmas windows, which were usually elaborate. So it was a case of our trying to give the maximum effect with a minimum of expense. Gradually, over a period of time, I developed such a close relationship with sellers of display equipment that they felt that the windows at Lord and Taylor were a showcase. They gave us very special, practically no-profit cost prices on material; and mannequins particularly. But I think mannequins is part of a development which we might want to go into at a different time.

I would say it was a case of borrowing a great number of things; and I found that since our windows had gotten such a great reputation, we were able to borrow wonderful antiques, for instance, from French and Company, tapestries from them, marvelous china things from various firms--as long as we put a credit card in the window.

I remember a man coming to me one time, and he said, "I just found a group of special lights in Italy, they look like little firefly lights; it's something very new. Would you consider doing your windows in November with a lot of these lights? I'll give you all you need." So he gave me about four hundred boxes of these tiny lights. And of course that made history, because then people clamored for these little twinkle lights. From then on he was the #1 exporter from Italy of these particular little magic lights.
But things like this were happening all the time. People were coming to me with new products and asking me to use them. Mannequin firms were saying, "We'll give you mannequins for free if you'll use them." So I had to do a lot of juggling, and give an effect that we were spending a lot more money than we had. We had our own carpenter shop and our own paint shop. And we had people on staff who were very clever about making things themselves. So many times we really made do; we made effects that were kind of ingenious, out of practically nothing, in a way.

I: Can you remember an effect that was ingenious?

N: I think the first one was artificial snowstorm. This was before the age of plastic, and we wanted to give the effect of a snowstorm happening in the window. We discovered a way of blowing kind of cut paper up through the air and coming down through a chute and down again. But it didn't give the right effect, so I called up somebody I knew in the food business, and I said, "Is there any kind of flaky things or anything like that?" And they said, "You can buy untoasted corn flakes," and they gave me a resource for that. We got bi. hundred-pound sacks of this, and we put them in the machines and they blew all this snow down. It also attracted every mouse in the whole of the area of New York; we were deluged with mice all through Lord and Taylor.

I: Really? Well, that's fascinating.

N: But that was an unusual thing.

I: (laughs) I hope they got rid of the mice.

N: Another thing was just to give the effect--the illusion--of rain. Somebody just
painted some black stripes on string that was stretched. When you put two layers of this together, when you're walking by, it looks as if there's rain coming down. It was kind of an optical illusion, because this person had studied optical illusion in art school.

I: How much of the temporary art found its way into display, do you think?

N: Well, I think a great deal. I think, during the surrealist period, we were very influenced by surrealism. We were none of us surprised when op and pop art came in, because we had been doing that for years: the oversized flowers, the oversized bananas, the oversized oranges; all the things that later became pop art were something part of early display.

I: This was part of your larger-than-life theory in terms of windows?

N: Yes.

I: Let's talk about mannequins, as a matter of fact. When you first started, go all the way back to . . .

N: When I first started, the very first mannequin I ever worked with was an old wax mannequin, made totally in wax. It was down in the cellar in this particular store that I worked in in the thirties, and I wanted to use something realistic in the window. My boss was on vacation and he let me alone to trim the windows. So I dressed her all up as a bride, I'll never forget. I couldn't get her to hold the bouquet, so I dipped her hand in hot water, and I could just bend the fingers over to hold the bouquet. The mannequin was made of wax, and she was left over from the gay nineties, you might say. Because in the thirties, the mannequins were made of cut-out wood, just flat sculptures, almost art deco in feeling. The other mannequins that we used when I worked for Bonwit Teller's were made by Pierre Imans and Segal in Paris. They were very stylized and heavy, heavy plaster mannequins. There
were no mannequins made in this country.

Then along came an American sculptress named Cora Scoville, and she made mannequins copied after the famous movie stars: of Garbo and Constance Bennett and gals of that particular time—Joan Crawford. They had plaster heads and stuffed cloth arms and stuffed cloth knees and plaster legs, so they could be bent at the waist and moveable. Their hair was made of embroidery floss, and they had felt lips, and their eyelashes were made of fringe. They were kind of grotesque, but we thought they were kind of special. Then the display directors asked Mrs. Scoville to do more realistic mannequins. And from then on grew the American mannequin field.

The mannequins at first were very heavier, made of plaster. Then they made mannequins out of a composition of jute and plaster. And then they started to work with papier maché. Then Mary Brosnan was one of the early sculptors of that type of mannequin, and a woman called Lillian Grenicker. Sometimes the mannequins had rubberized middles so they could be moveable, and sometimes the hands could be moved. They were articulated wooden hands. The hair began to be made of horsehair; and then afterwards, the horsehair was combed out to look like real hair. So over a period of time, mannequins became more and more realistic. Men's mannequins started to be used, children's mannequins started to be used. And then developed a whole industry of American-made mannequins, which became the finest in the world.

Then over a period of time the Europeans improved their product, particularly in England. And they started body-casting the famous models of the time. That has been the trend up to this moment now: very, very realistic figures. However, I've always found that mannequins were a very personal preference of
the store owner. Dorothy Shaver liked the mannequins to look like the advertising. So we had drawings by Dorothy Hood made, and then we had clay made like the Dorothy Hood drawings. They were realistic, but super-realistic.

I: Did she ever explain to you why she wanted that done?

N: Well, she felt that was a unified picture of what it would be. At one time, I used to have some of the best athletes, the real guys, pose for men's mannequins. I never could make everyone happy about the men's mannequins; there were always people who didn't like them. And I asked a very bright woman one time, I said, "Helene, why is it that I can never get a good-looking men's mannequin?" She said, "I'll tell you why. The only thing distinctive about a man is his face. And if the face on that mannequin isn't your kind of a guy, you're gonna take an immediate resentment."

Now that was a different period than it is today. I think today people feel differently about men's mannequins; they're more used to them. I'm talking about, now, the forties and fifties. They were kind of unusual. You just used them in conjunction with ladies' mannequins.

I: They still don't come off too well, I think.

N: Well that's because, unless the face is your kind of guy--your color of hair, or your age group--men have a tendency to identify immediately with the figure, whereas girls think of mannequins as a kind of a grown-up Barbie doll in a way.

I: I had an additional theory, I was curious as to your reaction. That is, female mannequins have the advantage of make-up. In other words, you really can create colorations, and the lights in the window can highlight in terms of contour, features, and so forth. The men's mannequins always come off as slightly immoveable faces that are staring as though they have some sort of eye disease. (laughs)
N: There's a group of mannequins now made in Denmark that are quite unusual, though, because they're exact copies of men. There's a way that you can paint a mannequin like a portrait, too; that you can get a very good effect.

I: Then it would make sense to me.

N: But it also is the fact that, I think, men have their own image of their own kind of a peer. That's the hardest thing to. . . . Men get to take a mannequin much more seriously than I think a woman does. But also, when I started to work with Adam Gimbel and Saks Fifth Avenue, he did not like mannequins at all. He liked headless dummies; he felt that a woman should be able to identify with just a dress itself. So I did a lot of experimenting with wire mannequins and with phantom mannequins, and with a doll kind of mannequin, so that each week we had something completely different.

I: Speaking about having something completely different each week, is there a secret as to how one is able to keep up that freshness. You were at Lord and Taylor for almost twenty years; when you consider all those windows that had to be done, what is the stimulus that allows you to recreate and recreate and recreate without repeating yourself.

N: Well, I think for me, it was the fact that I was becoming recognized as a force in the field. At that particular time, Lester Gaba, who had started as a sculptor of window mannequins and later as a package designer, had become an editor of a column in Women's Wear Daily. He would write up the windows on Fifth Avenue the same way that a columnist writes up a show. He would be critical; sometimes forcefully so, sometimes with great admiration. So that was a stimulating factor, too. The fact that people on Seventh Avenue whose designs were being shown in the windows showed a great deal of interest, the fact that the buyers were
interested, the fact that the merchandise managers were interested. It kept one on one's toes. I always found that staffs changed too; new people would come along, and other people would drop by the wayside or go on to better jobs. Sometimes these new people had fresh points of view that were stimulating. I found that there was always something happening in the world of fashion, all the time, to stimulate. It's a very stimulating, changeable field; every week something new is happening.

Since most of the designing that I did in windows had to do with enhancing the product that had been designed by somebody else, I think that that spirit more or less came through to me. It's hard in looking back to identify why I kept going, but it was almost a built-in obsolescence of ideas: let's get something different, but never done for the reason just to be different. Because the new product came along and stimulated a new idea.

I: That's a very interesting clue to display, and that is, that if you are using it correctly in terms of merchandising, in selling merchandise, what you're really doing is taking a product and allowing it to stimulate the idea to surround it so it can be seen most effectively as to why one should want to buy it. As opposed to doing a window which in itself will serve as something to be photographed or win a prize, or be a declaration of the artist's personal position, as opposed to moving merchandise. Have you felt at all, in terms of the most recent developments in display, that it's conceivable that occasionally the windows don't serve their purpose, which is to sell merchandise?

N: I never like to knock what is being done currently. But I feel that the trend now is to impress other executives within the framework of retailing, and to impress other display men, more than it is to excite and interest the customer. I think the particular period of shock, of doing things that were
really the last gasp of the pop art movement, where things were kind of done with violence and ugliness, was part of a last gasp of that particular period. I think that was a temporary stopgap, but it mainly impressed other display executives, rather than actually. . . . I never saw hordes of customers standing around to look at it, which was something that we were able to achieve in the work that we did particularly during the fifties.

I: Do you think the fact that there was an increased interest in windows from the thirties to the fifties was because there was less television? I mean there was a whole period . . .

N: Well, there was no television to speak of; and I think at that particular point—during what I call the great period, between right after the war and the advent of television, which would have been in the fifties—strolling on, say, Fifth Avenue or on State Street or on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia, or on any of the shopping streets across the country, was a thing to do, a thing for nice people to do. People would go there on a Sunday afternoon or an evening after dinner and walk and, "Let's go and see the windows." But with the advent of really living in the suburbs, and the cities becoming unsafe at night, I think that that became less important. In fact, many many stores in many cities began not to do anything with their windows, and blocked them up, and not even have them. Because it wasn't safe to be walking on the street at night.

Then also with supermarkets, and then shopping centers becoming the Main Street of America, a whole different kind of concept of window shopping came: what was really intense shopping, and windows were not done to look at in a pretty way. They were really getting back to the old market place idea; it was an entirely different period.
I: Going back to something you said much earlier about the glass showcases that originally appeared when the customer had no open interior display; talk a little about interior display. When did all that change?

N: I think that changed very dramatically about 1938, 1939, when new stores began to be built; when the new shopping centers began to be built, when open spaces. . . . When there were more industrial designers, like Raymond Loewy and, I guess, Donald Desky, and people like that, who got involved—when the new breed of architect got involved with stores. And that they felt that stores should flow, and that merchandise should be touchable. I know when Dorothy Shaver was very involved in the very first suburban store built by Lord and Taylor and one of the prototypes—copied all over the country; it was really designed by her under—with Raymond Loewy as the collaborator. There were no showcases whatsoever except in jewelry departments. Selling cases, that you sold, from the type you could look into. But the actual ready-to-wear and things like that were displayed on open platforms. This was so successful that it was utilized throughout the main store, and then it became a trend from then on.

But it was a case of merchandise being put out on display—it used to be a fine store had salons all over the place. And you walked in and you were supposed to be greeted by a woman; I'm in a women's department. The woman sat down, and then the saleslady, or venduse, would come out and say, "What can I show you today?" Then she would invite her to come into a special fitting room. She would take off her clothes, and the new clothes would be brought into her by the actual salesperson.

But, during the Depression, when moderate-priced clothes became more
important in stores, stores would put clothing out in open bins and open racks. And that was the beginning of a kind of self selection. From then on, it was less and less of the salon selling, except in very fine small specialty shops, and the department stores had more and more open stock.

I: It is interesting, Henry, when you think of the cycle, because a store like Saks, and the S. H. Stutz influence, who are creating shops within shops within shops. It really is nothing more than a revival of what department stores were originally—what departments were. Because they were a little like individual shops: the corset shop, the bridal shop, the travel shop. It took a very special personality to turn that into the marvelous avenue of separate shops that now exist in a lot of stores. What I find fascinating is that you get a competitive relationship between stores where one of them leads the way by redoing their entire store, and then they all feel that they have to redo their store because of that.

