For the Oral History Collection

of the

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

an interview with

BERNADINE MORRIS

Interviewed by:

Mildred Finger

June 6-7, 1990
Q: For the Oral History Collections of the fashion industry being collated by the Fashion Institute of Technology, this will be an interview with Bernadine Morris, fashion editor for The New York Times. The interview takes place—

Let's talk about—You starting with the facts of your birth [losing sound]

A: Well, for the first two years of my life I lived over the store. My father had a men's clothing store on Eighth Avenue and 14th, and about the age of two or three we moved to a new building [inaudible; low volume]—Lenox Avenue and it faced Central Park, and between it and Central Park there was a triangular building. I played with the ducks in Central Park. I went to a play group where we played and jumped rope.

Q: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: When I was three and a half years old my brother was born, which was about the time I went to the play group, to get me out of the house. And then I started school at a hundred and—The school was, I believe, about 112th or 113th Street and Lenox Avenue. There is a housing project there now. The school has disappeared. I think it was P.S. #177. I went there for the First Grade and I skipped 1B—The first part of first grade, which was 1A, I skipped 1B
growing up, where at different times of the year you took out your jump ropes or skates. There was this wonderful street culture where you played "potsie," you played "fox ball," and you played--I played stick ball because I was good at that, a tomboy. Marbles--

Q: Jacks?
A: Jacks. Each toy had its proper season, and it was a continuing thing. I don't know who knew when it was time to change from marbles to jacks or baseball cards. Playing cards, we used to trade, and it was all street things. At that point, when I was eight, nine, 10, you hardly--I don't remember making phone calls to one's friends. You went out with your ball or your skates or whatever was the thing of the moment, and you went out and somebody else was down there and you played with them. So when I got to the Bronx the first thing I noticed was there was nobody out there in the afternoon after school with a ball or skates or anything, and I discovered they were all in Hebrew school, so I went to Hebrew school. It was an orthodox Jewish neighborhood and the kids went to Hebrew school for an hour or two every afternoon, and so I learned Hebrew because pretty soon there was no one to play with so I went to school.

I was a wonderful student. I learned how to read Hebrew, which is, you know, basically the same as Yiddish,
the same symbols--

Q: It's not the same; it's not the same language.
A: It's not the same language, but it's the same symbols, and I picked up the symbols very quickly and they spoke Yiddish at home. I understood some Yiddish.

So, at any rate, I learned Hebrew and I remember in this class saying--I could read--The aim of our class was to read fast, and I learned to read it very fast, so pretty soon I said, "What does this mean?," and they said, "Well, next year, when you take the course," in whatever they called Hebrew, "you will learn," and that offended me because I hated to read symbols that I had no idea what they meant. I think I did take a little bit of that next course, and then happily we moved back to the West Side.

Q: So you moved back to the West Side.
A: So we moved back to the West Side, and I went back to P.S. #165. I was now in 7B and I graduated from there and I went straight from there to Hunter High School.

Q: Having taken the exam.
A: Having taken the exam.

Q: Did you go into the first year or the second year.
A: The second year, because it had turned into a junior high school. So I started in J.A. III, which--J was for junior high school, A was for A vs. B, and III was for the Third Grade, and one of the first things I did was take the
test for What's What? and I was down on 33rd Street at the annex and I was told that I was one of the three or four people who had passed the test and were accepted as reporters on What's What, and that's where I met you, Mildred. You were the features editor.

Q: But tell me something: Is this when you started—when you realized you that you were going to become a writer? Did that have any effect on your lifestyle, your future?

A: Oh, I knew—I knew I was going to—I had known for some time that I was—

Q: Had you?

A: Oh, somewhere along in junior high school, maybe always, because the reason I skipped these early classes was because I could read when I went to school. I didn't—Nobody taught me, I figured it out. In the play group there were some older children who had lessons and I would hear them going "b" for bat and "c" for cat, and I looked at my little table, my alphabet table where I had my meals, and it had the alphabet there and I worked it out. I mean, I remember—I can almost remember going "b," "p," "d,"—Oh. Dog. And getting it. So I could read before I went to school. I think around the 7th Grade, at school, P.S. #165, there was a journalism segment of the class and they took us to The New York Times on a tour and they gave me my name on a metal slug, which I treasured for a long time.
I just knew that I was going to be a writer, and I guess I knew I was going to be a newspaper reporter. I wasn't ever really taken with magazines. Magazines didn't interest me. It was the pace of--The fastness of newspaper reporting that appealed to me. It was like a boy's job for a girl.

Q: You didn't think of anything like writing a book? That was not part of your--?
A: It didn't--I thought of fiction from time to time and I took fiction courses. I wrote some poetry, I wrote some short stories. In the ninth grade my friend and I wrote a novel. We sort of did it in study period and wrote it in a composition book and showed it to our friends, who were quite taken with it. But that's the first and last novel I wrote.

Q: So there you were at What's What?
A: And there I was at What's What? feeling quite good about being accepted, and my first story (maybe you remember it), my first story was an interview with Deanna Durbin, who was pretty much our age or just slightly older, and--I just pursued her until I found out when she was coming to New York and I showed up somewhere she was doing a radio program and I had, you know, a fat five minutes with her. I was astounded at how much makeup she wore and she looked a lot more than our 14. But I did an interview and it did appear.
It was my first piece.
Q: Funny how you remember your first interview. Mine was with Artie Shaw.
A: How funny. Same period. Yes. And I had to travel up from 33rd Street to 96th Street, which was where the meetings of What's What? took place.
Q: That was at the old high school.
A: The old high school. That was very--That was lots of fun. I must say, my parents weren't too thrilled with the idea of my coming home at 5-6:00 in the evening, but I did enjoy it, and that was really, basically, what I wanted to do. There was only a moment when I thought maybe I would teach, and I took--I didn't study education; I was a journalism major, but I thought teaching might be nice because I could write. But I took a master's in--not in Education but in English--
Q: After college.
A: After college, right. I would have preferred to go to Columbia Journalism School, but I had to go to work.
Q: But tell us first--Go back--We haven't talked about college yet at all.
A: Well, I was a journalism major. It was the wartime years. I turned out to be--I was not a wonderful student in high school, I was a wonderful student in college, possibly because there was so little to distract me. I got A's with
no effort. I was also taking courses I could do. I'm curious—Hunter High School was terribly difficult. I think we were all very bright and it was all very complex.

But, as I went on in high school I discovered that I would get the best marks in English. It just happened, and—But we had to take a lot of things that I would not have chosen to take, like Physics, which I didn't find a snap, or Math, which I didn't find a snap. But anything that involved verbal—history—I could do easily. Easily, without sweating. In college, I could take more of the kinds of courses that I wanted so I guess it was really easy, and I did not work on the college paper. I did not work on the college paper because my—probably because one of my acquaintances, Naomi Bliven was big (Naomi Horowitz then), was big on What's What?, and she was a girl who was both beautiful (there were those who thought she should have been Miss America instead of Bess Myerson) and very brilliant, and I just didn't want to be in the same area as she. She was brilliant.

So, I worked—I was probably better off. I worked for newspapers. I worked for something called The Brooklyn Citizen where they let me do book reviews. They didn't pay me but they printed them—

Q: And printed your name.
A: And printed my name. Then I worked—
Q: Which was Bernadine Taub.
A: Then I worked for The Staten Island Advance, where they paid me 10 cents an inch and printed anything I wrote on anybody who came from Staten Island. So I would do surveys. I would get the names of the Staten Island students at Hunter, make up a question, put it in--Somehow get them--I don't know how I got it to them--and from the answers I would do a story. Everything I wrote there got printed.

Okay. We're now coming to--Oh, then I was a correspondent at the end for The Herald Tribune.
Q: Very impressive, whatever correspondent means.
A: The Hunter Correspondent. That wasn't so impressive, because The Herald Tribune had an acute paper shortage and they used very little of what I sent them, where as my friends who were on The New York Times, who were the college correspondents for The New York Times, got a lot printed.
Q: Was this in 1943-44?
A: Yes. Forty-four. Actually--This was not my friend but my idol--a girl named Kitty Telsch--and I'd meet Kitty in the journal--what we called journalism lab (they wanted to make it sound serious)--and Kitty went on to Columbia and then she was the New York Times correspondent. They promised her at the Times (we're in the middle of the war and men are disappearing fast, at least from newspapers), and they promised her a job, if she went to Columbia. She went to
Columbia and she got a job right after school as a reporter on The New York Times. She was a year or two ahead of me.

So, when my time came and I turned up at The New York Times for a job, I was told--It was now 1945, the war is approaching an end though it's still on--and I am told by some (I wish I could remember who) "We have a girl reporter."

