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THE FASHION INDUSTRY LEADERS

SHANNON RODGERS, FASHION DESIGNER

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Interviewed by

Mildred Finger
Shannon Rodgers is a designer whose background and experience cover a broad spectrum of the American experience in fashion design. He has designed for the movies as well as the U.S.A. ready-to-wear market. Starting as a sketcher, he became a successful designer for several different firms. In 1959, he joined Jerry Silverman to set up the firm of Jerry Silverman, Inc. In time, the firm was acquired by Warnaco, Inc. Shannon Rodgers withdrew from the company in about 1980.

Mr. Rodgers has been devoting his time and talents to the development at Kent State University of a Fashion School based on the principles of F.I.T. He and Jerry Silverman have donated to Kent State University the Silverman-Rodgers Collection.
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Q. Shannon, at what point in your life did you know that you were going to be an artist in some form or another? How far back?

A. Well I can, I can honestly say, I think ever since I was a child.

Q. Okay, then let's hear about your childhood. Where were you born and when and...?

A. I was born and believe it or not, on a farm in Ohio, a dairy farm, it was called Buckhorn Farms and it specialized in, in dairy products and serviced there a whole center area of Ohio. Towns like New Philadelphia and Columbus and so forth and so on. But like all those farms at that time, there was a little bit of everything. Everybody had a coal mine. There was the Buckhorn Coal Mine and everybody had orchard.

Q. How do you spell Buckhorn, just...

A. Buckhorn, B U C K H O R N, ---- H O N ---

Q. R N?

A, O R N, I'm sorry. And they had orchards... there were Buckhorn Orchards but that was pretty de rigueur, everybody, you know, was in that because in those days they were general farms and very prosperous and you serviced a whole area and... Like Akron, Canton, for us, and what have you but, unfortunately, as time passed on and as these small farms became large corporate farms, that whole concept is disappearing now. I mean, those little small prosperous farms are gone forever and they are now all managed by large corporations and they have masses of men that come in
and work an area one morning, another area in the afternoon and they, they
go out and do another farm, you know, the next day and that's what they're
going to... It's done on, on almost a machine basis now.

Q. Is this in a particular area of the country?
A. This is all of Ohio now.

Q. All of Ohio?
A. All of Ohio. Actually it runs pretty much for all of the
entire middle west and that's really... But in those days they were
prosperous little farms and they involved like two hundred to five hundred
acres and everything was going on and we... And of course it was a
marvelous life, you know, you were in the middle of everything and you...
Our particular farm, you always had what we call hired girls. Hired girls
usually were relatives of some kind. They were distant cousins or friends
of an aunt or uncle or something and they came and they lived with you in
the house. And on the outside we had what we know as hired men. And the
hired men did all of the big jobs on the farm taking care of all the cattle
and everything else, but they were also members of the family in a way
because when you ate, you ate with them and it's, it's the old English
custom, that's where they.... And, but you were more or less the squire of
the whole thing and, and... But you never regarded these people as servants
ever. They were actually people who worked with you and regarded that way.

Q. How many children were you in your family?
A. There were two, my sister and myself.

Q. Oh.
A. And, there were three, my brother died very young and...
Q. And, and when were you born?

A. I was born... You really want the actual date? August the third... Do I have to tell the year? Nineteen hundred and eleven.

Q. Yes.

A. Gosh. Confessions. That's a long time ago. But actually it was a great time to be born because I've lived through an incredible period. Because when, when I was a boy in Newcomer's town, you went to the station to meet friends and relatives and that sort of thing and maybe there were one or two automobiles in the entire area and they were... My uncle had a Packard which was considered a great luxury so forth and so on... And people literally turned out to look at it, you know, as he drove by; and all the roads were dirt roads with exception of, of some of the main roads which were, paved but they were paved by brick because that was a big brick production center. I mean there were a lot of brick mills around the area and most of the people who are farming were into manufacturing bricks too. They had a piece of a foundry here, a foundry there... But it was a marvelous life, because I've gone through all those periods. You know, that's something where suddenly everybody has an automobile and suddenly, you know, I remember one of my favorite stories is that in nineteen thirty, I think, thirty six or seven, I was doing a motion picture at Paramount and they have a sequence in it... It was with Burns and Allen and Ethel Merman and a few other big names I forget, it was called one of those silly names like, like the burlesque of this or the movies of something like... And it was a musical review and they had one whole sequence in it where it took place
on television and, of course, this was before, television was then just in an experimental stage...

Q. So this was almost science fiction?

A. It was all, and we watched this thing being filmed and then we watched in the shots for the... And oh, isn't this silly, you know, television, you know it's never going to happen. You know, you know, it's a toy, it'll never get off the ground and look what's happened since nineteen forty with television. And we really seriously didn't think it was ever going to happen. But getting back to Newcomerstown... It was a little town of 3,200 people and I was more or less a freak with my whole family because from the time, oh I was five or six years old, I drew. I was drawing constantly and they, my whole family thought this was very strange because they never had anybody in the family that had ever done it before. My family was mostly farmers and doctors. If they weren't doctors they were into education and my grandfather's five brothers were all doctors; he was the only farmer in the whole group and, and they, I remember they'd wonder where does he get it? Where does he get it? Where does he get it? Where does he get this thing?

Q. So actually, you were the freak throughout the whole family?

A. Yea, they, no they thought I was a freak...

Q. They thought you were, yea...

A. And, and they kept saying, where does he get this? You know, meaning...

Q. Was there an ancestor who might have passed along the genes?
A. No, the only one was my mother who was a concert pianist. And, they'd say, well she's artistic maybe he gets it there, but they always made it sound like it was a disease of some kind, where does he get it? That's how they... So, in the mean time we have, had a home also in Cleveland, Ohio, in Cleveland Heights and we commuted between the farm and Cleveland constantly and of course in those days that was a commute. It was ninety nine miles and it took six to eight hours to do it because of the roads.