N: This is very true. I think, however, that a lot of people today have lost sight of the reason, say, for a department store. You go to a department store because you want a vast selection of something, and you want to be able to go in and buy it immediately. Now, just as a man, you want to go in, you have an idea you want to buy a raincoat. You want to see every raincoat possible to make a selection; you don't want it to be said: "If you want to find this one, you have to go to the Armani shop, or if you want to have this one, you have to go to the Calvin Klein shop, or you have to have this one you go to the Aqua Scutum shop." You say, "Hey, come on, I want a raincoat."

The same thing happens to a woman when she wants to go in to find a dress.
She wants to find an evening dress, an afternoon dress, or a sports dress. By the time she goes around from one little boutique to the other, if she's a serious shopper she's worn out. So I think it's been overdone myself. I think small shops are exciting, but I think it's very hard to make a big department store into a series of little boutiques or shops, and have it really make a great deal of sense. I think that that trend is going to be seen someday as a detriment.

I am fascinated, and have always been since I watched in my lifetime, how the food people have visually merchandised their product. From the little A & P or the American store on the corner, where you went in and you had a grocery clerk and you gave him your list, and he would go and get things for you. Now you can walk into any city in the United States, any little small village, and you can find in great big letters: the bread is here, and the dairy products are there; and you can take your cart and you can go through and you can get—in any place, without any hassle—the makings of a gourmet dinner. To me, that is great modern merchandising. And I think the day will come when clothing and accessories could be bought in the same kind of manner. To me, this is great merchandising.

I: Henry, let me ask you this. Now, as the display director of Lord and Taylor, most of the things you've told us about have been in relationship to those windows on Fifth Avenue. Were you influential in terms of interior display, or was that an entirely different department?

N: At that particular time, it was an entirely different department. My responsibility was for the exterior of the store. Speaking of that, one particular thing that happened: Saks Fifth Avenue, in the front of their store one Christmas, had a kind of a papier maché scene put on the facade,
of choir boys with big candles. It was an interesting, but rather corny
interpretation of a Christmas card in the front of the building, but everybody
seemed to like it. So Dorothy Shaver called me up one day, and she said,
"Callahan, come on up to the office." So I went up, and she said, "What's
wrong with your mind? All you have your mind on are those four windows on
Fifth Avenue. Have you been up to see what Saks Fifth Avenue has done on the
front of their building?" And I said, "Yes, I have. I don't like it." And
she said, "Well, that makes no point. We should be doing something in a broad
sense like that. Now why don't you put your heads together and figure out
something?"

So I went home that night, and I was talking to a friend of mine about
the thing, and he said, "Well, what would you like to do?" I said, "I would
like to put crystal chandeliers in every window and candelabras, and outline
the building with lights, or put a canopy of lights." He said, "Why don't
you do a Christmas tree like this?" So he drew a kind of a green Christmas
tree, and I said, "Oh, that's as cornball as--oh, wait a minute, how about
making a great big Christmas tree as if it's like a great big crystal
chandelier?" So I made a sketch of that, and I thought, "How am I going to
figure out how much that's going to cost?" I remembered on Eighty-sixth
Street they used to put lights out over the street on strings. So I called
up the Eighty-sixth Street Association, and I said, "Who does the lights across
your street?" They told me this certain electric company. So I called the man
up, and I said, "Can you put a big tree of lights in the front of the building?"
He said, "Oh sure, we can do it, no problem at all. We can do anything." I said,
"Well, give me an idea, a ballpark figure, how much it'll cost." He said, "Okay. Figure a dollar a bulb."

So I made a whole sketch, and I made some dots where the bulbs would be, and I figured it would cost about eight thousand dollars, I think, or something like that. I thought, "Gee, that's an awful lot of money, but I'll present it to Miss Shaver." So the next day I went in and I showed her the sketch, and she said, "How quickly can we get it done?" It was done by the end of the following week, and of course it made history because for years that big Christmas tree. . . . We enlarged it, and we made twinkle lights on it. Robert, that's how that idea really came about.

I: Isn't that fascinating.

N: So the strings of lights were really rented from the company, and they did the whole installation and the rigging.

I: Obviously, Christmas becomes a large part of the responsibility of any display director in terms of the windows. A large part of the budget, a large part of taking a classic holiday, one that repeats itself annually, where the basic elements remain the same. How does one do that in terms of year after year after year?

N: I always tried to appeal to the childlike—at least when I was with Lord and Taylor and later with Saks, too—the childlike dreams of Christmas time. Somehow or other I remembered A Christmas Carol and the reading of the various books and the fairy tales—the beloved things of childhood. Rather than play on a religious theme, I usually tried to do something that had a rather poetic feeling. I began to use themes for Christmas that were based on—first there was Cinderella. I had sculptured figures made and all kinds of fantasy. In
other words, I tried to use that type of thought. One time there was a whole
fantasy of Christmas among the flowers. Another time was Christmas in Heaven,
with all kinds of little angels doing all kinds of things.

I had started to use motion figures, that we discovered. They were like
dolls that were animated. That became almost a trademark of Christmas windows
that I was involved in.

I: The element of every store president examining every other store's Christmas
windows, and coming back to their own display departments and saying, "Where's
your head?" Was there much of that during the year, or did that ever happen,
where people would, within the corporation . . .

N: Well, I never had that problem because we always had the winners. We always had
the biggest crowd, both at Lord and Taylor and at Saks, so I don't know that
it affected us. But I would suppose it certainly did—I was watched by other
stores. But when you kind of get yourself in the top position, people are
looking to you; and unless something is very unique somewhere else. . . .

I must say that in my own growth, I always watched wherever I would see a crowd.
Whenever I saw a crowd around looking at anything, I wanted to go right away
to find out what it was. It might be a pet snake in a pet shop window, it might
be a new fantastic jewel somewhere else, it might be a mannequin that fell over in
a window and the glass was all broken around.

I: Or a live mannequin.

N: Or a live person. See, we were not allowed to use live people on Fifth Avenue,
because I think many years ago on lower Fifth Avenue—around Fourteenth Street—
they used to have girls parading through the windows on the second floor in fur
coats. At noontime it used to attract attention, and the Fifth Avenue Association
uptown felt that anything like that would be in bad taste. So they made a kind of an unbroken rule that no motion should be used in windows except at Christmas time, when little figures could move, but no live motion at all. But I find that people would love to look at something extravagantly rich, like a lot of money, like a hundred dollar bill lying in the window, or a fantastic diamond tiara; something fantastically expensive and rare. Or something that moved like an animal, or something that was violent, like blood dripping or daggers. Those three things were bound to get people's attention.

I: Pets. Did you ever use pets?

N: I never did because it was something that had been used by Franklin Simon's: they used real chickens in Easter time in the windows, so pets were off the list; that was somebody else's idea. I never tried to do anything that anybody else did.

I: That's interesting. I'm curious about the level of assistants that you had. When you first started in display, going all the way back, you were the only person in display, I assume. This is your whole ball of wax, you had to do it all yourself. How did you progress in terms of assistants?

N: Well, I usually tried to pick people who were fashion oriented in their background. Whether it was a man or a woman, it was of prime importance that they were interested in clothing: women's, or clothing for men, or for children. But that they had some kind of a sense, or some training, or some interest, either in making clothes, or wanting to become a dress designer, or a milliner, or something--just to be an artist wasn't enough as far as I was concerned. I wanted someone who just had a sense of whatever the interpretation of fashion would be. Whether it would be an assistant, or a person pushing a broom, I felt: Why not give the opportunity for those trainee jobs, regardless of how lowly they were, to someone who had some training or some interest in the
fashion world. It didn't mean that they had to come from the finest family, or have a lot of experience in school, but they had to have some interest.

Sometimes we would give them an exercise to bring in tear sheets out of a magazine, or sketches, or something to indicate that they had a feeling for clothing.

I: If you asked them to bring in tear sheets, what would your rules be?

N: Well, if they looked like they were current, if they looked like they were picking the current trends, I would know that they were kind of aware. But I have to go a little further than that. I'll never forget: I needed someone one time who was a technical person on the display staff, who could stick sequins on things, and who could tack and cover panels and everything like that. A young man came in who happened to be a cake decorator, and he was out of work. I started him, and he turned out to be a very good display man in the long run. He had that tactical quality of being able to decorate a cake while he learned how to decorate windows. Then the funniest--well, I guess we can go in later to the famous people that have worked for me.

I: Yes, we'll do that later. You talked earlier about painting the Victorian furniture white and using cake decorations to turn it into looking as though it were Meissen furniture. Was that the result of that cake decorator working there?

N: That was a long time after: there were almost ten, fifteen years in between. (laughter)

I: Really. I see. That's interesting. But your head remembered that experience, I'm sure.
N: Well I think a wedding cake has always been kind of a fantasy. It's the greatest piece of display that you could make in the culinary art. Now I'll never forget when I first started to get around knowing my various interior decorator friends. Someone described a man's apartment as looking like a dusty wedding cake.

I: Uh huh, a nice description. That's like the Victor Emanuel monument in Rome which is always thought of as the wedding cake, and does look like one, as a matter of fact. What about the business of unfamiliar, unexpected uses of things for display? Did you ever use ice, for instance? Ice sculpture, or ice in some form. Things that one doesn't ordinarily associate with a window.

N: One time during the coal shortage--now I forget which year that would be, it must've been right after the war, there was a great big coal strike. So coal would've been in a position of diamonds, you might say, in a way. We had some black dresses going to go into a window--it was the summertime--and I said, "Wouldn't it be interesting to combine the idea of a coal mine, and have these mannequins as if they were coming out of a coal mine?" So I had the backgrounds all sculptured in papier maché and covered with flitter looking like coal dust. And then I had a ton of coal delivered to the store--cleaned, anthracite coal--and piled it up in the windows. Then I thought, "It's not going to look interesting enough, it should be smoking. And then, why not have the mannequins smoking?!" Because I remembered as a child seeing a wax mannequin that actually smoked, and I never got over it.

So I asked somebody on my staff, and it just so happened that one of the fellows in the staff had been in the Signal Corps during the war. And he said, "I can make everything smoke." So he figured out this way that you drop a
certain kind of acid on another kind of acid, and out comes black smoke. We had little tiny rubber hoses run all the way through the coal, and then up through the mannequin's legs, and out the mannequin's mouth. They were holding cigarettes and they were always smoking away like chimneys.

I: What a great image that is.

N: That attracted crowds of people!

I: Absolutely. Anything of that nature becomes . . .

N: And it made those little inexpensive black dresses really look like a million dollars, and they sold a lot of them.

I: I'll bet they did. Of course that kind of creativity comes out of having people on your staff that you've selected carefully. You've described some of the qualifications, but what about numbers? How many people are involved in a staff?

N: Well, a staff there where we're working on a group of windows, I would say we had about maybe fifteen people. There would've been a secretary, who takes care of the scheduling and the lists, because everything that you put in a window has to be listed and then mimeographed and sent all through the stores so the customers know exactly how much everything costs that's in a window. Then you would have your actual decorators, who would actually dress the mannequins--maybe three or four of those. You would have a stylist who would go and pick out the accessories. Maybe an assistant stylist who would go and get shoes and jewelry. Their responsibility would also be the returning of the merchandise after it would come out of the window, which was very important; seeing that things were pressed and ready for delivery to the display department, that would be part of their job. In other words, to produce all the things.

Then you would have a men's display person, and you would have helpers—
maybe two or three. And then a person who would be like a porter, and a
 carpenter, and a painter that would be assigned to that division. And then an
 artist, who would paint backgrounds and paint whatever you would need. So that
 would be about the general structure of a staff, depending on how many windows
 they would have.

I: Any idea what the salary budget was for all those people?
N: Totally?
I: Yes.
N: I wouldn't know, but I would think the average, at that time, in the forties--
a display man was making maybe about one hundred twenty-five dollars a week.
Maybe forty-five dollars for persons starting, a trainee in the beginning.
But they would've been considered good salaries at that particular time.

I: Well, we've pretty much covered the Lord and Taylor - Henry Callahan regime.
Now that ended, if I remember correctly, in '56?
N: I think it would have been more like '54.

I: Everybody associated you so completely with Lord and Taylor. I remember it
came as a shock to everybody that you were even considering leaving. What
was that all about?