I got a job through school. I graduated in January of '45 and schools had offered me a job at The Journal American (they had a job at The Journal American), where I didn't want to work because I was a snot about working for Hearst. So, I answered ads and that's when I went around to The New York Times and nothing was happening so I went to work at The Journal American, where it was a special deal. Millicent Hearst, the wife of the publisher, who was living in New York, had a favorite charity. It was called The Free Milk Fund for Babies, and one of the ways she supported this charity was to have a performance at the Metropolitan Opera House, and the social columns of all of the newspapers (there were seven or eight at the time) were filled with the committee goings-on; the meeting of the junior committee for The Free Milk Fund for Babies, a meeting of the senior committee for The Free Milk Fund for Babies. Who was going to be in the opera? The opera was Aida. So, Zelinka Milinon was in the opera.
See, I worked there from, oh, the end of January to the beginning of March--

I worked for a woman called Florence Wessels. Flossie Wessels. I became what later was known as "a Flossie girl." She was a sob-sister. She wrote poignant pieces for the Sunday paper. Mrs. Hearst did not like the usual publicity person. She had had some experience with them, I presume, over the years. She liked Flossie, so every year Flossie was relieved from her job to work--to do public relations/publicity for this Free Milk Fund for Babies. She became quite a force in New York among journalism students. As I say, I didn't want to take this job because it was The Journal American, but nothing else turned up so I went down there, and it involved mostly bringing press releases through the rain to whatever newspaper was selected that day, or several days, and I was told there would be a job on the city desk for me if I was a good girl and performed well.

And I had no problem with it. I performed well. I delivered these messages. Sometimes when I had to type something I would improve the writing and the next time it was typed Florence would always return it to the original form. Then, finally, there was the opera night, and there were debutantes selling chances, or selling something, and
my job was to collect their money.

I had a lot of dealings with Mrs. Hearst, because I would go there when she woke up about noon and--She had an apartment, a penthouse on Park Avenue. It was quite handsome. I remember looking at the pictures on the wall and thinking, "What wonderful reproductions," but they weren't, they were real Renaissance art. But she and I got on. She said (I remember being quite flattered), she thought I had a lot more sense than the debutantes. So, the time came. We had the opera, my job was over, Florence went back to writing feature stories, and I was offered a job. I was told to report at 8:00 to the city desk.

Well, to get to The Journal American from the upper West Side, then or now, was fairly complicated. You took a subway down to Chambers Street, you took a bus across Chambers Street and waited for a little jitney which ran to The Journal American, which was on the river, the East River. It took about an hour. Getting there at 8:00 was tricky. I spent one day there. I was, incidentally, taking my master's at NYU at the time, at night. I chose NYU over Columbia, where I would have preferred to go, because you had to go full time at Columbia and NYU had evening classes so it was possible to go at night. But it was hard to go to school at night and get up at 6:00 in order to get to The Journal American at 8:00.
Anyhow. I only did it one day, and the funny thing was that the reporters—I didn't know what I was supposed to do. I made books. Not book, but books, and books were putting alternating slices of carbon paper and copy paper. Make 10, 10 sheets of paper, and this is what the reporters typed on. I did that. A lot of the reporters kept asking me to get them Seven Up. Seven Up—not Coke, not Pepsi, not ginger ale—Seven Up, and I went to wherever you got the bottle of Seven Up and brought it to them, and I couldn't understand until the end of the day what was going on here. I didn't know Seven Up was such a popular drink. It turned out that they were putting their gin into it, and it was a perfect mask because it was white. It looked like water. But I didn't find that out until the end of the day.

The next morning I thought, "I didn't go to college to get Seven Up for people and to slice pieces of carbon paper into books," so I called up and I said, "I'm sorry, I can't do the job," and the city editor says, "Oh, yes, you can. You're just tired. Take the day off and come in tomorrow." I said, "No, I cannot handle this job." So, that was it. That morning (and I probably would have missed the call if I'd gone into work), but that morning I got a call from Millinery Research, and it was a blind ad I had answered before I was working, which said, "Reporter."

Q: Was it WWD?
A: No, it was Millinery Research, and it was a weekly millinery publication, and I walked in the door and I got the job. It was the worst sweat shop that ever existed. They had put the ad in like six or eight weeks before. They had hired someone and she had already quit, and to save money, they used the next list of people on their list. That was hilarious. At that time buses and subways were a nickel, except for the Fifth Avenue bus, which was 10 cents. We were instructed—I was instructed, I was the reporting staff—I was instructed never to use a Fifth Avenue bus. The telephones had locks on them, and you could accept incoming calls, but you had to get permission from the boss's wife, who sat like Madame Lafarge over the telephone. You had to get her permission to make a phone call. They wanted you to go out and talk to people.

One of my claims to fame is that I'd never worn a hat. I just didn't like hats. So, I handed in my first story (with great trepidation) to the new editor who had arrived on the scene the same time I had, and he just put it through and I said, "No, read it," and he made a pretense of it and just sent it through. It turned out he had been a printer in Ohio and couldn't get a job as a printer in New York because of the unions being so strong, and he'd answered some kind of an ad and figured he could fake it as an editor. The two of us went on and became friends, of course. On Saturday
mornings, we came in and wrapped the papers.

Now we're coming to the end of my--I started there about March, and we were coming to my final exam period. I really didn't want to do poorly in school because I was paying for it. I hadn't paid anything for Hunter but I was paying $5-6-7 a credit for NYU. I didn't want to throw this money away, and I hated it passionately. So I quit.

Q: You hated Millinery Research.
A: Millinery--Oh, no, I didn't--I liked it. The first time I handed in a story I thought, "Oh, my God, I'm getting paid to write this!" I wasn't crazy about writing about hats, but I was getting paid to write, which was what I liked to do.

Okay. Exams are over. It's the end of May, and it was May, 1945. Let's see--There had been D-Day while I was on Millinery Research. I had done a piece on how D-Day affects the millinery business (I wouldn't like to have to reconstruct that one), and how the milliners felt about the death of FDR, because he died during that period. Those were my two big pieces, besides descriptions of hats.

Okay. So, you know, I had to get another job.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1; begin Side 2]

So, the next job I got through NYU. It was for International Mutoscope Corporation, and I was the--

Q: What is a mutoscope?
A: I don't know. It was some kind of a gadget that was used
in penny arcades, and this company in Long Island City put out machines for penny arcades—toys and—They did the camera that you took four pictures of yourself for a quarter. They did "Grandma," who was this gypsy character, and she sort of trembled over cards and you'd put in a nickel and she'd give you a card with your fortune.

But I was editing the house organ for this company, which had a lot of war accounts. War work. But you know, the war was now coming to an end. Oh, that was perfectly awful. It's in Long Island City, which is nowhere. You can't eat anywhere. It was basically a factory, and I guess—I don't know what the house organ was supposed to do for the employees, but it was to keep up their morale or something. It was all right, but it was awful and that isn't what I wanted to do with my life. So, around Christmas, I left that.

Then, another coincidence. I'm not sure if I got my new job before I left, but it was very quick, because I've never been out of work. Again, ads that I had been answering. I picked up the phone and it was a man called Max—I can't think of his last name. Max called me. I had answered an ad, and he said, "Are you the Phi Beta Kappa?," and I said, "Yes," and when I went down for my interview I hunted up my key, which was the first and last time I wore it, and it was a trade paper called Fashion Trades, put out by Jerry
Finkelstein, who was then operating *The Civil Service Leader*. Now it's over on Duane Street. And that was really fun, because they were starting out a publication that was supposed to be a weekly. As they explained to me then, it was to be a weekly, like *Time Magazine* was to *The New York Times*. It was to be a weekly fashion publication with the same relation to *Women's Wear Daily* that *Time Magazine* had to *The New York Times*, and it was a fantastic staff because by now the war was over and newspaper men from all over the country came to New York to get a job, and they wanted to work for *The Daily News* or *The New York Times*, and they ended up with working for the fashion trade.

Q: Was Jerry Finkelstein the father of Andrew Stein?

A: Jerry Finkelstein was the father of Andrew Stein.

This was an amusing time. There were approximately 30 people there and we had two or three months to put out this publication before it started, and early on someone came over to me and said (I was now maybe 20-21, because I got out of college at 19; I was out of college in about a year and a half. A year, so I was 20), and someone came over to me—a woman who looked like Brenda Starr, a senior reporter—and she said, "How do you feel about unions?" Well, I had studied unions in college and taken an economics course on labor unions, and I thought unions were just fine, and she
said, "Well, will you sign the card?" And it was a Newspaper Guild card. Of the 30 people working there, 30 people signed the card, and we asked for a meeting with Jerry Finkelstein, and we had a meeting in Longchamps? And he asked for a delay until we published. That sounded okay, that sounded okay to us, we agreed. We published one week and he called us together in another meeting at lunch, and he said, "You're all fired." Then, I go to clean out my desk, feeling sad because I really had a good time there, I was feeling sad and--There were three editors. One of the three was this fellow Max, who had interviewed me. Max said, "What are you doing there?" I said, "I'm cleaning out my desk." He said, "Don't do that."