N: I got a call one day from a head-hunting company--Handy Associates--and they
asked me if I could recommend someone for industry. Someone of my caliber.
It was an industrial job. And I said, "Well, how much salary are you paying?"
They mentioned thirty thousand dollars a year, and I said, "I'll be right over!"
Because I was making fourteen thousand dollars at the time.

So I went over and talked with them, and they said, "Wouldn't you like
to know what kind of a business it is?" I said, "Well, yes, I think I would."
And they said, "Well, it happens to be Schenley Distiller. Do you think that you
would be interested in that kind of a thing?" I said, "What do they want me to
do?" And they said, "They want someone on their staff who will be able to help them improve their visual image. Improve their displays, and the presentation of their packaging and things like that. And I said, "I think I can do it."

So against all kinds of advice from everybody I knew, including Dorothy Shaver, I took the job, not knowing what I was going to get into. And I found it one of the most fascinating experiences of my life. Because I worked very closely with all their sales promotion division, their packaging division. . . . Their sales promotion division included those that did displays for all the liquor stores, bars, restaurants, and things like that all over the United States. Using paper goods and using printed material and using things that were part of the advertising campaign.

The advertising campaign fell right into my lap, you might say. It was called "The Return of the Golden Age of Elegance." It was a new packaging, a new concept; it was a red velvet curtain draped back, with a bottle of Schenley Reserve at one side. It just somehow was something that I felt that I was able to do totally for the company; and we were able to put on big shows for the distributors, in showing them what the word "elegance" meant. Because before that time, all the advertising campaign in the liquor business was hit towards sportsmen. In other words, you had fish and deer heads and hunting, and I kept stressing the fact that any kind of spirits were a part of gracious living. They were part of entertaining, just like food would be, and they could be as glamorous as perfume. They could be beautiful gifts at Christmas time. So I was able to kind of totally revolutionize their point of view about how to put across their product.

The only switch to me was working with a multi-million dollar firm, who thought big and thought totally all over the United States. Also, instead of
working directly to attract the consumer, we were working to attract the distributor. To make the distributor think better of our product. So it was a much higher level of point of view. I was able to put on big sales meetings in Las Vegas, in San Francisco, and various parts of the country. We put on fashion shows to impress the distributors. We achieved a great breakthrough in points of view about convincing the liquor retailers that they could do a more beautiful job visually.

One of the things that I developed at that time was a series of brandy inhalers. One was large enough to hold a fifth of whiskey, and then on top of that was pasted another one upside-down; on top of that was another one, until you got a whole pyramid that stood about three feet high. We would present these to certain selected night club bars, so that our product would be dramatically posed on the bar, hoping somebody would say, "I'll take that, that thing that's inside." Because we were trying to make our product look better than the next person's type of whiskey. It was a kind of a competitive business at that particular time, but I still used the idea of showmanship and fashion and elegance.

I: I found myself going back in my mind to your first experience at the Waldron Academy, when one could have that rare moment when the front parlor was opened up and you saw all that gold furniture inside.

N: Absolutely.

I: How wonderful to draw upon that and think of the Golden Age of Elegance. Because, as you remember, I was part of that whole thing and therefore I remember the constant ability that you had to create packaging and things that would produce some relationship to gold, associated with elegant living. I also felt at the time that you opened something else up, which was that women drank. That it wasn't just men that drank.

N: Well, we weren't allowed, you see, at that particular time: there was an unwritten
law imposed by the industry that women were not to be used in ads, because they were terrified that the WTCU would come through and Prohibition would start again. We were not allowed to even infer that women drank, so we couldn't show them at all in any kind of a way. The audience we were hitting for—we found that most liquor was being bought by men, and asked for by men, by brand at bars. The man did the ordering of the drinks, according to whatever buying habits they had.

There were other no-no's in the thing. We weren't allowed to use butterflies in any of the promotional material, because butterflies meant butterflies in the stomach. We weren't allowed to use anything to do with any kind of children's fairy tales or anything like that. Anything that would be cute, that would attract children to a liquor store window. Or anything that was religious in any way we weren't allowed to do. These were all unwritten laws.

When we had a distributor meeting, I said, "Well this is not for the general public. Couldn't I possibly use women in the distributor meeting to show them our new things?" And they said, "Do whatever you want." So I'll never forget a show that I did in Las Vegas: I had a girl dressed in a marvelous Edwardian outfit, and I had her pushing in a tea cart as part of this fashion show that I did showing new products. I said, "Now this is the tea cart of yesteryear. Now let's see what the modern hostess does." And there appeared a model in a golden sheath, all sequined, and she pushed in a golden bar cart with all our products on the top of it. And we had great music going and lights flashing. I suppose it had results.

I: Well, I think it was larger than perhaps you realized, because I recall, at that point, I was hosting a television show in Washington, and I remember taking one of your particular... Somebody had sent me some material—I think it was you—which talked about the upcoming Christmas presents. The kind of elegant things
that you'd be given. And I remember analyzing it on the air, talking about the fact that it was a recognition that you could have wonderfully gracious living even if you're living in a one-room studio apartment in Washington, D.C., which was a dominant kind of direction towards the single worker, the government worker. That was the nature of the program that I was doing, to make their lives more exciting and more stimulating, because they were a large part of the television audience.

But I remember implying that although there were no women in the ads, it was obvious that when one talks really about elegant and gracious living, and you have men in dinner clothes, we have to imply that everything isn't a class reunion; and therefore, there are bound to be women in the situation. And that I felt it was a tacit recognition that women are part of the cocktail party scene; and the hostess very often relates her menu to what is being drunk, or how much is going to be drunk, by her guests. And that you had also brought back another form, which was the after-dinner drink, which was a sense that cordials and brandies and things of that nature could be not necessarily absorbed and used simply because they were alcoholic, but because they formed a gracious level of flowing from the dinner table to allow the staff, or the caterers, to clean everything away, so that the hostess wasn't faced with people quitting on her or getting a bill that would just be gigantic. So I felt at the time that you had done an extraordinary thing, in terms of recognizing that lifestyles had very real meanings as far as the liquor industry was concerned, which they had never presented before, ever. (pause) My compliments, Mr. Callahan.

Now, the Schenley experience lasted for how many years?

N: Two years.

I: Well, you did a lot in those two years; there was a lot that was accomplished
and a lot that was covered. And you left there because of what?

I: I got a telephone call from Saks Fifth Avenue, and they said, "Could you recommend somebody of your caliber for our store?"

I: (laughs) Everybody wants you, or they just want your caliber.

N: "Our display manager is going to be retired." The wheels began to turn around in my head. I was very happy at Schenley and doing very well. And I thought, "My God, if I had that opportunity, I really could do a number on that store, I really could do something with them." I knew Ray Johnson, who was the vice-president of the store. In fact, he had been the president of Bonwit Teller's in my very first job, when I was working for them, or in my second job. I said, "Let me give it some thought, maybe I can come up with somebody for you." And then I thought more, and I thought, "I think I'm going to talk to them myself," but I wanted to find out first if I could break my contract; I had a contract with Schenley. So when I talked it over with Lou Rosensteel, he said, "Well gee Henry, we like you here, we'd hate to lose you, but if you feel more happy back in that business, I can see your point of view. I wouldn't stand in your way in any way," which was very gracious of him. And he said, "I'm sure we could still do things together if necessary."

So I discussed it with the people at Saks, and they said they would like to have me join them. So that I moved uptown to Fiftieth Street and Fifth Avenue. I never left Fifth Avenue all those years, because even Schenley was on Fifth Avenue; I was on the eighty-fifth floor of the Empire State Building—my office.

I: I remember it well.

N: Well then started another ballgame. The attitude was, "Okay, sonny boy, you've done okay downtown, now let's see what you can do up here." Then there was a
certain amount of sabotage from the staff, who were very unhappy at my arrival: they had their own format of doing things there for a good many years. And I had to face a kind of a hostile group: some hostile buyers who were very happy with what had been done before. To try to get this poetic quality that I had learned under Dorothy Shaver to a group of hard-headed, very very realistic merchants--it was a new ballgame for me; because where I had to pretend on elegance at Lord and Taylor, here it was built-in: Saks had been in a luxury business ever since its establishment. So I really had to learn a different point of view. Here I was in the real world. The others seemed to me like summer stock before being on Broadway.

I: That's interesting. When you were at Lord and Taylor, it was Hoving who established the term, "We do business for the nice people." How would you describe the people at Saks?

N: I would say the people at Saks were the dressy people. The dressy crowd. I was just absolutely overwhelmed when I would walk into the costume jewelry department, and I would see drawer after drawer of the most extraordinary costume jewelry, we never had at Lord and Taylor. We used to have to go and make it, sometimes, ourselves down there. And to see stockrooms just overflowing with fantastic handbags. And the millinery department was practically a block wide, and stockrooms just bursting with luxurious goods. You know it was almost like Ali Baba's cave to me.

But also, buyers that were very knowledgeable. Saks had stores in various parts of the country, and they had a tremendous reputation within the business community. They had an in-house designer, Sophie Gimbel; there were custom-made departments. I was staggered by the grand luxe of the company, compared to where
I had been before. However, I was told that the budget had been established; the size of the windows were very tiny compared to Lord and Taylor. The staff that I inherited I had to train in a new way. So, I had immediate problems. It took a while to overcome them, which I did by patience, by weeding out the people that were not necessarily up to the standards that I felt we could achieve. I must say, the company was very supportive of that.

During the years I was with Schenley, I learned the appeal across the board of the United States. You know, being able to work in every city; and through the experience I had in traveling all across the United States, I knew how big our country was. Of course, Saks had stores in all the luxury places: Palm Beach and Beverly Hills and Chicago and Detroit. Wherever money people congregated. I just knew I had a built-in audience for this luxurious feeling that I always believed in. Gradually I had new mannequins made that were inspired by people. I remember I had some done after the paintings by Baldini of the Duchess of Marlborough, things of that nature. I was able to do a truly de luxe job. It was a time of fashion, too, of all the luxurious cocktail clothes and fur stoles, and marvelous turbans and hats. Dressy daytime looks.

We used to do great windows of "mother of the bride" and all the ceremonies and events that were part of that whole thing of the fifties and the sixties. Not emphasizing too much on imports, but things that were made by the American market for American customers. That was the strength of their stock.

Adam Gimbel was a great revelation to me, because I didn't know him before I worked there. On my very first interview with him, he said, "Well, welcome uptown! You've done some good things downtown, let's see what you can do with us. Henry, I hope you like to paint with a broad brush." And I loved him from that
moment on, because I knew just what he talked about. He didn't want to be involved with the details, he would say to me: "Now, just in case you're getting a little bored, I have a project for you. We would like to attract more young customers to our sports department. Do you have any ideas? Don't tell me now, think about it. And as you come up with ideas, we'll sit and talk again." He thought in a big way.

It was just the beginning of the Saks expansion program. But I had to learn a lot of new things about the interior of stores, about opening stores. I opened fifteen stores for the company; and when you open a store, you work with the architect all the way from the beginning, the store planners, the merchandise people, the buyers. It's a very very heady and very exciting experience. Because you have to buy all the display equipment: the mannequins, the fixtures, the counter things, the embellishments of the store. Adam Gimbels was very conscious of the local architecture of the community where he was building a store. My first experience was in helping them open the store in Springfield, New Jersey. It was a contemporary store, but it had overtones of early Americana: red brick and glass. He wanted the salon to be a kind of reproduction of a Williamsburg livingroom. Because in analysis, he found that most of the people in that New Jersey area had an early American point of view. All the things that I picked for the store--the brass mirror stands on top of the counters, the brass fixture that held jewelry and scarves--all had the feeling. . . . I had gotten an early American candelabra, and we had that base copied and enlarged. So everything we had in the inside of the store was brass, or crystal, or something that would have harmony with an early American interior. We had furniture picked that was
based on Williamsburg, and colorations of Williamsburg; and the mannequins had a very special kind of a look, almost like early American primitives, in their makeup. So nothing was harsh or hard.

And then for the opening, since it was the opening in the Garden State, and it was opening at Thanksgiving time, I had a pyramid, forty-five feet high, made of wire, put in the center of this big open gallery. It was completely covered with vegetables, all the way to the top: all donated to us by the local A&P as a gesture of welcome. But then we arranged it all around this thing, in row after row of carrots and fruits.

I: It's interesting when you said Garden State, of course. My personal association was flowers, but you turned it into gardening in relationship to vegetables.