Well, it seemed that some of us were rehired. The three editors, me, a copy editor named Bernie, and the photographer and an art director, and the three editors and I continued to put out this magazine, this weekly. It was a newspaper, actually, and pretty soon the three editors disappeared. Bernie Stevens became the editor. There was another guy who was brought in from the outside. The three editors were too high priced; they were gone. They got a cheap editor from outside who also wrote, and Bernie Stevens was the copy editor and myself and we carried on for a while, and the Guild--I was feeling discouraged and I wanted to leave and the Guild said, "No, you have to stay there to
Well, no one was ever rehired from the rehiring list, but what happened was I learned my job. Oh, by the way, the reason Max had called me out of all these answers was I had elaborated my millinery—my six weeks on this—millinery research became six months, so there I was, with bona fide fashion experience. By the time I left—Well, okay. I was there for about two years. It wasn't making any money. It became a very thin publication, which I wrote most of, and I figured it was time to get on. I met a man called Paul Hanenberg. I had met him at press conferences that I was covering and I remember it was another press conference and I said, "Paul, are there any jobs at your place?" For Women's Wear. And Paul said, "Oh, sure, the dress girl just left. I asked who to call and I called Ruth Jacobs at Women's Wear, who told me to come up for an interview. She knew what I had done on the little crummy publication, and I came up and we had—Oh, God, I remember my outfit, because now I was getting into the big time, I thought. I got a big straw hat, even though I didn't wear hats. A big straw hat. It was now June, it was summertime. I had a turquoise silk linen dress, and the piece de resistance (Mildred, you probably knew better at the time), my piece de resistance was gold slippers. Now, some 30-40 years later, gold slippers would be possible in mid-day and might even be
chic. But gold slippers, I now recognize, in 1947-48, were really not what one did.

Nevertheless, I triumphed. Ruth said to me, "What do you like about the fashion business," and I said, "I like dresses best," and she said, "Oh, very good, we have a position open in dresses," which I knew very well by then, so I followed Mimi Byrnes as the dress--

A: --Yes. As what we called the chief dress editor. There were two--Dresses were the most important market in women's wear, so there were two people covering it. Better dresses and--What did they call it? Budget dresses, or moderately priced? I always called it cheap dresses.

I did that for about three months when the girl who covered the coat and suit market left and I was promoted to being the big coat and suit editor. I can't remember her name; she's never surfaced again. The girl who was hired after my three months was Lillian--She went into retailing. She was a charming, really good fashion person. Dona Guimares was the lingerie editor at that point in time.

Okay. Women's Wear then was run--There were three editors who had been there, to my young eyes, since before the flood. Because Women's Wear, during the '30s--Remember, we hadn't really recovered from the depression, which affected my family so badly. Jobs were scarce during the
depression. Women's Wear hired people, did not fire people. I heard only once was there a problem, when they asked people to skip one week's salary; then, when things got better, they returned the week's pay.

But the three ladies I worked with seemed older than God, were Tibby Taylor (who was fairly flighty, I thought), Madeleine Monroe, who was my kind of serious fashion editor, and Ruth Jacobs, who was the top. They called everybody editors, but we weren't really. Well, in a way we were, because we not only covered our market but we made up the pages, wrote the headlines, planned the art, so I guess in a funny way we were editors.

Q: And--
A: Yes, that's what we wrote about. But these three ladies had really come in the '20s, which seemed terribly long ago at that point, and the first shift was--All right. Let's see. I covered coats and suits for a year and then Ruth Jacobs asked me to cover corsets, and I cried. That was the only time I have cried on the job, and I said, "What is the matter? Am I not doing a good job?"

"Oh, yes, you're doing a fine job. We need someone for corsets." Corsets was one of the most significant areas. They had huge sections weekly and then very huge--I mean, like huge; like, 12-14-16 pages a week devoted to corsets.
Bernadine Morris

A: Yes. It was called the corset section, but it was corsets and bras. And then she also gave me negligees, so I wouldn't go crazy counting the bones, to have a little bit of fashion. And I also during this period served as a feature writer, and if a new designer came along I was sent to interview him and an old designer--If there was any news, I was the writer. During that period I think, when I was still doing corsets, I first met and did stories on Arnold Scaasi, Geoffrey Beene, John Weitz--Well, but John Weitz was one of my people in the lingerie business. And I'm sure there were others.

So, I'm doing corsets, and I did corsets as the main part of my job for five years, which is a very long time, and I kept thinking, "Now I've got to get out of this. I've got to do something else." But it was pleasant. The corset people were delightful. They were quite different--Their headquarters were on the East Side and they were quite different from their counterparts on the West Side. I mean, even though girls--models would parade in bras and panty girdles, nobody touched, which is not what you could say--You couldn't say the same for Seventh Avenue at that point, and it was kind of a well bred--The people were lovely. I did enjoy the people. I didn't wear the merchandise, but I enjoyed the people. I always covered things I wouldn't touch. I would go to the "five and ten" and buy myself a
garter belt. I was skinny then. So, finally, some change began to happen. Madeleine Monroe was put in charge of Women's Wear's home furnishing publication. Joan (I'll think of her name in a moment), who was in charge of Women's Wear Chicago office, was brought down to take Madeleine Monroe's place.

Ruth Jacobs did not like Joan because Joan was not her choice, so she plucked me out of corsets to become Joan's assistant. This was a job that had not existed (Joan Harwood), and I functioned as Joan Harwood's assistant. Ruth was a very difficult woman. She liked me better than Joan. She didn't like Joan at all, and after a year or so Joan got rather itchy—nervous—hated it, and Joan arranged for a job at Tobe'.

Q: So she's been there a long time.
A: This is about 1955 I would say. About this time two young women turned up at Women's Wear. One was June Weir and one was Etta Froio, and about this time, Nina Hyde. So, June was a house afire when she arrived, filled with ideas, looked marvelous. She was a girl from the Middle West and she looked exactly like what a fashion person—in New York should look like—no gold sandals—Well, I'll tell you what she looked like. She was poor, because she hadn't worked very much, she didn't have a lot of money. She wore a Larry Aldrich black wool dress and she had a green turban.
and a purple turban—satin or velvet—and she would alternate these two turbans and wear the same dress every day, for quite a long time until she could afford another dress. But she had millions—she had lots of ideas. She was very enthusiastic and Ruth and I were not getting on at that time. Joan Harwood gave a month's notice, and on the last day of her month's notice Ruth Jacobs said to me, "You'll be doing Joan's job." June was a likely contender at that point because she was hot stuff, but in the end I got the job.

So, I was the feature editor of Women's Wear for maybe seven years, eight years, until I left for The New York Times in 1953. But, in Women's Wear, things began to happen. In 1957 I covered the Paris collections for the first time. It was not just Paris. It was all through Italy. Italy, at that point, was Rome, Florence, Milan, and I also went to see the British dressmakers in London. It was a very exciting time, and the only reason I went was because John Fairchild, who had already been dispatched to Paris—His wife broke a leg or something in Switzerland. He was ill, he couldn't come, so I was sent from New York to organize the Paris couture coverage.

The first thing that happened when I arrived in his office was Madame de la Prade, who had been there since World War I (and who would only speak French to me), said, "I am Madame de la Prade, we are at your service, what shall
anything he had to say. His father let him do it, but he was determined to change Women's Wear from its rather prosaic, staid, boring publication to something else, he didn't know exactly what to change it to. So, that's when we had a bit of fun because he would let us all do whatever we wanted to do. He chose Ermina Stimson, who had been the art director, as the fashion editor, and she was obviously a better art director than she was a fashion editor. Certainly, she never stood in his way, and I was her assistant and so we worked it out. And, he did let us do whatever we wanted and it was great fun--for a while. It then became, for me, too erratic. Too--Well, I didn't understand--I could not understand why he was pushing some things and not pushing other things. We are not on the same wave length. I'm sure he would say exactly the same thing about me, and one day--We had regular editorial meetings every day at 10:00 in order to decide what would happen, what would be in the paper the next day. They were mostly show and tells for John, but we did get some work accomplished. One day he left the meeting because there was a phone call. He came back and said, "Carrie Donovan is leaving The New York Times." This was in December of 1962. He said, "Carrie Donovan is leaving The New York Times. She's going to Vogue." The newspapers were on strike then. The strike happened around Christmas time, in December of
1962, and—well—continued, actually, for five months, but one didn't know that at the time. He said, "Carrie's leaving." I excused myself and called Pat Peterson, who was the fashion editor, and said, "I understand Terry's leaving," and Pat said, "Oh, come on up," so I crossed the picket line for about five months. Mrs. Hawkins was the fashion editor, the women's news editor, and somehow there was a common thread among all the editors operating at that time. There was Ruth Jacobs, who seemed to be cut from the same cloth as Mrs. Hawkins, who was cut from the same cloth as the editor of *Vogue* and *Mademoiselle*—I can't remember those ladies' names.

Q: *Mademoiselle* was Betsy Blackwell.
A: No—Mrs. Blackwell, yes. Betsy Blackwell. And *Vogue* was Ilka Chase's mother, Mrs. Chase.