N: Well, it was Thanksgiving time, it was a natural to do it at that time.

I: Of course. Interesting how we all have our own identification with these things.

N: And New Jersey is known for vegetables, I think, more than for flowers; anyway, all the products of the farm, I thought of it that way.

I: Very very good. Now, obviously, your position changed there. In other words, at Lord and Taylor, you were primarily concerned with exterior display.

N: And here I was concerned totally with the administration not only of windows, but interior displays as well. At that time, when I came with the company, there were fifteen stores all across the United States, and I had to administer the staffs and the budgets and the points of view of all those stores. I had to visit them on a regular basis, and supervise the personnel, and train them into the way of thinking that we were doing in New York.

I: Did you hire everybody for those departments?

N: No, I was able to motivate the people that we had in each area. By a case of gradual involvement with their problems and helping them solving them, I was
able to get to know the people on a first-name basis. I was able to utilize the telephone very intelligently by long distance. We had Watts line connection with the various stores, and I was able to communicate that way.

We had photographs of all the stores' interiors, and books, and photographs of what their window areas were like. So when I was able to discuss problems on the telephone, we would say, "Now let's turn to page so-and-so in the manual. Now which area are we talking about?" We were able to communicate that way. That was the beginning of what we would call the "boutique era" of stores.

The first boutique that I had heard of in a store, that I remember, was when Dorothy Shaver came back from Florence and said, "There's a shop in Florence called The Fantasia Shop, and I think we should have a shop on our main floor called Fantasy or Fantasia. All the unusual, wild things that we can find: fun things, whether we sell them or not, but something for women to come in and just 'Oooh and Aahh' over. I'm going to give that to the interior display director, Edgar Talman, to merchandise." So when I went up to Saks, they were just beginning to think that way, of having boutiques--they always had certain shops within the store, but they were practical shops. Like they had the Wetsel Shop for men, and they had certain shops for women's sportswear. And they had one boutique, but that was only the New York store.

So the idea was to make most of the dress departments look more like boutiques, so that when you walked through a kind of an archway, instead of just seeing nothing, you would be attracted with iron stands with dresses hanging on them, and accessories and scarves and things like that. So the idea was to soften the look of the store, and make it into a kind of a very feminine place. Because it was primarily a women's store. And of course, keeping the men's stores very neat and tidy. In other words, I was using that experience
of Dorothy Shaver: Mess up the ladies' side but make the men's side look very neat.

Then, also, it was rather revolutionary to use a few realistic mannequins within the store and put spotlights on them. Because before that, at Saks, they were just kind of like salons—like Adam-style rooms or Sheraton-style rooms or Louis XV type of salons. So it was a case of making this kind of ultra-feminine approach into the store, which was very much of the trend. Because as you said before, when Stutz started to make boutiques inside of Bendel's, that began to be watched by a lot of the executives. And since some of our Saks stores were small shops, like in St. Louis or in Palm Beach or in Miami, it was a natural to try to make them look like boutiques, and get more things out and around.

I: Did you set the window policy for each one of the branch stores? In other words, was there somebody in a branch store who was . . .

N: Yes. There was a display director of each store, and usually in this system sometimes two or three, depending on the size of the store. And then of course, if they could utilize what we had used in New York, we would ship things around. We would ship certain kind of unusual display pieces to Chicago, and from Chicago to Beverley Hills, or to San Francisco. But each of these were charged against each store, and the shipping was charged against each store. And the budgets were set by the managers of each store, not the display managers. So there was always a kind of a fight and a hassle to get things going. It wasn't the freedom of a lot of money. Each store had its own budget set by the store manager. And the store manager was autonomous, in a way. We couldn't tell them what to do; we could suggest, but the store manager was almost as if he were president of each store.
Adam Gimbel believed that each store manager should be the merchandise manager, and we should be there to help that store manager and help the display person; not to be autocratic, not to be dictatorial, but to be a motivator and an inspirer and a helper. So a lot of my time was taken up with doing just that. Plus the attendance of meetings—interminable meetings—within the New York organization. Because in a big organization like that, there had to be a lot of decisions made as a group: with merchandise managers and buyers and sales promotion people meeting together.

I: Of course, one of the fascinating things is to realize that when the whole branch store world began to develop, where everybody was competing with every shopping center and every new area, I was always interested in knowing—and you're a perfect person to ask—whether or not. . . . For instance, at Lord and Taylor, where there was one store originally, one could define who the Lord and Taylor woman was, pretty much. When you have stores all over the country, how do you define who the Saks Fifth Avenue woman is, or do you try? Or do you make the assumption that . . .

N: You make the assumption that she's the same all over the country. You are bringing Fifth Avenue to Palm Beach, you are bringing Fifth Avenue to Chicago, to Beverly Hills. . . . You're not trying to make it into a Beverly Hills—Hollywood store: It's a Fifth Avenue store. A Fifth Avenue in the center of Springfield, New Jersey. Naturally, you bone up on the departments that you'd have in the parent store that would be right for their lifestyle. But the point of view wouldn't change. It always was to give a super-sophisticated point of view. Because when a person opened a Saks Fifth Avenue package, regardless of where it was in the country, it was that moment of magic: getting it from the finest store in the world. That was my quest, to keep that enthusiasm going on everyone
possible: to realize that they were working with the best merchandise, and putting out the most distinguished point of view, and trying to appeal to the top creme de la creme of their community. And not to lower their standard.

I: Did a display idea ever come from out of town to you? In other words, did one of your display directors from one of your smaller stores . . .

N: Oh yes, many times they did. I think we had one great genius--his name was Jack Johansson--in the San Francisco store. Windows there were very very small, and he never used mannequins. He used a kind of a headless dummy. But he was a true artist. When he made an arrangement in the window, of flowers and birds and accessories and a dress, he did it as a still-life artist. And it was very hard to reinterpret that in other stores. Because if the person wasn't a true artist, it could look like an awful "mishmash." But I think that was one case where we really utilized the talent.

I: At Saks you were a vice-president, if I remember correctly.

N: I was made vice-president in, I guess, 1964. I was one of the first people in my profession to be made a vice-president.

I: Did that change you in any way?

N: It made me feel much more a part of the management team of the chain. I felt that my decisions with the managers of the stores became more of a commitment as far as they were concerned--my ideas were accepted more readily. I think inwardly I felt very proud of that moment.

I: I would think so. Tell me this, Henry: you were on the Avenue for a lot of years. How many years, actually?

N: Forty.

I: Forty, that's a long time. Forty years. And having a strong impact and influence
all that time, there are a couple of questions that I've been dying to ask you. One of them is: one of the things I loathed about the Saks Fifth Avenue windows were those awful frames. Every window was framed in that funny, dated frame. When you got the job, I thought, "Well, that'll be the end of those frames. They'll take those out and open up all that glass." But they were never removed. Why was that?

N: Those frames were designed under the direction of Adam Gimbel by Irene Sheraff. He was very proud of those frames, and he felt that was a distinctive look in the company. He preferred those not to be changed.

I: You had no choice.

N: So I didn't particularly feel that I wanted to fight with City Hall.

I: No, I suppose not. But it's interesting, I always wondered about that. Because there were so many times that I would look at a display at Saks that you had created, and think, "Well, it's fine excepting why am I looking at it as though it's a painting, when it's not a painting. It's an attempt to create a moment of real life. What's the matter with everybody? Don't they understand that the frame... ."

N: You see, they were designed in the 1940's. And it was designed as a total picture frame. Even the floor was higher, and it was supposed to be just one figure in a picture frame, like a portrait. That was the idea of the time.

I: Sure! It would be a wonderful idea, for instance, if you are presenting annually or semi-annually, the couture of purchases. The major statements from the major designers that you buy from. Then, treating each one as a portrait is a wonderful idea.

N: You see, I think that was the original concept. Whoever made the concept, that's how they wanted the windows to be. In fact, it was almost like Garfinkel's in Washington. He wanted a headless dummy in the window with just a dress on it and
nothing else. And they were very hard to utilize . . .

I: To budge.

N: . . . in any way. But I wasn't able to make any change on that. Because things like this do happen. You don't have the free hand as an executive. If you owned your own store, you would.

I: All the years that you were doing display in these major department stores, did you ever have the feeling that you could be a better buyer than some of the people that were buying merchandise?

N: I've often felt that I could've been a more tasteful buyer. But remember, in all the years that I was in department stores, I never once spent a moment in a fitting room. I never once helped a woman or a man put himself totally together in the fitting room, so I have to respect the knowledge that buyers and fitters and sales personnel have. So I've never mocked them in any kind of a way, because that's been a part of experience that I only had by hearsay from my family's experience. And I used to hear the terrible, horrible things that went on in fitting rooms. Where customers ripped up a dress because they didn't like the way the sleeves fit, and things like that. I kind of just kept into my own world of fantasy, you might say.

I: The other question that I've always wanted to ask you has to do with the fact that when one is an artist—and I think of display people who are good as artists—when an artist gives of himself, he gives a great deal of his personal emotional feeling. He draws upon that, and gives it to you in whatever it is his particular art form is reflected in. Did you ever feel that way about windows? I mean, did you ever feel that emotionally you had drained yourself at a given moment to give something into a window? Or did you ever do a window and have it put together by your staff and then look at it and think it's too emotional?
N: I got very emotional about practically every window that was an artistic kind of masterpiece type of thing visually. There were opportunities where I felt very rewarded by realizing that I had created a piece of visual art; a collage, you might say.

I: Give me an example of something.

N: Let me think of the first windows I did for Saks Fifth Avenue. They were the most beautiful, encrusted lace short evening dresses I've ever seen, done by Harvey Beren. They looked like a wedding cake, in fact. They were all lace and bows and ribbons. And I saw them in my mind as almost ballerinas at the court of Louis XIV. I've always loved those paintings at the Frick; the paintings that were made by Fragonard for Madame DuBarry. And I conceived the idea of a background like that. I had the artist do backgrounds inspired by the trees and sculpture that are in the background. I had the mannequins standing and leaning against a piece of sculpture completely covered with roses. I had one sitting in a swing, like Fragonard would have, and marvelous hairdos. They were contemporary, but they had almost the feeling of the Louis XV period. And beautiful slippers. And then there was moss on the floor, and rose petals, and the sign was in the form of a poem. And there was just one shaft of moonlight coming down on the mannequin. There was a little butterfly on the rose. It was just a scene out of a dream. I stretched tulle over the front of the windows, so you could just faintly see this whole effect.

Well those were something that when I stood outside, I just couldn't believe that anything could be so beautiful. But there were many things like that. I did some things that were Chinese. I did things that were Indian-inspired. I did things inspired by a trip to Venice. And sometimes totally contemporary things that were all done in steel and chrome, when that was returning as a trend.
I was always trying to get into the newest movement of the time. I was one of the first to do art deco over again in the sixties, when people were beginning to talk about it. In fact, I found a lot of old props in the Saks Fifth Avenue display storage room that were left over from the art deco period.  

I: The original period.

N: Yes. Because we had a place called the Salon Moderne.

I: One of the things that I thought of as we were talking earlier about Cecil Beaton: one of Beaton's contributions, of course, to fashion illustration and fashion photography, was that marvelous sense of contrast. He would take the most beautiful ball gown and take it down to the Fulton Fish Market and photograph it. Or take his original photographs, that started that whole direction going: he used bombed-out buildings in London with terribly chic cocktail dresses. There was something almost ghastly, but at the same time wonderfully stimulating, by that sense of contrast. Did you do anything of that sort, in terms of display? Was that thinking any kind of an influence on you?

N: (pause) No.

I: Not at all. You didn't believe that trend would be effective?

N: No. Harmony was more of what I was into, rather than contrast.

I: You're just an incurable romantic, that's what you are.

N: Yes. (laughter)

I: Of course. You don't want any harsh realities entering into your world. Of course the feeling that one always has about display—and many people do—is that you're dealing with a staple gun, and you're dealing with something that's going to last a week, and then it's going to be torn apart and disappear.
And yet, my experience with the things that you have done is that I never felt that a staple gun had been used. I really do think that one of the reasons that you are as famous as you are is that the windows that you created never left you with that feeling.

N: I was very very careful about finish. I was trained to have things looking well finished even though they weren't. The effect was there. One time, when my mother was in her late nineties, I asked her, "Mom, what do you think of me?" She looked me straight in the eye and she said, "I think you're the world's greatest faker." I said, "WHAT?!" She said, "I thought you were going to take it that way. You know how to make rain out of cellophane. You know how to create all those wonderful effects. What's the matter with that? You're the world's greatest faker."

I: I think that's a wonderful description. I really do. I love it.

N: It's true that I was able to create effects. We would make marble out of paper, and all the products that would give you the feeling of something solid. Sometimes you'd see in the background something that looked like it was completely made of marble or molten steel. It would really be vacuum-formed plastic, as light as a feather, that would just have this look. And you could just put these panels up with pins, but they looked like great big stones.

I knew where to get all these lightweight things; because doing things in a window, you have to carry props long distances. Usually the studios are way down in the basement, underneath the cellar of the store, and you have to wheel all the mannequins--they're dressed in another area--and you have to wheel them in on kind of trolleys and bring them into the window. And each time you change a display, you would have a different kind of mannequin. We didn't
use the same mannequins week after week. We had a new kind for each week. We would have maybe fourteen, fifteen sets of mannequins: different kinds, different spirits, young mannequins, older ones, in between. Sports ones, ones that are poetic, ones that are very straight.

I: Was there ever a real goof? I mean, did you ever come back after you staff had been delegated to do something, and suddenly you realized somebody had...

N: Yes. One night at Lord and Taylor, I—my wife and I and a whole bunch of us really went out on the town. We tied one on, we had a great cocktail party. We all decided, "Let's go back and finish trimming the windows at Lord and Taylor." The whole bunch of us got into the windows and pinned skirts over the girls' heads and put hats on backwards, and put gloves on their feet, and shoes on their arms. It was just absolute madness.

I: You must've been stoned out of your mind. (laughter)

N: The next morning, I got a call from Dorothy Shaver, saying, "Callahan, what's happened with the windows?!" And I said, "Oh, we haven't finished, we haven't finished." I rushed out and I saw this complete madness, and we had to, of course, change it. But that was about the only time I ever did that. That's one thing I learned: Never have a cocktail party on the night that you're doing windows. (laughter)

I: I wonder if there was any other kind of them. I mean that was sort of a deliberate, drunken spree, in which one was expressing, perhaps, frustrations that you felt at various times. A little hostility, there, towards the entire organization. But I was wondering if there'd ever been the sort of goof that was done without anybody being aware of it, or catching it immediately. Any window that ever stirred up the kind of controversy or hate or malice.
N: Oh yes. One time--this was in the Walter Hoving period of Lord and Taylor--Brook Cadwallader did a special print for Lord and Taylor. It was a white ground print, and over it was printed a black mesh. On the mesh were little turquoise and shocking-pink fish, as if they were caught in a net. They had a whole series of dresses made in these prints, and I thought, "Wouldn't it be interesting to have the mannequins as if they were silhouettes: paint them black, and put all black accessories with the clothes, so that just the dresses would stand out. And have it in a black setting." So we did. Well, the windows the next day were practically stoned, because there was a very anti-Black feeling at that time. People screamed on the telephone, "What is this business of doing all black mannequins, dramatizing the Black people?!" And oh, it was a terrible. . . . We didn't dare take the windows out. But I was told, in the future, if you're going to do anything like that, be careful. I never thought of it as a social problem. I thought of it as an artist . . .

I: Of course.

N: . . . I never thought of it as anything else.

I: But that was years and years ago.

N: Yes.

I: What year was that?

N: That was in the forties.

I: Yes. One would not have that response today, I assume. At least, we hope not.

N: I don't know.

I: Now, you stayed with Saks Fifth Avenue until what year?


I: So you were there a long time.

N: Yes. I was there twenty years.
I: Twenty years at Lord and Taylor, twenty years at Saks.

N: Well, not quite twenty years at Lord and Taylor. But also, in between all that, I was involved with a lot of... You see, Saks having stores in the luxury resorts, particularly Palm Beach and Washington, I was involved with helping the communities put on great extravagant galas. That was really very exciting. I started to help first when I was with Lord and Taylor. I started to help Claude Phillipe on the first April in Paris balls, and helping him decorate the ballrooms and events at the Waldorf. Then, when I went with Saks, I helped many of the women's committees of the various cities put on big charity balls and pageants. We supplied the decor for them. That's quite an exciting thing to suddenly take a huge ballroom, or a huge area in a club, and suddenly transform it into something magical in two or three hours at a very minimal cost, in creating a big effect. That was something that was part of my experience and also part of my work.

I: Was there compulsory retirement at Saks? Is that why you left?

N: Yes.

I: Ahhh. That's interesting.

N: When Saks was taken over by BAT--British American Tobacco Company--there was a compulsory retirement age of sixty-five.

I: Were you unhappy about it?

N: I felt that it was a good opportunity for me to take a crack at a different point of view about living. Because I had been working, you might say, from the time I was fourteen, fifteen. In that business that many years.

There was new management coming in, new points of view, many of which were kind of at variance to what I had been used to before, in terms of personnel and management.
I: But also the whole sense of the purpose of selling. In other words, you grew up with the whole feeling of elegance and de luxe living.

N: And also it came to the point to where there was beginning to be a dictatorial point of view coming from the merchandising department, rather than working in tandem: "What do you think?" It was, "Here's what we're going to show." It was the emergence of the fashion director "calling the shots." And that was something that I didn't particularly feel too cozy about.

I: Well, we've come to the end of this particular session. We have one more session, as well as the television period. I'd like you to think, between now and tomorrow, about any areas that you would like to put on the record that you haven't covered today. It could be anything from an anecdote that you remember that you think is meaningful, or anything that you'd like to say about display, both professionally and where it can go. And I'm also going to ask you about some of the names in display that you might respect or that you don't care about, or whatever it may be. Just so we can get, not so much on the basis of any sort of personal peep or anything of that nature. But you are certainly, in justification for this particular tape in oral history, as if you are the best in the business; I would be interested in how you feel about the Candy Pratts and Robert Curry and Gene Moore. (tape distortion) And one of the areas that we can certainly save for the television camera is all those people that are Henry Callahan graduates. People that have worked with you, been influenced by you.

N: You want to keep that for the television thing.

I: Yes.

(BEGIN SIDE I TAPE II)

I: This is Robert L. Green continuing the Henry Callahan tape. Henry, I
indicated to you that I was going to continue this discussion by asking you about the word "visual merchandising." It's always interesting that when it comes to the fields of the arts, inevitably there's a category and a description and then it gets to be very popular. And then people begin to separate themselves from it and don't want to be known, for instance, as the interior decorator, so they become the interior designer. In the case of display, or window trimmer, one gets into the direction of visual merchandising. What was your experience with . . .

N: I'm the father of the word "visual merchandising." When I first got into the business, it was called window trimming, or the head man was the chief window trimmer. Then, in the thirties, it was called the display business, or display director. When I went with Schenley Distillers, I was amazed that they called the people who trimmed the windows of all the liquor stores, their merchandisers. But these men had to check stock. They had to check how many cases of Schenley were in stock in the store. And if the store didn't have a certain number of cases, the window wasn't trimmed. Because the window was trimmed by the distiller. This was a way that the distiller knew exactly the count of their stock throughout the United States. This was all put into a kind of a computer, and they knew exactly how much dispersion, what a good job their distributors were doing. So they really were doing a merchandising job.

So when I returned to the display business, I realized that I was spending most of my time in meetings with merchandise managers. And I was kind of the last one called to ask an opinion, or I seemed to be the lowest one on the totem pole. I realized that these people didn't feel
that I was on their footing. I was the artistic person; and I realized that I had to at least make a statement about merchandising, in a way. I began to use the term, as I used it at Schenley, "we merchandisers." I began to call our display directors in the stores, our visual merchandise managers. And then respect started to come, because I find that people in merchandising want you as a display executive or a display expert to know all about their problems. But they don't know or give a damn about your day by day problems; they don't know the modus operandi of display. The person has to learn to identify with Mr. Moneybags, you might say. Because display is a sales getting force, but you have nothing to prove that you are bringing money into the company the way a merchandise manager does.

So I began to put this on signs over our departments: Visual Merchandise Manager. And it was picked up then by the display press. Now, even the national magazine that used to be called Display World is now called Visual Merchandising. So I feel very proud that I was able to raise the profession to a standard of executive thinking, without letting down on the artistic angle.

I: That's very gratifying. I wasn't aware of that. I asked the question because I just thought it was one of those funny things that developed, with somebody deciding that they wanted a more posh title.

N: Well, I feel we are in a title-oriented retail society today. Now I think the display executives are considered visual merchandising experts. Most of them now are vice-presidents of the larger companies.

I: It occurred to me as we talked about your experiences at Saks that perhaps you might give some insight on what your total contribution at Saks was. What you feel it was. In other words, were the windows very
different after you took them over, the twenty-year period that you were there.

**N:** I think the windows, when I went there, were quite severe. I think they were designed by people who were more interested in designing backgrounds, or designing just displays. They didn't seem to relate to the merchandise that was being displayed. The mannequins were selected because they were attractive mannequins; not necessarily because they enhanced the type of clothes that were there. I don't think there was any feeling of grand luxe or what the store stood for. There wasn't an awful lot that made people stop and say, "Gee, I can relate to that beautiful dress."

Inside the store was more severe, more classic. I feel that I helped give it a more interesting look. Since I realized that most of the customers at Saks were women, I was able to give it a more feminine visual atmosphere through fresh flowers through the store, through interesting displays: maybe a bit on the cluttered side, the things I had learned from experience with Dorothy Shaver. So I would say that I helped feminize the stores.

Of course the stores, when I was with Saks, were a mixture of architecture, mainly French. Adam Gimbel was very very inspired by France, by the way the Dior salons looked, and the great palaces in Europe. Most of the architecture had been planned by a firm called Alivoine of Paris. A lot of the rooms were really French rooms. So the stores were either that, or they were kind of American colonial. They were, depending on where the stores were, Spanish in Palm Beach, for instance. So we had to create an atmosphere of charm, without really spending any money architecturally. Because the firm at that point
wasn't into remodeling. They felt very happy with the atmosphere in their stores.

They all somehow went with the type of clothing at that time. The fifties and the sixties was the time of the elaborate cocktail dress: Dressy, daytime clothes. Hats and stoles and costume jewelry. There wasn't the emphasis on sportswear and casual wear that there is today. So Saks was known as a dressy store. If you wanted to have something dressy for a wedding, for an occasion, you'd usually go there. So I tried to make the stores look more European than American.

I: I think that was very wise by virtue of the fact that... I once talked to Adam and Sophie Gimbel about their attitude towards Paris fashions. It was at a dinner party. I felt when they both were talking to me that they were less interested in Paris fashions than they were in the sense that most women associated the word "fashion" on the best possible sense with Paris. And therefore, some continuum, such as creating a French atmosphere within the Saks stores, would be valuable. It's an interesting association. I think it would be less valid today. Don't you think there's a growing increased interest in American designers today?

N: Well, also I think Paris has changed greatly. In all my trips there, I've noticed over the years how it's changed from the adoration of the eighteenth century toward almost the influence of the Bauhaus: the chrome and the metal. All the things that we know as contemporary store design today really started in Paris. I know that could be debated among some of our industrial designers, but it really started in the boutiques that St. Laurent put in; shops that Cardin put in that had metal ceilings and walls. They really were inspired, though, by the Bauhaus rather than
the beaux-arts. The beaux-arts used to be the big influence in design of buildings and stores, but then it came from the Bauhaus. The German influence started to come into industrial design.

After the war, instead of doing things in plaster and wood, they seemed to be going in for metal, and beautifully done. And I think that's where it really has happened.

I: It's interesting because that's your association with it. My association was that when you had Mies van der Rohe as an architect designing furniture that was glass and crisp, wonderful stainless steel, the education of the eye continues and eventually this sort of thing finds its way. Because it's a perfect frame for display of any kind. Much more so than beaux-arts or any kind of rococo or baroque treatment. Because it's so crisp and clean; it allows the clothes of the display material to pop out at you, and the merchandise pops out at you. So it's understandable that should happen.

Also it evokes a sense of today, which is what I meant when I said before, when I think there's an increased interest in American designers. I think that the people in this country are so much more related—well, you were getting at it when you said that the fifties and sixties was a cocktail dressy period; and we are much more casual and much more sportswear oriented, even sportswear for in town. Which of course creates its own kind of crispness as far as windows are concerned.