Q: *Vogue* was—
A: Mrs. Chase. And these ladies, who had all been born around the turn of the century, or who were certainly one or more generations behind us, all seemed to be cut from the same cloth. They had some elegance, they had a stake—mostly they were serious about their work. They were an interesting breed. I used to think that because it was so unusual for them to work—for a woman to work seriously in those days—that you were out of kilter with life as a woman then, because women didn't work. I assumed that women did work by
Anyway, I was interviewed during this strike. Every two weeks or so Mrs. Hawkins would ask me to come up and we would chat about life. After the first interview I didn't talk about what I did for a living or what my background was, but we talked about—everything—gossip, and I certainly thought I would get the job. I said to my husband, "I'm going to quit, because I really don't want to stay here anymore. I'm going to get the job at the Times." But, of course, the strike kept continuing and finally the strike was over and I'm waiting to hear from her—Maybe the strike was over at the end of April or May. I'm waiting to hear from her, I do not hear from her, I call her and she says, "Oh, Bernadine, there's so much going on here, I haven't had a chance to think about it. Don't call us, we'll call you." I was quite infuriated, and I went over to my friend Joan Harwood, who was now the head of Tobe' because Madame Tobe' had died, and said, "I don't like it at Women's Wear anymore, I've got to get out." I told her that I was aiming for a job at The New York Times but it didn't seem to be coming through, and she said, "Come meet Marjorie Deane, my partner," whom I don't think I knew at the time, and I met her partner and they offered me a job for what seemed like an awful lot of money. But the marvelous thing was they said, "You can have the summer off and start in September. I
had never had the summer off. I had two children now, it just seemed--

Q: When were you and Jesse married?
A: Oh, I've always been married. I was married in 1947, when I was working for Fashion Trades. Carol was born in 1959, when I was working at Women's Wear--

Q: When Carol--With her birth, you didn't stop working?
A: No, I didn't. I didn't stop working for anything. There were no women--There were no special causes or anything--

Q: I'm sorry. What kind of household help did you have?
A: I always had a full-time nurse, plus a cleaning, and my last woman, baby nurse, who came when Michael was six years old, is still with me. She's my house cleaner, housekeeper--whatever. I had trained baby nurses in the beginning, because I didn't know anything about babies but they did. So, I had my babies at Women's Wear, and the good thing is I was working--I had to work on Sunday, because on Sunday we set up the Monday paper and it was only a couple of hours so I took Friday off, so I really worked from Monday to Thursday, and my husband could deal with the kids for a couple of hours on Sunday. It was okay. So I worked four days and I was home basically three days, when they were small. That worked fine. And, in 1963, when I was applying to The New York Times, Carol was four and Michael was three, and I was pretty much in control. I didn't have to have a
sleep-in anymore. I was calm enough to have someone come in in the morning; and, besides, they were starting nursery school, so the worst of the child-care thing was over. I found it was very—I found it was okay. I could get good nurse-maids if I paid a little more than the going rate. That was my secret. Besides, women liked to work for me, it seemed, because I wasn't there, whereas other women who had nurse-maids were around the house, bugging them. They would pick me rather than them, and I offered them $10 more a week.

Anyhow, getting back—The New York Times has told me, "Don't call us, we'll call you." I was ready to leave. I didn't like what was happening, I didn't understand what was happening. There were feuds, there were people you couldn't put in the paper, I thought this was nonsense and I didn't want to be associated with it anymore. So, I got the job at Tobe'. Well, I didn't make a lot of money. I was fairly well paid by Women's Wear. I was making something, I think, like $250 a week, and in 1963 it was okay. But Joan offered me just $300, and we never argued or negotiated about it. It seemed like a decent salary. She didn't know what I was going to do, but she thought of something, and I go home and The New York Times calls me and says, "You're hired." Now I have two jobs. I have a sleepless night, and called Kenneth Paul Block, who was my best friend at Women's Wear, and I
told him the story. I had not told anyone, because John was always very funny about people leaving for The New York Times. I left nicely, I think, from my point of view, not from his. There was a lot of negotiation to be done about salary. We had to take a physical and the guy who was interviewing me, who did the final hiring, said, "Now, don't quit your job until you pass--until you hear the results of the physical," at which point I thought I had a rare tropical disease and had failed.

So, on a Friday morning in June, that was my job-leaving time--On a Friday morning in June, the Times called me and said, "You're hired, when do you want to start?" They wanted me right away, and I said I'd start on Monday. I was really preserving a little summer vacation for myself, but I said--Also, I was keeping myself out of the position of being a lame duck, because they were not nice to lame ducks. So, on that Friday morning I got the call at home, I accepted the job, I said I'd be to work on Monday. I had an appointment with Arnold Scaasi, and I go to interview Arnold Scaasi, and I say to Arnold, "You know I'm leaving Women's Wear, I'm going to The New York Times," and Arnold says, "Oh? Now, I think hemlines will be 15 inches from the floor and red will be the most important color for the next season," or something like that. That's the most he would say. I came back to the office, I asked to see John
Fairchild, and I said, "John, I am leaving," and John said, "I'm terribly sorry you are leaving, you are part of our management team," which he had not indicated to me. He said, "I'm not going to be here all the time. I want to set a team up to take over for me," and I said, "Well, you should have--" I don't think I said it but I thought, "You should have mentioned it to me before."

Q: Was he going to Paris at that time?

A: No, he was back from Paris. This was 27 years ago, and he is still there. So--But, I guess that's what he said, and then he said, "When are you leaving?" I said, "As soon as I finish the Arnold Scaasi interview," so I finished and I cleaned out my desk and I went home, and I started at the Times, with Mrs. Hawkins, who soon was supplanted by Charlotte Curtis.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2; begin Tape 2]

A: Charlotte was a rather extraordinary woman who had come out of Columbus, Ohio and gotten a job at The New York Times maybe a year or so before I got there. She began doing extraordinary social coverage. She had the whole city, including people who were not at all interested in society, following her social coverage. She would make an amusing event out of an ordinary party. She had an enormous sense of humor. Everyone felt she was a sociologist; she claimed she had never even taken a course in college. She had this knack
for people and society and in 1965, Clifton Daniels made her the Woman's Page editor, and I think in a year or two she absolutely transformed the coverage of women's news in newspapers. The women's pages were no longer a depository for canned material from department stores, for simple recipes, for pieces on how to clean your pearls. As a matter of fact, the first piece I was asked to do for the Times, by Mrs. Hawkins, was, "How do you clean your pearls?" This being 1963, I said, "What do you mean, Mrs. Hawkins? Nobody's wearing pearls!" And she got someone else to do it. She asked somebody else to do a piece on how to clean your gloves. These were not pressing issues in 1963, when we were--You know, the world was saying "no gloves." White gloves were out. So, Charlotte came along, with a much more appropriate attitude, and she decided to hop up the fashion coverage in a rather--She was never a fashion editor, but her idea was to cover everything. And, you know, there were hundreds of shows on Seventh Avenue every season. The way she decided to cover it this first time that she was at bat, as it were--She would take me, for instance, if I were in charge of the next day's coverage, I would pick the collections I wanted to see--presumably the most important ones--and assign the other people in the office to the other collections. Then, the next day somebody else would be in charge and I would be assigned to a collection. The person
in charge wrote the story; the others supplied that person with their notes. It was awful, because everybody came to it from different points of view. Again, this is 1965. The prevailing look is the shift. My dear friend, Virginia Lee Warren, who hadn't covered fashion in maybe 30 years, and who liked the particular style, saw it everywhere, and this season, when the shift--the Courrèges--had conquered the world, Virginia Lee Warren's story began that small--tiny waists and full skirts were the order of the day, because this was her particular style. And so it went. I mean, we just all went out independently and covered our collections, with no--

Q: Focus.
A: No focus at all. No one told us what to be looking for. We didn't decide it. Okay. After a week or two of this--It was appalling, if you knew anything about fashion. If you didn't know anything I guess it didn't matter. At the end of it I was so annoyed at this, because I did know how to organize fashion coverage, having been at Women's Wear and having organized it, I was so annoyed I sat down, angrily, and wrote--I don't know--a 10-12 page, single spaced letter/memo explaining how it should be done. I sent it to Charlotte, who gave it to her assistant, Joan Whitman. Joan Whitman came over and said, "That was a great memo you wrote. I passed it on to somebody else." Six months later,
Charlotte said, "The collections are starting. You're going to do them."

Q: Where was their sense of urgency?
A: No, well, six months was the next season.
Q: Oh.
A: So, when the next season was about to start—Everybody had a nice memory of my memo but nobody remembered what it actually said, including me, except the gist of it was—Not that I wanted to be the total fashion person. It just was, how to organize this in some way that we could all make a coherent—the coverage could be more coherent. Which, you know, everybody—any publication takes for granted, or store takes for granted, but it just hadn't occurred to them.