It's lovely to realize, of course, that your total span of experience has been a half century, really. In that sense, if you were to break it down yourself as to the kind of projected images that you were interested in at various periods, what phases did you go through?
Well, the first was the real art deco influence of the twenties and the early thirties. Inspired by the cubist movement, you might say, in the beginning. Mannequins that were stylized of metal, and backgrounds that were inspired by that whole movement. Things that were bought in Paris at the time: Lalique, glassware, and things of that type, that came in before the art deco. Wrought iron being used in kind of modern forms.

Then I would say the next was a kind of a slick lacquered surface inspired by the musicals of Hollywood. The curving backgrounds, lacquered surfaces, and a lot of white and chrome, and chrome trims.

Then, a restudy of Victoriana, that we talked before about, how Cecil Beaton began to use Victorian things and wicker and lace—but a restudy of it made me paint it white, and using artificial flowers and Cupids.

Then, a kind of theatricality of "cinema verite," you might say, where you had settings that looked like things that were happening. Theater--street theater--in the windows. But usually on a very high quality.

Then, a restudy of some of the simplicity coming through in the fifties. And then the rediscovery of art deco, and then into a very severe kind of moderne. Then into the last phase of, that I would say was, really street theater, inspired by some of the more outrageous things that were photographed in Vogue and by Barbara Turnville and Boudin. It was part of that whole wild disco scene.

In a sense of kinkiness. I always felt that both the clothes, the photographs, the whole sense of projected lifestyle, had to do with an uncovering of the fact that most people's rigid codes of behavior covered up other things.
N: There was one word that was utilized at that time. Everything had to be "with it." Now "with it" is already dated, but it was certainly emphasized that last period of my involvement in actual display on Fifth Avenue.

I: How would you describe it now?

N: Now I think it's a kind of a cooling off period. A kind of cold and cool, and very similar to what it was when I first began. A mannequin in a window, usually crouching in a corner or something like that. But the mannequins are much better today. I think today, particularly in the fine stores across the country, the fashion coordinator is the one who's calling the shots, rather than the display director. The fashions are picked by a specialist, and they're put together, and whatever is on the mannequin—or whatever is used to show the clothes—is the important thing. I think the display or the visual merchandise person doesn't have as much to say in that. And I notice a kind of a disparity between what is in the background and what is on the mannequin. It's almost as if one is not exactly getting together with the other.

I: Perhaps fighting the other.

N: Well I know they do.

I: Because it's interesting when you think about the history of display. Originally in stores, the people who had the sense of style and frequently the best taste, were the people who worked in display. They were the people most likely to be interested in reading the fashion magazines and going to the theater. And projecting out of their own fantasies and their own lifestyles ways of having elegance and romantic
behavior manifesting itself. The buyers were hard, very tough bargainers and merchandisers within the concept of the showrooms and the manufacturers. They really depended upon the display people to produce a kind of look in the windows. If you asked those buyers to do it, you would've been in tough shape, because their own personal taste was not that great.

But, of course, fashion itself became much more eclectic. And therefore, one particular projection of fantasy could be ruinous to a store by virtue of the fact that no store can really operate any longer on the basis that it reflects one single point of view. Because there isn't any single point of view anymore. There was a time, of course, when stores could, as Saks did, reflect elegance: the Paris imports, the best possible merchandise made in this country, the best quality; and there was a consistency. It was ladies' and gentlemen's clothing. Today, you're hard put to define what that means by virtue of the fact that it's only by behavior that you can judge a lady and a gentleman, not by what they're wearing. It's really quite true.

But thinking about it in terms of your career, it's fascinating to me to realize that of course you continue to have an impact, an input and force, because now you are living in Philadelphia. Now you went back to your roots, obviously; you went back to the city where you spent most of your early childhood. I'd be curious: do you have a salon that has gold furniture? (laughs)

N: No. I do not. I have a house that is filled with things that I have bought at very minimal cost over the years in my travels all over the world. So it's rather eclectic, and I happen to love living in a mass of color. So I have a salmon living room, and I have a bright red Tartar bedroom, and I have a brilliant yellow library. And I have a brilliant emerald green
kitchen, and I'm surrounded with the things that I've treasured from my travels all over the world.

I: I'm curious: will you change those colors with any degree of regularity like you might change your windows?

N: I'm so happy with them, I've been living with them now for five years, and I don't feel I want to change at this point. (laughter)

I: After all those terrible weekly deadlines.

N: I'm a fast mover. In fact, in Philadelphia they call me the "Silver Streak," because I move so fast. I'm not a person to sit around in my house.

I: What is it that you are doing professionally now?

N: Professionally, I'm a consultant for industry, any industry that wants to improve their visual image. One of my accounts is a group of stores in Detroit that kind of went down the drain visually, and they've asked me to help them define their taste in terms of packaging, in terms of display, in terms of logo, in terms of advertising. Then I've designed, once, the first total store that I've ever designed, for a shop in the Fairmount Hotel in Philadelphia.

I advise any firm that gets in touch with me that wants to improve their visual image. My present job is for the people who are on the foundation for the Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia. They've asked me to give the rooms in the House a kind of a lived-in look. And I've just finished a project there where I've ordered mannequins and had clothing copied of the period, and gave the rooms a lived-in look by putting documents around. And sometimes even simulating the things because a lot of the original little artifacts are not available. I've had them copied out of documents.
I'm also the chairman of the advisory committee for the costume and textiles wing of the Museum of Art in Philadelphia. I'm also on the board of the Friends of Moore College of Art, which is the oldest women's college in the United States. I'm helping them develop a program to teach visual merchandising to women. I lecture at both the University of Pennsylvania and at the Wharton School of Business. I'm in a business to teach some of the potential executives a little bit about visual merchandising. And also at Drexel University. I'm in the process of writing a textbook on display. I'm also painting, because I started, as I told you before, as the artist for the display department at Bonwit Teller's. And I've continued my art progress over the years.

I: Are you finding the painting really gratifying for you getting back to it?

N: When I can find time for it. But to find time with all the pressures of the other things. And of course the pressure of living, too; because I find, living in Philadelphia, I'm a new face still in town. And I'm involved with many of the charity fund raising events, where I help the committee people do the decor for balls and galas. I've just finished one to help to raise funds for the opera. We revived the Balle Masque del Opera, and we had to create a backstage atmosphere at the Academy of Music rehearsal hall. All of these things I've tried to use my expertise and my knowledge of how to make things out of nothing to create wonderful effects so that the event produces a lot of money for the cause.

I: Henry, if you were advising a student, saying to a student, "All right, you want to go into visual merchandising, or display." What direction would you ask them to take, in terms of their education; and what would you suggest that they also supplement their education with?
N: Broadly, usually the people who like or are drawn into this field are going to some kind of an art school or a school of merchandising. Usually that school somehow has a bridge, I would hope, to the theater in some way. Either a little theater, or some kind of a project, where vocal arts are more or less taught or helped. I think it's very important for an executive mind of the future to learn how to vocally communicate. Too many people in the display field and the advertising field and the commercial art field don't know how to sell themselves. Don't know how to talk the way that you do. I've had to learn it the hard way. So I think being able to get up in front of a class, or a group of people, and be able to sell your ideas verbally is a very important aspect.

I think also to be able to learn how shows are put together, to be involved with a little theater group; not only in acting, which gives the other confidence of standing up, but also how to put curtains together and how to put scenery together and how to put lighting together. By learning that way you--because in visual merchandising, you many times have to produce a fashion show, as well as your display work.

The other thing is, if you're applying for a job in visual merchandising, shouldn't you know to put yourself across visually? So instead of bringing a portfolio of your student work, you should prepare over the years, a portfolio of you. That you can just open this beautiful portfolio, the best thing you can possibly do in front of the executive and say, "Don't talk to me; look at me. This is me. These are the people I wish I could meet. These are the places I'd like to visit. These are the colors I like. This is what I would hope to do. This happens to be a little bit of my work in here." But it's more of this showing the dream, and it's how you present
this portfolio that will help you get the job.

And then it's very important to put in that portfolio kind of a looseleaf page. And on that looseleaf page you have something that the person who is interviewing you, or the firm that he represents, has done. An ad from a Strawbridge and Clothier or a Bonwit Teller or a Saks Fifth Avenue or a Lord and Taylor. They could be lifted out when you go to the next place. But something that makes the person who is interviewing you say, "Gee, you like what we do." And boy, you're going to get that job.

I: (laughs) I think that's a very interesting suggestion, the business of: Don't interview me, but look at me.

N: But also I feel too that people should try to understand one part of the world of merchandising, and kind of pinpoint it. Realize that in visual merchandising, you're going to be specializing either in home furnishings, in men's wear, in women's wear, or children's clothing.

I: This is pretty much the way it's broken down in stores.

N: This is the way it's broken down in the store. I think that if a person has a feeling for home furnishings, it's a great field on learning how to set up gift shops, and how to set up model rooms. That also leads into a career of interior decorating. Because really in display, you're creating still lifes. And then I think that people should haunt museums, and watch how the great artists of the Renaissance and all the way through the eighteenth and nineteenth century, how they created these still lifes. These wonderful display ideas are all in the backgrounds of the paintings. One can just observe, and also become aware. If a student is in a city where there aren't great museums, or there aren't stores to
compare to, there certainly are great art books. They're very expensive, but there's nobody who stops you from leafing through them in the bookstores.

I: In most cases, there are libraries.

N: And there are libraries. I think looking at color, just absolutely absorbing color, is very important. Not being afraid of color. Learning how to work with it. And learning how to use pigment, and to mix things. It isn't necessary for a good display or visual merchandising person to be a great artist or a great designer. It's a marvelous field for people who aren't quite great dress designers or aren't quite great anything particularly in that field. It's more of a craft, really, than it is an art form. Particularly in the beginning, because you learn on the job.

I: All right, you described home furnishings. Pick it up in terms of what you think a fashion person should do. Somebody who wants to be in the fashion end of display. The clothing end.

N: If it's a boy, it's a field for the kind of a guy who maybe wanted to dress dolls, but he wouldn't tell his mother or tell anybody else. It's really a kind of a field of a person who understands putting together women's clothes. It used to be a field totally for men because there's a lot of hard work involved: carrying heavy plaster mannequins. But now I think it's a great field for women. A great field for women in display.

But I think they have to understand and want to put clothes together for other people, not for themselves. It's a very treacherous career for people who have an inflexible personal kind of taste. I think one has to be more interested in dressing other people, maybe a little bit more in the theatrical way, than dressing themselves. It requires someone who thinks outwardly, "How can I help someone else?" Rather than somebody who
wants to grab everything for themselves. A person of a generous nature, who wants to improve the look of other people.

And then, maybe they're not great in terms of sewing or painting a sketch or something like that. But they have an inner urge to create; they're fascinated, they are crazy about clothing. Then I would say that they should immediately go out and get a subscription—if they have to beg, borrow, and steal money—to Women's Wear Daily, and read it the way that a future tycoon or a Wall Street oriented mind would read The Wall Street Journal. And then absorb, because that paper somehow just reports everything that's going on. More so, really, than the fashion magazines. Get to know what's going on in the fashion world. I think it requires not so much a knowledge of people, but the desire to know people. This is an abstraction, I know.

I do feel very strongly that taste is acquireable. It isn't necessarily a natural attitude. But one has to be able to expose oneself to the best. I think a lot of people in the world today get very discouraged, or they're keeping their sights down at street level. I like to tell young people, "If you want to go someplace, hit for the middle of the bull's-eye, not the rings around the corner. If you hit toward the center, you're going to hit something. Hit for the best. Always aim high, look high." Maybe it's because I'm a Sagittarian, I don't know, but my arrows go way high.

But I've always learned from the very best people. One can do that by reading columns, by watching what people are doing, what people are wearing, what people are thinking. Whether it happens to be movie stars, TV personalities: whatever intrigues the person about clothing. Because
there are many facets to that. There are facets for the very fine specialty shops. There are the general department stores and the chains. The chains really pay more money, really: the places like Penny's and Sears and firms like that. For a person that maybe hasn't got the high standard, believe it or not, they're the ones that are really making the money in the country, in terms of volume. So there's a big broad field.

I: I have always suggested to students that you can expose yourself to a visual education without having any money. In other words, you can walk into the lobby during intermission of an opening night, and see what it is that people are wearing. You can go to almost any sporting event the same way, in terms of whatever the intermission is. But you can also hitchhike out to a polo match in Long Island and just see what it is that people really wear in situations like that. Or to someplace where there are boats or ships. It's always so amusing to me to have students take on the responsibility of designing yachting clothes, and they've never even been in a dinghy, to say nothing of on a yacht. And without any understanding of the function of those clothes or what they mean.

I think that there has to be a much larger exposure on the part of students to the worlds in which these clothes are in, and objects that are used, if you're talking about display.

I like very much your thought that you allow yourself to plunge into the books, and let the colors and let the paintings and let the other techniques of other people teach you technique, as well as by association. When you mentioned Women's Wear Daily, I was struck with the fact that the copywriters of Women's Wear Daily are very very bright. They realize
realistically that they've got to capture the attention of the busy executive on his or her desk each morning. Their leads are extraordinary. If I were in display, I can tell you that I would just clip out all those leads and keep them. Because when they have a series of things that have fringe, they'll connect it to an Indian tribe. And suddenly there opens up a whole conceivable possible way in which you could do windows, drawing upon Americana, Indians, etc., etc., cowboys, all the associations that go with it. That's an almost oversimplified thing; it just happened to be the current **Women's Wear Daily** had that. I'm fascinated by the use of words as an association.

N: That's exactly the way that I think, the way you think. But an awful lot of display people, right now, at the present moment, don't think the way you do. Like you're saying, "Let's do something that will dramatize the whole American Indian thing. And let's get some wigwams." Nowadays, they'd just put one more chrome panel, and then another thing, and then a mannequin dressed in the fringe. And you don't get the **total** theater; that's what I'm talking about, that I'm hoping there'll be a revival of. But I also was almost going to ask you, "How did you get your motivation to think the way you do now?" Because we're both talking about the same kind of thing: the motivation inside you as a man to begin to think quickly and have this marvelous love of the magic of the world.

I: Well, we're not really here to interview me, Henry.

N: Yes, I know, but it fits into my interview.

I: Yes, I know what you're asking. Let me phrase it so that it comes off as perhaps a suggestion to students. One of the things that I do, for instance, with my own students, in trying to get them to understand, is that I will send them to an exhibit such as the current Hapsburg exhibit at the Costume
Institute at the Metropolitan and simply say, "All right, enjoy the exhibit. Then what I want you to do is make a list of things that you see in the costumes that can be transposed, translated, stolen, copied, borrowed for other uses. In other words, look at the buttons to see if they would make a cuff link or an earring. Look at the stitching of a buttonhole and see if that in itself wouldn't make a repeat pattern on a fabric for textile." That kind of thing. Giving them the sense that it is unlikely that one is going to find an entirely new form.

I mean, there are very few people who, like Picasso, can come up with construction sculpture and invent it, practically, when nobody had ever thought of it before. That happens very rarely. Most things are repeated and they reappear, like the invention of the wheel in separate cultures. You can find things in primitive paintings that seem wonderfully contemporary. And the impact and influence of, say, African sculpture on contemporary art of contemporary forms, and yet those sculptures go back thousands of years.

Now, if you can get students to think and understand how to associate, play that game by association.

N: In other words, to look back, to look forward.

I: Yes, and also let your mind freely run. Let whatever flows into your mind. You said something many years ago that I recall, which was that you never lost an image. That when you saw something, you filed it away somehow in your brain. And that in the most surprising moments when you were faced with a problem, you were able to, almost like a computer that goes brrrrrrrrrrrrr, and up pops that particular image.

N: But it pops up in a magnified form. Sometimes, larger than life in a much more wonderful way. That's what I've encouraged students to really
push for: I call it the "quest for the magic eye." In other words, to retain the memory of beautiful, sensational things. Not be looking in the garbage heap, in the low gutter of the street. To look at the very best that has been done. And not say that it can't be achieved again. Because you never, as we talked about, know where an idea can be reevaluated. Because even talking about Picasso: I would say that he studied very carefully some of the Greek things, the African sculpture. Who knows what he saw? Because as an artist you don't really tell where all your ideas come from.

I: I like the wonderful thing about Picasso—and of course he's currently so much in everybody's mind because of the incredible retrospective exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art—but I loved the line: "I think every artist has a right to steal from every other artist, but if I found myself repeating what I had done, I would be very unhappy." Now that's interesting and could apply to the visual merchandiser as well. No reason at all why you can't beg, borrow, or steal from whatever else you find in the world of the arts visually. But you'd have to go out very carefully not to repeat yourself a lot or your windows would become boring. There's an example of association that a great artist declares his philosophy and you can discover that it's a very interesting direct maxim for an entirely different profession. And an interesting one.

I want to go back to the student thing, because I do think it's an important area for them to understand. For instance, hiring an assistant. You're interviewing an assistant. Let's assume that you ask them about their educational background, and they say they went to Moore, or they
went to FIT, or they went to the University of Wisconsin, or whatever it may be. What specific kind of things would you hope that they had studied? Would psychology be part of it? Would sociology be part of it? Would politics be part of it? Economics?

N: When I was interviewing people, if I did not have a job available, and there was time, I would ask them to make a scrapbook of their taste, as I described before. I asked a young man who came in from Rhode Island School of Design to do that. A month later I got this magnificent scrapbook on my desk, and I immediately got in touch with him. I just had to find a spot for him, and he turned out to be the very best assistant I ever had. Because of the way he put it together, the whole feeling. I just knew that he knew. And I knew that there was going to be a person that I could depend upon, that could relieve me of a tremendous amount of responsibility. I just knew that he had the potential.

After a certain amount of experience as an executive, I realized the kind of person in talking with them whether they were going to be easy to get along with, or whether they were going to be on my wavelength. But I think one has to have—you judge a person a bit by how they are personally put together. If you're looking for someone who is a fashion-oriented person, you look at their clothing. You look at how well they're groomed, you might say. And if you're looking for a person to work in the display shop, you don't care if they have old jeans on, and they look kind of artsy. You just ask them, "Well, what do you do with your hands?" And then I always ask the big question, "Well, how are you with a vacuum cleaner?" And that always poses a great question . . .

I: Why?
N: Because in display you have to do everything. You have to sweep up and you have to nail. If you're going to be an assistant in the beginning, you have to be there with the hammer and the screwdriver and all that.

I: All right, that opened up an interesting thing, which is: What particular kind of basic skills—I mean you just said the vacuum cleaner . . .

N: The first thing you have to know is how to cover a panel. How to use what they call a staple gun. And how to cover panels and how to do simple, simple things. That staple gun is the number one tool of display today, because you can cover all kinds of panels and things with it. You can always say, "Well, I know how to cover panels." Well, then that right away helps you get a job. (laughter) Or, "I know how to dress a mannequin."

I: Now how can somebody get practice doing that?

N: Usually in the schools where they're going to. Or they would apply for a job in a junior department store or something like that, as a helper, which is usually the term of the trainee in the beginning. Or they go to a personnel office and say, "I'd like to find out if you have a job, during summer vacation time. Do you need anybody in the summer? I'd like to help out in the display department." And you do exactly that: you fetch and carry and watch and learn.

I: What about lighting? Because it seems to me it's so terribly important in terms of windows.

N: Well, lighting has all been based on the world of the theater. As I said before, the first person to use theater lighting was Helen Cole
at Bonwit Teller's about 1937. Now lighting—the actual instruments are very adaptable. But very few people understand how to use them. They don't seem to care about how the displays look at night, particularly in windows, because the windows are trimmed during the day. And then you walk by at night and the lighting is not well used.

I had quite an unusual experience because I needed someone to do lighting one particular time. Because I had figured the theory, after a lot of experience, that a mannequin's face looked the most beautiful if on one side you had a kind of a cold light, like shades of blue, coming from underneath; and then a kind of rose color from the other side, which would be pink and amber combined. The color of the sunset. You know, when the sunset is at its peak, how beautiful people look in the glow. Well, that color is not made in a color lens. But by combining rose and amber you get that color. That is directed at the side of the face, and the blue on the other side. The face becomes opalescent, like a pearl. And then you get white light down the front. Then you have to be careful not to get a white light on the nose, because the nose looks enormous. You learn all these things after a period of time.

One of the lighting men that I had trained had gone on to another field completely. In fact, into the field of designing fabrics. I called my friend Jack Venza, who was with CBS, and I said, "Do you know of anybody who is living, breathing, that knows something about lighting." He said, "No, I don't know anybody who knows anything about lighting to your standard, but there's a young man here who is a kind of an assistant grip on the set." It was before—there was no
union problem of any kind. "And he's looking for a job." And he came to Saks with me and we worked together. Now, ten years later, he's a lighting director, or was—he did all the lighting of the Metropolitan Museum, and he's a specialist at museums all over the world: Lamar Terry.

But lighting could be a very interesting career. But I feel that the person who is going into that should learn how to light things not from the great distance of a light gallery on the stage, but almost in a studio. Because it also is a great preparation for the field of TV lighting. Miniature.

I: Throughout this particular series of talks, flowers have come into reference point a lot. I'm curious: would flower arranging have any value to . . .

N: It certainly was for me. Because when I was going to high school, I used to be a delivery boy for a florist. And then I watched them arrange flowers, and I learned how to make corsages. It was very very important for me to know that. And there again it was by study, by experience, by reading, by watching, by going to lectures. It was a very very important thing for me to know. And to know how artificial flowers were made, to learn how to make them. Because then you're able to work with the studio people. When you go out to buy things and you want something originally planned, you can tell the people in the studio, "Well this is how—why don't you turn it this way and that." Because as a display editor, you learn to work with resources that way. When you learn their craft as well, then you're able to communicate your ideas to them, rather than just saying, "I don't think that looks right," and not being able to say how
it. . . . You don't learn, in other words, constructive criticism.

I: Also, going back to something you said at the very beginning of this: it's not a big budget field, usually. Which means that a great deal of the responsibility of the visual merchandiser is to be able to create things themselves. Of course the other element that runs through everything you've said is that it is a world of illusion. Therefore, what you learn from working in the theater, or seeing the illusion that occurs in paintings--after all, it's a flat surface and one creates some trompe l'oeil by itself--the fooling the eye becomes an extraordinary element, I think, as far as display is concerned. I've always had a feeling that if I were setting up a course of study for somebody who wanted to go into display, I would certainly see that they knew a great deal about trompe l'oeil.

N: Also, too, Robert, there are an awful lot of people who go into theater school when they're right out of high school, or in college, and they think the world of the theater is going to be something special. Then they go out into summer stock, and they find that it isn't really rewarding, and they're looking for a job. Well, I would like to see them going into visual merchandising. Because some of the most successful people I know have started as either ballet dancers or actors or something like that. Because that feeling of illusion, as you mentioned, or that desire to create a role or a scene, even if they're onto acting or dancing or participating. . . .

I: Let's talk for a moment, Henry, about some of the other people in display, at least the directions that they take. For instance, Robert Curry, who did the Bendel windows for so long; and Candy Pratt, who went from Jordan, I think, to Bloomingdale's. And of course, probably the most
famous of the Fifth Avenue display people in the art form today would be Gene Moore at Tiffany's. I remember when the first Moore windows began to appear with that wonderful sense of--I saw a connection with the early Cecil Beaton photographs. Beaton had brilliantly contrasted the element of the world of glamorous fashion and placing it against bombed-out buildings in Europe. Moore, it seemed to me, was taking luxury jewels that Tiffany had--I remember the first one I recall that was tattooed on my brain was the most beautiful sapphire bracelet I had ever seen wound around a hammer. Just an ordinary used hammer; and I thought, "Wow. My God," the impact was just a knockout in terms of that kind of thing. How do you feel about all that?

N: Well, I have to go beyond that. Because the original person that did that type of display--it was a firm called Blackstar and Go on Fifth Avenue. They had miniature windows. His name was William Baird Oakie. That was Jack Oakie's brother. He had very famous windows during the thirties of these miniature things, and I'm sure Gene saw those as a young man when he first came to New York.

For instance, I remember one time he had a pomegranate in the window, a real pomegranate. He had it split open, and the seeds were coming out, and the rest of the seeds were rubies. Does that answer that?

I: That sounds wonderful.