So, Charlotte said to me, "You're going to be covering Seventh Avenue, it's going to be your beat, and if you have any problems, if you need any help let me know." Well, in due course, two important designers were showing at the same time, so I go to Charlotte and I said, "I need help," and Charlotte said, I said because Larry Aldrich and Mollie Parnis are showing at the same time, and Charlotte said, "Well, if you can't do the job." I said, "Never mind, I can do the job," and I went and saw somebody before and somebody after. So, I pretty much had the field to myself after that. I basically covered the collections. I mean, surely, at some time there were other people helping.
Q: When did you start Paris?
A: So, I did that in New York for five years. Meanwhile, in Paris or--Italy and Paris was the routine then, couture--
In the beginning of the fashion coverage for *The New York Times*, which was about 1958, Carrie Donovan had alternated with Pat Peterson, and then the *Times* rehired Gloria Emerson, who had worked there, and Gloria was living in Paris and later in London, and Gloria did the collections. Hating it, because Gloria wanted to go to Vietnam, and after five years, Gloria convinced (five years including a tour of Africa to show that she could handle other kinds of stories)--Gloria went off to Vietnam, and she had recommended me as her successor, rather than Pat who had done it before, and somewhere on her way to Vietnam Gloria typed me an 18-page letter, explaining who I should yell at in the course of this coverage; the people at Associated Press, the people in the office--it was all clearly detailed and, honestly, one of the really clever professional things I did, I threw the letter away, figuring I could find my own people to yell at, and why pick up her prejudices.

And I had great fun covering the couture, which was then in January and in July, and we would go to Rome for a few days and then there'd be a few days of rest. A lot of people went to Capri then. Then on to Paris, and the Paris couture collections. After a year or two of this I realized
that I was in the wrong place. I should be in Paris for the
pret-a-porter collections, which were just starting up.
Paris ready-to-wear had been around a bit, but it was
suddenly getting itself organized a little bit, and I knew,
because couture was at that point very tired, and because
all the energy was going into the new ready-to-wear
collections. A whole different set of names--People like
Cacharel, for instance, that we don't hear about so much
now, and Sonya Rykiel was the queen, doing sexy sweaters,
far from couture--
Q: Dorothee Bis.
A: Dorothee Bis was another--Those are the people,
right. And then--But I was doing the couture. Actually, it
was very nice to go to Europe in July, and I loved Rome. I
even found a hotel with a swimming pool that was not out of
town, in town, and it was very nice. But finally I felt I
had to go to ready-to-wear. Everybody was very reluctant.
Gloria Emerson, who was not enamored of fashion anyway,
didn't want to add to her fashion beat so she wouldn't cover
it and she didn't give them any encouragement, but about
1973 I went to ready-to-wear, and it was kind of brutal, it
was rough, it was not organized, but it was obvious that
that's where things were happening at that point.

So, I got ready-to-wear added to the budget and
curiously, nobody took the couture off the budget, which is
why, all during the '70s and into the '80s, I was about the only person from a newspaper in America (there may have been an isolated one or two but I was about the only one) who covered both couture and ready-to-wear, which was wonderful. It gave you a sweeping—Nothing much happened in couture, I have to say. Okay, about—I dropped Italian couture about this time because I realized nothing was happening that I had to report from the Italian couture. I mean, they were dressmakers, they made pretty clothes and what have you, but no trends were starting with Italian couture. This offended Valentino a lot because he was a high spot, and it was worth going to see Valentino, but I really didn't want to go to Rome for one collection. So, I dropped that. I guess that helped explain why they didn't cut couture off my list, because I just went for one week in Paris.

Then, about the mid-'70s, about '76-'77—Milan decided, ready-to-wear having grown up in Italy as well as [recorder off]—The core group in Milan, were the Missonis, Krizia, and a few others; five or six designers decided they would invite the world to Milan.

Q: Was Versace part of that?
A: Not yet, no.

Q: Not yet. Or Ferre'?
A: No, he wasn't there yet. Armani was there. But this group of initiators—there were five or six people. Walter
Albini was one, who's since died, and they invited me to come to Milan, and I said, "No, thank you, because I saw--The Missonis took their collection to Paris, so I could see the Missonis in Paris. I didn't know Armani; he was not the name he was to become. Krizia I'd never heard of, and I didn't see there was any point in going to Milan. But they were quite persuasive, and I began reading about Milan and I decided I would try it one season. Well, there was, of course, something special about Milan. You know, Italian fashion was always quite diffuse. Milan was the center for knitwear, Florence was another center of manufacturing, Rome was pretty much devoted to dressmaker or couture clothes, and Rome and Florence had traditionally fought about which one was the center, so, then, Milan wasn't even considered. Milan decided they would just step into the brink, and what they did eventually, they built a proper place for a fashion show, which no other city has. They--It's the site of what they call the Milan Fair, and it is a series of buildings that are kind of free form in the sense that you can put up the walls and you can take the walls down; you can build--And there's plenty of space, and though I can get pretty claustrophobic spending a whole day there, they have the right space for fashion shows. They have the right space, and the sightlines are good. It really is the most modern facility for fashion shows, for fashion viewing. Then, of
course, the Italians add their own little piece de resistance, like they have a restaurant on the premises, which has terrific food, and--so you don't have to leave--

Q: The reputation of Milan of this period was that it was really kind of a dangerous city to be around in.
A: Not right away, but after--when the--Soon after the Red Brigade, is that what they called it? And people were mugged--

Q: And, of course, there were lots of kidnappings.
A: but they weren't bothering the foreigners that much. Those were locals. But, you know, what did we know? We went from our hotel to the fair, which is about 10 minutes outside of the center of town, and we had our lunch there. Then we came back and if we were lucky we went out to dinner. The wonderful thing about the Italians is they didn't schedule anything between, say, 1:00 and 3:00, so there was, indeed, time to relax at lunch. And I say that for the French. They keep their shows going and they don't care if you--And they're important enough shows that you have to go to them. And, by God, I have brought peanut butter sandwiches with me and anybody with some crackers will be mobbed, because it's so bad in France, and they never have--I mean, I don't really think a leaky tent is the right way to show good clothes. And that's what the French have provided for us. They're now building a center under
the Tuileries, and I'm sure they'll leave out the air conditioning and we'll all die.

Q: You don't mean under the Tuileries.
A: I mean under the Tuileries.

Q: In the Tuileries.
A: Under the Tuileries. Yes. They're excavating and building a center and I know that—

Q: It's always fascinating in Paris. They really dig under things to create what used to be on the surface.

A: Right. And I know they're going to forget the air conditioning, because money will run out by then and we'll all go in there and die! However, the Italians—I have some funny stories about this. The Italians really did a modern, effective place. You can go crazy there, too, because if you see 10 collections in one space, just moving from one floor to another, you can also go crazy. But, really, it is the most efficient way to show fashion shows. And, oddly enough, the clothes started to get better and better. They didn't organize in this place right away, and the shows were all over town in different hotels, but then when they got themselves together, I'd say by the end of the '70s, and the clothes got to be better—Now, you know, Milan's great advantage is the fabrics. Como is near Milan. I'm sure that the Italian designers and manufacturers have the first crack at the fabrics. They work out things especially for
them. The fabrics are wonderful. Even the French designers are using fabrics from Como. And for some reason they have the skilled workers. Skilled workers are hard to find anywhere. By some amazing thing, the Italians have kept the pool of skilled laborers alive. I don't mean, particularly, fancy embroideries. They know you can't do that. But just people who can work sewing machines effectively. And, as you know, a lot of the French companies now, like Ungaro, are having their clothes made in Italy. So, what Italy had going for them was the workmanship and the fabrics.

Q: Even Ungaro is having ready-to-wear.
A: Is ready-to-wear. Yes. Is ready-to-wear. He's not the only one. But the workmanship and the fabrics are superb. But what are we going to do about this? How are we going to style it? Well, the first--When they got their act together, the first major show, the first big look from Italy, were these enormous football-shoulder pads, often in black leather coats, and to make their big stages effective the models would come in their high boots, black leather coats, often studded with metal, and big shoulders, and they'd come charging out like storm troopers. It was a very scary (in a way) thing. But, of course, that look did take over, and--I don't say that the Italians were the only ones doing it, but they certainly did it strongly. And, it lent itself to tailoring, which is what they did best, so, that is the
look, and that established Italy as another center for fashion.