N: It was done in a little spotlight area; the windows were exactly the same size. I remember when Gene first started and he did windows for Delman's. Instead of the shoes being the important thing, there were pieces of art. He had friends in the art field that would love the idea of having their paintings on Fifth Avenue. He had a great taste for the
avante-garde. He would say, "Well, you loan me your picture, I'll put it in the window." He maybe did it the first time just for something to put in the window because the shoes might've been boring. But it really caught on. It became to be like--people would say, "Let's go and see what they have in Delman's window. There's always an interesting art piece behind." People didn't care about the shoes.

And then when he became display director of Bonwit Teller, I had a little bit to do with it. I don't know whether even Gene knows about this. Because Sarah Pennoyer, who was the sales promotion director of Bonwit Teller's, interviewed me for the job. I decided that I was going to stay at Lord and Taylor, and she said, "Do you know anyone that you'd like to recommend?" And I said, "There's a very good young man doing the windows over at Delman's." She said, "Well, he's just doing shoes." And I said, "Yes, but he's got ideas. And I think that he would be great." Well, they did hire him, and made him display manager.

Of course, Walter Hoving was the president of Bonwit Teller at the time, and that's how the association with Tiffany's started. But Gene's windows were very very more like a gallery type of thing. And he did continue with the idea of using artists. He got to know Rauschenberg and Indiana and all these people right in the beginning. Way in advance. They were controversial things. There were some people in the fashion world who said, "Well my God, Bonwit Teller's windows are like a gallery. You don't look at the clothes." Even though he was kind of criticized for it, he did some unique things. When he concentrated on the tiny windows at Tiffany's, he was able to still do the same type of thing which he used to do. And artists do come to him from all over and say, "Would you present my work?" He's built a reputation of that.
I: They're very effective windows.

N: Very, very, very.

I: And it's one of the few areas that I still pursue. In other words, as I used to go and look at Lord and Taylor windows when you were there and then later the Saks windows, I still go and look at the Tiffany windows. I find them wonderful.

N: He has also the remarkable patronage, real patronage, of Walter Hoving. And Walter Hoving has always said, "I don't care whether you sell one piece of merchandise. I just want them to talk about Tiffany's." He had that attitude at Lord and Taylor and he had that attitude when he was president of Bonwit Teller, the same way.

I: Well, it's very smart retailing, as a matter of fact. What about some of the young bright forces like Robert Curry and Candy Pratt? Because those are talents that are quite removed from the way in which you used windows.

N: I don't know them, and I don't know how to judge them. I think there's always been a kind of mini force that starts things going one way or the other. I think that those trendy ideas come and go, just as fashion does. I notice that there's a kind of a change in that now. I think, there again, Robert Curry was successful because of the patronage of Geri Stutz. She was his Dorothy Shaver. And I think Candy Pratt also was under the patronage of both Mr. Traub, but particularly on--what's the gal who used to do the rooms?

I: Barbara Darcey.

N: Barbara Darcey was the one who hired Candy, so she was her sponsor; but it's funny that these two people, who were forces, were under the
patronage of strong women.

I: Well, I find that understandable. In the sense that the area that you're dealing with, going back to the early, traditional position of fashion being a woman's world, sewing being a woman's world, the people who were attracted to the area, by your own description, were people who were interested in women's clothes, for whatever the motivation. It doesn't make any difference. But they were interested in a woman's world. And so, if you were setting up a store, it would be logical for top management, which was essentially and still is essentially male, to simply say, "Well, when it comes to the area of the model rooms or the fashion windows and things like that, to Christmas, I think Miss So-and-so can be the head of that. She can find the people to delegate the authority to." So that I find that very understandable.

But I also think it's interesting that it is inevitable that when the society becomes fragmented in terms of its values and its relationship to clothes as a language. . . . In other words, there was a time when you either had just hand-me-downs or the most boring clothes in the world, which were just functional clothes in our society, which was locked into lower or middle-class direction as far as clothes were concerned. The time when a man got up in the morning, put on something, and took it off at night and went to bed. I mean nobody ever changed their clothes, excepting in the upper classes, meaning the wealthy. And those areas were easily defined. In other words, one could have very rigid rules of fashion. When I started in fashion, the rules were very rigid. I mean I would say things like, "I'd drop dead rather than being seen with brown shoes after six o'clock." That kind of thing. Well I couldn't care less now. So that in the
language of communication of clothes and merchandise, it seems to me that it was necessary that new young people come up who reflected a whole other direction of attitudes. A whole other direction of attitude towards what clothes meant to people.

To an awful lot of the young people in the sixties, clothes was simply a costume. It had nothing to do with the way we thought of clothes or fashion. It had to do with exhibitionism in the most amusing, fun context. It was like, "Look at me. Pay attention. Aren't I having fun." And there was no interest in holding onto the clothes. The clothes were something that was instant satisfaction, instant gratification, instant entry. And therefore windows became instant eye catchers. So that you needed that kind of really totally unexpected thing. I mean, the guillotine, the head falling off, and the necklace being on the head, that kind of thing. God, what an awful image, I just thought of that. (laughs)

It's also interesting to me that those people basically deal with the same techniques you've described. Robert Curry, one of his famous windows was to take the Glad, or the Hefty, green trash bag, and just filled it with a lot of paper or something, and had those bags as a kind of form of natural sculpture. It worked wonderfully effectively. You thought, "My God, anybody could do that." There were six bags, well lit, with some sweaters draped over them as though you just were at a picnic, and just dropped the sweaters. It really was wonderful. It had great solid impact. But it's also the sort of thing that, again, Blackstar and Gorham or Tiffany's did in their windows with the contrasted jewelry.

Now, contrast was not something that I remember associated with you.
N: But if you did that same thing in May's down on Fourteenth Street, people would fire you. You see, it was a contest of where it was. I mean, in a Bendel or a Bergdorf or a Bonwit Teller or a Saks Fifth Avenue, because that's like doing it in a gallery. You can take a couple of pieces of ozite and hang them up on the wall of a Castelli gallery and it becomes a work of art. You do that in Macy's basement display room, people say, "What is that piece of junk you got up there? Get that out of here." It's being in the right place at the right time, with the right audience, with the right sponsor.

I: That's a very interesting point. Is there anyone's work here or abroad that you have great admiration for? That you wish you had done?

N: I would say, there are people who have done remarkable things. There was a woman called Jean Genet in Paris that made the most extraordinary figures. Like a whole great bird completely made out of scissors for Dior. And she also made extraordinary sculptures of birch bark trees: they were male nudes.

I: I remembered the scissor bird.

N: She made these extraordinary male nudes out of birch bark. She selected trees in the forest; they even had the genitals and everything on them. Out of the heads were marvelous nests of birds. It was a fantasy type of thing.

There was also a man in San Francisco who did extraordinary windows for Gump's. His name was Herb Renault. They were very very different.

I: How were they different?

N: Well, for instance, there was no mannequin in the window. All you saw was
the dress as if it were walking out from the back. The door was partly open going into a--it was a Chinese dress going into a kind of an opium den. That was just illusion; it was almost surrealist.

I: The dress was on a mannequin, though.

N: It was not on a mannequin. It was on a kind of a form you didn't even see. It was just as if the back of a woman was going through a door, and this trail was coming out of the back. It was a highly artistic quality that you just knew you were in the spirit of something that was true art.

These are things from a design standpoint. I think the windows that I saw that I described before that Jim Buckley did at Bergdorf Goodman during the surrealist movement, I think that he was somebody that I really feel was one of the greatest display artists I've ever seen in my life. His points of view were cerebral as well as visual.

I: What about flowers? Who have you admired in terms of flowers? I was thinking of it in terms of some of the floral displays at the Metropolitan. You know, those enormous vases . . .

N: Well, the ones that I think that are fascinating today are ones done by Renaldo Maia. A friend of mine, a Japanese designer, is his assistant. They're a combination of the Japanese ancient technique and the modern point of view. Flowers in a simple glass container, or marvelously tied together on twigs, and things like that. They're also in a book for any student to read. He's written a marvelous colorful book about the technique. And there are so many tremendous books on flower arranging today. Constance Spry, to me, was the one who really inspired me more than anyone.
I: It's interesting because, going back to the sense of association, I, many years ago, had lunch with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor at the Mille outside of Paris. The place cards, or the indication of where your place was--is more accurate--fascinated me. I remember thinking at the time, "What a great idea it would make for a window display." Because what she had done was taken what she believed was the essence of your personality in the form of an animal. Her concept of me was that I was a very wise man, and so she had a little porcelain owl. But the thing that made it work so effectively was that there was a little tiny glass vase that had one jerbra daisy. Now the size of the owl was so small and the daisy seemed enormous, that the daisy came off as a tree that was covering the owl. Each place had a different flower that was lending itself to some sense of a tropic thing--they were all forms of daisies. I remember looking at it and thinking, "One, this is an association of, for instance, table settings." In other words, if you were having a very "sly as a fox" relationship, then you can do this kind of thing. If you're having the wise old owl, you do this; if you have the cunning, not to be trusted snake in the grass, as it were, that sort of thing.

My point being that if you go anywhere, and you see anything, you learn and you should learn to transpose it to the field that you're particularly involved in. Because the ideas are everywhere. Whether it's Maia's book or whether it's anybody else's book in one period or another. Things can be taken out of context that are sometimes absolutely wonderful. I did a series of wallpapers out of walking around my house in the country, and for the first time, really looking at details. Making
myself consciously look at the bottom of a basket hanging on a kitchen wall, which became a very successful wallpaper called basket-weave. I think that those things can happen; and certainly when you have fifty-two weeks to fill windows with, and many banks windows—as many stores do have these days—God, you have to learn to associate and think that way.

But of all the people that have come through your life—because I'm fascinated as we listen to you and get the sense and the picture of lots of different people who you have known and admired and communicated with—but how about people that have worked for you? Have any gone on to become well-known people?

N: A great number. I think the first one was a young man who came in to work for me, and I liked his drawings of horses with manes that were filled with forget-me-nots and flowers. I hired him at Lord and Taylor as our artist for the display department. He went on to become one of the great modern furniture designers. His name was Paul McCobb. He did very contemporary furniture.

I sat next to a young man at a dinner party in Havana, and he was describing the Duchess of Camargo's emeralds. And I said, "Gee, you ought to be in the fashion business. What are you doing with your life?" He said, "Well, I'm studying to be an architect." And I said, "If ever you want to change your idea, and you come to New York, I'll give you a job at Lord and Taylor." One day, my secretary said, "There's somebody out here, I think he's foreign, I think he's maybe from Cuba. And he said that you promised him a job." And it turned out to be Luis Esteves, who went on to become one of the great fashion designers.

Another time, at Christmas, I needed somebody from the personnel
office. They could get somebody that would help us dye excelsior green for wreaths for Christmas time. They sent this young man down, and he was straight off a farm. At the end of this week of dyeing all this excelsior, his arms were green all the way up to the elbows, and I said to somebody, "We've got to give this guy a job for a while until the green wears off his hands." So we put him to work sweeping floors. And then one day when I came in from lunch, I saw him draping some fabric—the displays were down in the studio in the basement. He was draping fabric on a headless form, and I said, "Gee, that looks terrific. Do you like doing that?" He said, "Yes. I do." Well, to make a long story short, he turned out to be George Halle, the great fashion designer.

Another time, another young man came in to see me and he was going to Parson's. He said he was a fashion designer, but he was looking for a job. That was the beginning of Donald Brooks's career.

So I feel very proud of that. And then Lamar Terry, who's the lighting man for the Metropolitan.

I: It's interesting how all those things do relate to one another, and then you and I have worked together ... 

N: And they've all remained great friends, too, over the years. And I'm so fascinated to see their growth over a period of time.

I: Well, I must tell you Henry, that I found this period of time with you most enlightening and a delight. I've really enjoyed very much making these tapes with you because it's been easy to do. You are so knowledgeable about your own field, but you also, in the same way that you did windows, have a way of creating the illusion and the image of the force that's behind them. And I think that that can become extraordinarily valuable
to researchers and students trying to understand more about the field.

N: One thing, too, Robert. I think it's fascinating to me to see the constant interest in this particular field of display that is now visual merchandising. And to see the enthusiasm of the young people coming into it. Because it is a great, great career, I think.

I: Thank you. This closes the interview, the oral history, with Henry Callahan. My name is Robert L. Green. Now, Henry, with any patience, we're going to get the television people to do a half-hour television show with us, which will go over the highlights of your career. So that we get, on tape, the sense of who and what is a Henry Callahan.

(End of interview)
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