So, I would go to Milan and there would be a few days in between Milan and Paris, as there had been when we went to Rome--

Q: Or when you went to London.
A: Now comes London.
Q: Okay.
A: Maybe the Milan collections would be over on, say, Thursday, and the French collections would start on Monday or Tuesday, which gave you a few days, and the British designers, who were totally unorganized--

Q: We're not talking about the Hartnell--
A: No, no. We're talking ready-to-wear. This new ready-to-wear field. I went to London before it was organized, and I really went from showroom to showroom, as we do on Seventh Avenue. I mean, it was no great hardship for me, and it was kind of fun to see people at work. But, I just went and did one story, on what was going on in London. The truth is nothing was going on in London, and there were two designers who were left over from the '60s who were going full strength, and that was Jean Muir and Zandra Rhodes, and they still are. But, the British designers--About 1980-81, they got Princess Di and Vivien Westwood, and both those two, dissimilar things gave them a spurt and people--and the
Bernadine Morris

Tape 2/Side 1 - 44

punks--so people started to return--

Q: And the skinheads? Was that--
A: Well, the skinheads are another aspect. They were
different from the punks, but at the same time, and they
surfaced, so people went from--Italy had attracted quite a
following and some people went home--I mean, I couldn't face
the trip twice. I would never even--I mean, if I had to go
home I wouldn't go. You know, if I had to go home--If it was
there and back within four or five days I couldn't do it. I
know I couldn't do it. So, I went to London and actually
London looked like it was going to do something big in the
early '80s, and it just petered out. But, it is another
place. It is still interesting. I still do one story from
there. It's a lot harder to do now, because you keep looking
for new places. You find new places, you find designers of
some talent, but they can't make the goods right.
Increasingly, the--guess what. They're having their clothes
made in Italy.

Q: The samples, or their stuff.
A: The production, in Italy. Rifat Ozbek, for instance,
is one of the new, bright hopes there.

Q: He's American isn't he?
A: No, he's Turkish.

Q: No, but I thought he was American.
A: No, he's Turkish by birth and his family is Turkish and
they have lived in London for a long time. He does speak English quite well. But he found he couldn't have his clothes made in London. Alistair Blair, who was one of the higher echelon designers who had worked for Karl Lagerfeld and tried to do a quality product, found he couldn't have the stuff made, it became too expensive. He was importing these fabrics from Italy because wonderful British fabrics don't exist in women's clothes, they tell--for women's clothes, they tell me.

Q: Except they have them in woolens, I suppose.
A: Yes, but they still prefer the Italian knockoffs. I guess because they're lighter. Whatever, Alistair had his things made in Italy, so there's something going on in London but it is not backed up by the means of production. Clothes, for what they are, are terribly expensive there. You know, in the '60s, when it had its vogue, clothes were relatively cheap and they were throw-away clothes and you would wear them until they fell apart and you'd get another one in two weeks. But they were relatively cheap, at least in London they were relatively cheap. They are not cheap now. So, it's tough for them, but they are a creative breed and it is interesting--

Q: Where do places like Jaeger fit? Anywhere?
A: Nowhere.

Q: It's sort of middle-of-the-road nothing.
A: Nobody--They have designers. A designer I was quite fond of for a time there, went to Jaeger, because his own company went out of business. I can't think of his name. But then you never heard from him again. They're there, and I suppose they're worn, but they're not fashion.

Q: What about the woman who died but the business has carried on? Laura Ashley.

A: That was something very special, and very kind of off-beat.

Q: Does that mean anything today?

A: No. Not really. More in decorating than in clothes. Chintzy bedroom kinds of things. No, but honestly, I work harder in London than I do anywhere else. The last show in Milan is on Wednesday night and it's Armani, and it's late enough to make it impossible for me to do it that night for the next day's paper, even with the six-hour or five-hour time difference. So I write Armani on Thursday. The last plane to London (I know all this) is at 6:00. Well, what if the pictures don't come through? I'm afraid to sign up for that 6:00, because, you know, to leave on a 6:00 flight you have to start going at 3:00 in the afternoon and I just--Well, I plan to leave on Friday. I usually take a noon flight on Friday because I don't want to start another country exhausted. So, the plane leaves at noon. It takes what--between one and two hours to get from London to Milan.
That's not the problem. It's getting to the airport, getting from the airport. I arrive sometime in the early afternoon in London. I drop off my bags and go to the first show because the shows start Friday in London. Then I work all day Saturday, because there are plenty of shows on Saturday and on Sunday.

Q: Who shows on Saturday?
A: Everybody. They use that because they know that's the three days when everybody—That's when the London market week is, Friday to Monday. And Monday I have to cut it off and write for Tuesday's paper. So, I mean, they are the most labor-intensive days. Then I go to Paris and start it up all over again.

Q: What day of the week does that start?
A: Well, okay. It--Well, it used to sort of start slowly in Paris. So when you got there you got there. I mean, sometimes I would leave on--get there on Tuesday, sometimes even on Wednesday. You know. I seem to remember that Karl Lagerfeld would show late Wednesday, so I could get there early Wednesday.

Q: Do you ever cover anything at Porte de Versailles?
A: Not anymore because it's at a different time. Initially, when we covered—I was curious because if you're covering high fashion or trends—I used to go to Porte de Versailles religiously, in the early days of French ready-
to-wear, I mean, basically, that's where you went. But, then, when more important houses had their shows, I found I didn't write about the Porte de Versailles. They were perfectly nice clothes but you didn't write about them. Anyway. Now they have them at a different time, so I don't go there.

The first shows used to start Wednesday, Thursday. What happened there, they're filling up our dance card very quickly. What happened is, again, in the early '80s, the Japanese started coming to Paris and they gave them an awkward--The French shows always started slowly; that is, they would go on for almost a week, but they would not be necessarily headliners. You know. They kept the best for last, and they did not--Whoever makes up the dance card did not give the Japanese designers the best spot on the ticket.

They gave them, I think it's Thursday. Well, we all have to be there by Thursday, it might be Wednesday. There is not much time from London to Paris, and what happened is that that extended to the following week.

Yes. So, what has been happening is that the Paris week has been expanding to almost two weeks, starting, of course with the--Now, for my purposes, I start with the Japanese because I think there are two Japanese designers, Comme des Garçons and Kohji Yamamoto, well worth covering. And, there are others, of course, like Kenzo.
Q: How about Isseye Miyake?
A: Yes, but he shows later. He doesn't want to be considered a Japanese designer, and there are some lesser ones that I don't think it's necessary for us to cover, because I think between the two of them—Comme and Kohji—they touch all the new bases. And then they're frantic over the weekend again, starting with the Thursday.

Then there are Friday shows and Saturday shows and Sunday shows and Monday shows, and the problem in all of this is to find a little time to write your story, because I tend to do daily stories from Paris. And St. Laurent is the traditional curtain, and some people even have their cars waiting for them after the St. Laurent show, which is on Wednesday, usually. They have their cars waiting for them, to take them to the airport. I don't know how that's going to continue, with St. Laurent not being in the best of shape, but that certainly has been the case ever since I've been covering the ready-to-wear.

Q: I'd like to talk a little bit, whether it's now or a little bit later, if you have things you want to add to this, about your own relationships with the designers over the years, both here and there.
A: Well, I really—I'm one who believes that newspaper
people or reporters should keep as big a distance from their sources as possible, because if you get to be friends, whether you're covering politics or theatre, it's difficult. Brooks Atkinson, the famous theatre critic for the Times was given a party when he retired, and they invited all the people in the theatre to it, and he was meeting many of them for the first time. That, I think, is a consummation devoutly to be wished. I'm not that good. I have become friends with people because, you know, you see them year after year, and you do get to—Well, they become your friends. I met Victor Costa here in America because our kids went to the same school and were in the same class, so we were school parents rather than a work relationship, and that's one of the few exceptions. There are certainly people I like and there are people I lunch with, but there aren't very many people I see. I don't mean to sound arrogant in this, but I just think you should not establish close personal relationships with people that you might have to be tough on. It's not such an effort for me, because during most of this time, when I was going to Europe, I had children and I didn't want to go out cavorting at night. I'd rather be with the kids. But it doesn't mean that I don't admire some people very much, and my first—I guess my two great favorites in the early days of the Times were Norman Norell, whom everybody who knew him loved. He was an
incredible man. And Mainbocher, whom I didn't love at the beginning and I grew to love and admire and respect. These were old men when I met them. Norman was born in 1900 and Main was born in 1890, and I met them toward the ends of their lives, their respective lives, so, in a way, they gave me a sense, both of them, of the continuity of fashion.

Q: I'd like to hear more about your knowledge of Norman Norell, because there was a period when I tried to do the oral history of a dead man, which is not easy to do, and I interviewed his top model, Gloria--

A: Gloria?

Q: Not Gloria, sorry. That lovely woman whose name will come back to me. I interviewed top saleswoman, I interviewed several retailers, and I had a variety of stories, each more fascinating than the next, ranging from the customers who approached him on the street and asked him where they might buy one of his dresses, and he disappeared, and he called Martha and he said when this young couple came in she was to give them the clothes, way below cost. All kinds of stories like that, which were fascinating.

A: He was an incredible man. As I say, I got to know both these guys late in life. Norman, especially. Let's see, I did Main's obituary. I did both their obituaries, so you have to do a certain amount of research for that, but I did a book on Norman for F.I.T. I met him in, I think it was
1954, '55 at the latest. It was the year that Balenciaga did a brown lace dress with a long torso and loose waistline, and my boss at Women's Wear, Ruth Jacobs, looked at the sketches of this and said, "Bernadine, this is an important change." She could spot those things because, you know, we were still working on the new-look shape—the hour glass new-look shape. Even though this had a waistline, a low waistline, it didn't have a natural waistline, a loose natural waistline, and she really saw the chemise coming, and she said, "Bernadine, go talk to Norman Norell about what this means." That's a swell thing to do, except that Norman didn't let Women's Wear into his office, which she knew very well.

Also, that day I didn't expect to go out to work so I wore my basic college uniform, which was a plaid skirt, a sweater and I think I might have even done bobby sox on that day. It doesn't sound so frightening today, but in 1954, when everybody was in bracelets up to their elbow and mink jackets it was pretty scary.

So, I called Norman Norell, he said, "Come on up," and we talked all afternoon. At this time the company was called Traina Norell, and the reason Women's Wear wasn't allowed to come in (and we didn't see the collections) was because the newspaper—Nobody was still alive who had been there, I'm sure, but sometime in the '30s.
Mr. Traina had a different company. Traina Norell didn't happen until 1940. In the '30s Mr. Traina had another company and *Women's Wear* had written that he had a sweat shop. He probably did have a sweat shop. There were lots of sweat shops around, but he was so insulted by this he never let *Women's Wear* up again. Now we are at least 20 years later and Norman is talking to me, quite animated because--I was asking him, naturally, if the no-waistline dress was reminiscent of the chemise of the 1920s, and that was his favorite time, so we got along just swell.

From time to time a big, tall man would pace back and forth in front of us and at one point Norman said, "That's Tony Traina. I'm not going to introduce you because if he knew you were from *Women's Wear* he'd throw you out." So, that's how we got together initially, and after that he said, "If you ever need me you just call me." Then a few years later, when John Fairchild came back from Europe to head up *Women's Wear*--This was--Now we're in 1960, that was the year that Norman bought out Mr. Traina, and Traina Norell became Norman Norell, and, of course, he was not shy about publicity. It wasn't his idea to keep the press out, so *Women's Wear* was one of his great boosters and that's how I really got to know him. He died in 1972, he was a big--I will never forget--I joke about it, but I will never forget how nice he was to me about not looking like a fashion
person. From time to time somebody comes to me who doesn't look like a fashion person and I try to be nice. We really got to be friends, and about--One time in the spring of 1971 Norman asked me to write a book with him. He had been asked by F.I.T. to do a book, and they had Sally Kirkland picked as his ghost, and he said she was too nervous, he couldn't work with her, would I work with him? I was absolutely floored and pleased and flattered and looking forward to it, because Norman was not a reader, but he was a rememberer. He also had a very precise memory, which I knew because sometimes I would ask him about something that was happening in the past and when I went to check it out (because, you know, you can't trust anybody's memory), he was always right. When he first did movie clothes for Gloria Swanson and the studios in Long Island, he was right about the name of those studios and the dates, because later that was confirmed by Gloria Swanson.

He was wonderful, and he was conveniently born in 1900. He came to New York at the age of 19 in 1919. He worked around at various jobs from 1920 until he went to Hattie Carnegie, in about 1930, and from Hattie Carnegie he went to Traina. He's now 40 years old, experienced, and ready to do the most wonderful clothes in the world, which they probably were at that period because Paris was in the middle of a war and America needed something and he was America's prestige
designer, as part of Traina Norell.

Q: Galanos was not yet in the picture, was he?
A: No, Galanos was a generation younger. Galanos came along, I think, around the early '50s.

Q: No, I think later. Sixty-two?
A: No. Galanos is about 65 now, and he made it at the age of--He started his company in 1951. So, there was a lag but, of course, there was a long period when our two most prestigious designers, Galanos on the West Coast and Norman on the East Coast--They were quite different. Let's say Galanos was more romantic and Norman more classic, if you will. Anyway, that's just a convenience. But, Norman's clothes were slick and always photographed magnificently, whereas the Galanos clothes (true to this day) were subtle and moving and flowing, and it was hard to get a good image of them, because Galanos is still with us. And then Mainbocher--

Q: Excuse me. Before you go on, to Norman Norell--The two sources I had mentioned earlier but didn't name were Denise Linden--
A: She was like a sister to him.

Q: Right, and Edna Sullivan's chief showroom person.
A: Okay. So, about the same time--Well, no. After I knew Norman quite well, I am now at The New York Times, I am asked to cover the Mainbocher collection. I had never covered the Mainbocher collection, though he's one of the
mythic names in fashion, for this reason. He wouldn't let Women's Wear cover him, because he made couture clothes, custom made clothes, and why should he have this trade paper coming up and writing about him. He thought there was no point to it. He was a man of incredible integrity, believed what he said, and he wouldn't let Women's Wear up. Well, okay. I am now from The New York Times and it's okay and I see my first Mainbocher collection. It's kind of wonderful, it's never been a, you know, set-the-world-on-fire, as LaCroix did a few years ago, but it's kind of wonderful, classic clothes. It's very nice and we became interim friends. There were some rumors going around that he was anti-Semitic and the one time in my--He kept asking me--I liked his clothes and he liked the way I wrote about them. He kept inviting me to lunch and I'd put him off. Well, you know, how no matter how popular we are, you're not that popular and I began to be embarrassed--

Q: You mean the press? No matter how popular we are--
A: Well, I meant me. I mean, he asked me to lunch, but there's always time if you want to. I really didn't want to, because I didn't see any--that I and this at-this-point 75-year-old man who had come from--He was born in Chicago but he grew up in the Paris high life, which was not my time, and I didn't see any reason why we should get together at lunch. But, eventually, I just got embarrassed when his
secretary kept saying, "Well, what about next week," and "What about next week," so I made a lunch date. I had also heard that he was anti-Semitic.

One of the few times in my life I announced I was Jewish at lunch. I don't know that I'd ever done that before, but I didn't want to sit there, dragging out with a Nazi, and I wanted to see—I really wanted to see how he would react. Well, he reacted beautifully. He told me the reason he got out of Paris in 1939, when he couldn't take anything with him and he closed his house, was because he didn't want to work with the Germans, and he had other stories—

Q: Had he done a couture—
A: Oh, he had been a couturier in Paris from 1930 on, until 1940. He had done the Duchess of Windsor's wedding dress and was part of that pre-jet set group, which is why I didn't think we had a lot in common. But he turned out to be an absolutely wonderful, wholesome man and he was always interested in my children. All I did was have lunch with him maybe twice a year and the one story I refused at the Times was when he was going—I did a piece about him going out of business, because that was news, but they were having an auction of his stuff, because he was going to live in Europe. He was now 85, 83, and he was going to live in Europe, and I knew it would hurt him, and I now considered
myself his friend, so my friend Nadine Brosan did her first story for *The New York Times*—and bought two Mainbocher dresses which she never was thin enough to get into! For $10, and that's the heart-rending thing.

Q: Really?
A: Well, they were just getting--

Q: Samples, I mean--?
A: Yes, samples. But she thought she'd be able to wear them but she couldn't. Then I used to—Then our friendship picked up in Paris. He was living mostly in Munich, mostly for the music. He was very interested in music. And he would come to Paris periodically, where he stayed at the Hotel St. James D'Albany (until it closed and he had to stay someplace else) with his boyfriend of, at the end, more than 60 years. Fascinating. These were two charming gentlemen. Douglas Pollard. These were two charming, wonderful gentlemen, taken out of Proust and put into my life. The best side of it. Douglas was English. Main, you know, was born in Chicago, he was American of a multiple-European background, and when I was in Paris—We had a little more leisure in the early days of ready-to-wear. He and his friend would take me to lunch and we would talk—

[End of Tape 2, Side 1; begin Side 2]

Q: How did he pick the times when he was going to Paris?
A: He found out when the fashion shows were and he knew
I'd be there and he came to see me. He said that, finally.

Okay. Main died. He was maybe 85-86, and he had had diabetes for most of his life, and he lived well but he had no money towards--He had no money when he left. You know, he went out of business--He really didn't want to go out of business, though he was in his 80s, but some manager had run off with a lot of his money and he just couldn't continue. There was no way he would get new clients to bring that money back. So, he closed--They raised his rent so he closed up, heartbroken, because he felt he had a few more years in him. He went to Europe, where he was living mainly in Munich, possibly cheaper, and he would come to Paris. Then he died, and Douglas moved into my hotel in Paris. Now, I stay at a very simple place. It's called the Calais. Hotel de Calais. It is convenient because it's walking distance from my office. As you know, between 7:00 and 9:00 at night in Paris you cannot get a cab in Paris, no matter how many good names you have. I mean good cab company names. They don't answer their phones. So, I have a place where I can walk to my office, which is on the Rue de Scribe, near the Opera, and it's around the corner from the Ritz, where a lot of the trade people stay. It's most convenient, it is lovely, it's like a townhouse from Proust's Europe, and I have an enormous room and it is dirt cheap.

I must add, they serve breakfast. Period. You can have
your clothes cleaned, but there is no service there. I stay in Paris 10 at a time, at the most 10 days. I'm never there during the day when I'm working, and I'm telling you I would like a place sometime that had room service at all hours, and this does not. It serves breakfast, which is fine, but after that you're on your own. I'm very happy now they've got the mini-bar in there, so you can drink your dinner. But it's fine for me. It serves my purpose. I was desolee, as they say, when Douglas moved in there. He moved in there and stayed there permanently because it was reasonable. Now it's the equivalent of $100 a night, which is reasonable for the Right Bank in Paris, and I guess he could muster up that. But it broke my heart, that this 80-year-old man would have to go out for his meals.

Q: Is he still alive?
A: No, he died a few years ago, but he lived there for a while, and he was such a gentleman. When fashion show time came he would slip a note under my door, or leave one with the concierge, and ask if we could meet for tea. I would try to pay the bill because, after all, I was on an expense account, and he would never let me because a man did not let a lady pay the bill. But it broke my heart that this old, old man stayed at this hotel, which is neat and clean and gave you breakfast, period.

Q: What do you think about the current situation of new
designers? How do you--
A: I am about to do a story, which will appear next week, on the two designers I think are wonderful. I'll tell you--I won't keep you in doubt too long, but I want to tell you how I got to write this particular story, why it would take this particular shape (and I sure hope it works).

I was talking to Fernando Sanchez, who is a lingerie designer as you know, here in New York, and he was reminding me that he was in the same class at the Ecole Chambre Syndicale as Karl Lagerfeld and Yves St. Laurent, and I was thinking, wow, what a trio they must have been. Fernando said they were indeed a trio--They were maybe 17-18 at that point. They knew they were better than everybody else and they carried on, he said. They never did any work, they never did their projects, he said, "Because we knew what fashion was all about and the other people had to learn."

That got me thinking, and I said who in America would be like that little group? I carefully sifted and I spoke to people and I decided there were two designers in New York right now, who are in their 20s, that I know will be in business in the 21st century and may be the Karls and the Oscars and the Bills and the Yves' of the 21st century. I say this because they're not just designers, they live it. They're young men, they love what they do. This is what they want to do, they do it very well. The two are Isaac Mizrahi,
who at 28 has worked for Perry Ellis and Calvin Klein and had his own business for, I think, three years. That's one. The other one, who is almost the same in some ways, is Mark Jacobs who, of course, took over Perry Ellis. And he told me he won a Perry Ellis award when he was in Parsons. The two of them were at Parsons. Isaac Mizrahi was a year ahead of the other. For a story to really work, if you're trying to prove something, I think three is a nice number. I could not think of a third, in that calibre.

Q: What do you think about Christian Francis Roth?
A: I think he's terrific, but I think the other two, who are 27 and 28 years old, have had about 10 years experience at this point and they're known quantities. I think Christian Frances Roth is terrific, but he's 21 years old, this is his second-third collection. I don't feel it's right yet to put him in that--I don't feel that sure about him. Not about his work (he certainly is a talent), but these two are something else. I mean, these--I would think these two would be the Karl and Yves of, say, 2200.

Q: What about Paris? Anybody there?
A: Well, Christian LaCroix. Absolutely. Because of this little--Paris has now--I talked about Italy before and I said that they make clothes very well and their fabrics are good. Now--In the beginning they didn't, but now they fit. What Paris now has is this raw creativity. Like, they don't
care. They'll do three sleeves if three sleeves looks right to them. You can't sit down in it? Tough. I'm exaggerating, but they are untrammelled creativity and untrammelled design. I'm not sure, personally, how I feel about that. I mean, I think clothes should work and they're not works of art, but nevertheless, this is what gives Paris its great push now, and what makes it the fashion capital of the world, probably for now and for the foreseeable future. Christian LaCroix embodies this sheer creativity.

Q: Anybody else? Or just him?

A: Well, we're talking younger people. I can't—I mean, I'm sure there are, but he is wonderful, and I think—He's just learning his craft. He's in his mid-30s. He's been around for five years. He came from art history. He was a curator, or trained to be a curator, and got into design. He's learning, and—You know, it wasn't an accident the world went crazy. It's that you see things you've never seen before. He doesn't put things together—He doesn't look and say, "What did 'Villinier' do?" He puts them together in his own way. It's magical. He does some wearable things. I don't think it's any trouble to him; he can do wearable clothes, but he's just inventive in the way he puts his fabrics together, the way he structures his clothes, and I think we all get a little jaded looking at clothes. You could have St. Laurent at his best, where you just glow in the
perfection of every line and everything seems to work and go
together and the colors are magnificent, when he puts them
together. Then you have this absolutely mad romanticism of
LaCroix. And let's face it; they're the two extremes. I'm
kind of sorry--Arnold Rose is good, but Arnold Rose is in
his 50s. I am not a great admirer of Ferre'. I mean, Ferre'
in Italy is one thing, but Ferre' doing "Dior" here in New
York--He's learning his craft.
Q: And among those people, that age group, it seems
unlikely that there will suddenly evolve a Balenciaga.
A: Yes. Exactly. I think Versace is one of the underplayed
designers. I mean, we don't give him credit because his
clothes are so silly and sexy, but I think he's got great
ability and that's his style. You know, both he and
Valentino are showing in Paris.
Q: What did you think of Roberto Capucci?
A: When I first saw him, in 957, in Italy, I thought he
was absolutely wonderful.
Q: Yes, I did too.
A: Absolutely wonderful. I say "when I first saw him,"
because I haven't seen him so much since then. He shows
during couture time. I did see his couture collections. When
I saw them in '70-'71 they weren't that wonderful, and then
he did these--He had this exhibit that traveled around in
these exaggerated clothes, which were prototypes or whatever
you call them. They weren't real clothes. You couldn't criticize them as clothes, but that collection I saw in '57 I remembered as maybe the best I saw in the world.

Q: What did you think, what do you think of Pierre Cardin?
A: Well--

Q: Or do you think anything?
A: No, I think--He makes me sad, because certainly, in the '60s, he was a mover and shaker. He wasn't just space-age clothes. He and Courrege brought in the new world, as it were, and I think he's not nice now, because he--Well, he only shows couture. He shows 300 numbers, which is more than he has any right to show. Half of them I've seen before. If I haven't seen them, I think I've seen them. I'm angry at him because he doesn't put himself to his task; designing is just something else, and he's very arrogant about it, I believe. I don't mean I've ever talked to him about this, but it looks arrogant because he puts on this enormous show in this unpleasant place for a fashion show--the (?) Cardin is a theatre, it doesn't lend itself to a fashion show, and a lot of what he shows is really nonsense. Occasionally some good things.

Q: Pierre Cardin played a great role in my life, because every year, early in the '50s, when I was on a panel, at Fashion Group, with John Fairchild and Charles Rendix, who ran a business called--He ran a very high-priced evening
dress business, and somebody else, and I remember that I--On that panel, Lucy Noel was translating for us, and at one point a question came to me, by Pierre Cardin, and I don't like to be interpreted or translated, so I did--I answered in French, and of course the audience collapsed, because they were not used to Americans speaking French. So, nobody ever remembered what I said (which I thought was pretty interesting, but--outside of the fact that I was speaking French), but Pierre Cardin said, "Why is it that we designers must design for buyers that are commercial. Why can't we design what we want to design?" My answer to him was, "You can, as long as you accept the fact that sometimes you will be commercially successful and sometimes you won't."

A: That's a good answer. It's curious you should mention that, because--My French isn't as good as yours; but I can use it if the subject is willing. When I first went to Paris, in 1970, I interviewed, en francais, Pierre Cardin, Philippe Venet, Yves St. Laurent, Manuel Ungaro, tout en francais, because they didn't speak any English. You had to speak French. Without an interpreter, but we could manage. That was no problem. Not brilliantly, but we could manage. About this period Mr. Cardin gave a speech at F.I.T., and he was really on, because the kids came out of the woodwork and they were cheering. He had a good audience,
and, of course, most of them didn't speak French, and they would speak English. He not only understood their questions, but he answered their questions, and just a few weeks before I had said to him, "Mr. Cardin (at a dinner), I can understand French, but you must speak a little more slowly with me," and he didn't slow down.

Q: I spoke to him in 1951 and he spoke English.
A: That's what I had suspected, and that's not nice.
Q: No, it's not. Well, this has been wonderful Bernadine. Really great. I think so. It really is marvelous. Thank you very much, it's going to make a great Oral History.
Transcripts housed in Special Collections:

1. No photocopying without written permission from the oral author or his designee. The Director of the Library will furnish addresses; the reader must write for permissions.

2. Written permission is needed to cite or quote from a transcript for publication. The user must send the Library Director the pertinent pages of final draft; the Director will assist in obtaining the final permission. The form of citation normally used is: "The Reminiscences of ________, (dates), pages ________, in the Oral History Collection of The Fashion Institute of Technology." No fees will be charged for published use. User is asked to furnish Oral History Program with a copy of the published work.

3. In order to see PERMISSION REQUIRED or CLOSED memoirs, the reader must obtain the written permission of the oral author or his designee. Contact the Library Director for addresses. The reader writes for permissions. Written permission if obtained must be presented when the reader visits.