Q. I real..., by car?

A. By car, yes. We had an old Hudson, I remember that, and then we had an Essex after the Hudson. Anyway, and it was, but then as the roads became paved and so, of course, now you can do it in like an hour and ten minutes because there's a super highway all the way through the state.

Q. But, when you started school, did you start in the farm area or...

A. I started in the farm area and then I went to... Actually, I was doing half and half after; oh, about the third or fourth grade. I was in the farm area during one period actually after the spring vac..., you know when, in January when you go into the spring semester? I was usually, in the wintertime I was usually in Cleveland and that's where I really got my best training. I remind you that even in my high school time in Cleveland we only had one hour of art a week and actually it came down to about thirty minutes because by the time you got there and got your things and... And they thought that was enough, you know. Of course,
I was hungry as you could be as a boy because I'd like to spend the entire time doing nothing but art, drawing and that sort...

Q. By what, at what age were you now?
A. Oh, I'm going, this is from junior high school right through high school.

Q. So you were a, let's say from twelve to eighteen...
A. Eighteen.

Q. You had this...
A. I had this great desire. And I was always winning prizes.

I won a prize for this and I won a prize for a drawing that was in the newspaper contest that sort of thing and what have you and they'd still like to know, what's he up to? What is this thing anyway? And in the middle of this whole thing when I was about seventeen or eighteen years old Wayland Gregory, he was one of the great sculptors of that area and he was also an instructor at the Cleveland School of Art where I was going at the time on Saturdays, because that was the only time I could get in there. He was a member of the community theater which then was in the basement of a church across from the Wade Mansion on Euclid Avenue and is now a great huge structure with a, built in the Shakespearean lines and what have you and does magnificent productions but then it was Little Italy in the basement of the ... And I got to doing theater costumes and sets and building them, you know, the hammers and the nails and the whole business and loving every minute of it.

Q. So you really, the first costume design, the first design you did was for theater costume?
A. Theater costume. And, of course, in the middle of this whole thing...

Q. With no training?

A. No training, no, no. Just the little bit of art training I was getting at school. And, I also went to classes at Cleveland School, the Cleveland Museum of Art and...

Q. Which is a great museum.

A. It was a great museum but then it was free, but remember I'm going back quite a few years, it was a very small institution at that time long before Windsor French left all those millions of dollars to it. But I'm really sort of, but Wayland said to me one day, Shannon, he says, you have a real talent for this sort of thing you should be in New York, you know, and get yourself a job there. So, on graduating from high school I, you know, went and bombarded my family. You know, I've got to go to New York, I've got to go to New York and they said, well, we'll make a deal, "you finish your freshman year at college here in Cleveland and then we'll recap the whole thing and see if you still feel the same way." Well, to make a long story short, I finished the freshman year at Western Reserve and of course I was gnashing at the bit all the time and finally when the summer came, they said, well, "we'll underwrite you for one month in New York and go and see what you can do." Well, that was their fatal mistake. So, because once you're in New York, you know, you're not going to try to get out of it. But the funny part of this whole story is...

Q. At least not in one month.
A. Yea.
Q. Yea.
A. I've got to go all the way back to the beginning of it because this is the strangest part of the story. I come from this little town called Newcomerstown, Ohio, which is 3,200 people as I said before but it, in some cockeyed way there's something happened in that town and we don't know exactly what. It is because Woody Hayes was a schoolmate of mine there, Sy Young was born and raised there, oh, uhm, oh, she just died recently, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes", uhm, I can't think of her name.
Q. Loos?
A. Nope, no.
Q. No, no, I'm sorry, ... I'm sorry...
A. "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes"..., she, little short gal with..., Q. Yea, right, I know exactly who you mean, I know exactly who you mean.
A. But I can't think of the name, that's terrible...
Q. It'll come to one of us, okay.
A. But anyway, Ben Robinson who was the editor of Field and Stream and a very good artist for that magazine and Joe Doherty who was a, Ambassador Joe Doherty, but there's a string of people from this little town that's unbelievable and among them is Norman Bel Geddes, the theatrical designer.
Q. Fantastic.
A. He was born and raised there. So, this is the beginning of the story, so when I was driving my family crazy about going to New York,
I said to my father, don't you know anybody in New York that can, you know, give me a hand and so forth? And my father says, I know of no one, you know, that could help you, he said, except... and he mentioned this man's name who was a salesman for Finchley's on Fifth Avenue and he was their travelling salesman and he hit the Statler Hotel in Cleveland twice a year in the spring and in the fall; and we could always tell whether father was doing well or not doing well because if when he got there my father would buy a suit or two suits, that meant things were well, if he didn't buy it meant that things weren't so.... But they were very close friends, and they had met during World War I somewhere along the line; and they were always talking about their past experiences and we used to hear it by the hour and my father finally contacted him. He says, do you know anybody that, you know, might be, you know, involved in the theater and so forth? And he got a letter back from him saying, I don't know any but I do have a man who lives across the hall from me and he lived in the Beaux Arts apartment on forty fourth street.

Q. Yes, I remember, I know it well.

A. He says, I have a man who lives across the hall, I don't know him, but he borrows ice from me every now and then and then and I do take a message for him: his name is Raymond Sovey and he said, Raymond Sovey the theatrical designer.

Q. How do you spell his last name?

A. S O V E Y. And he said, I'll speak to him and maybe something will come of it. So, I got a letter from Mr. Sovey saying, I've been so and
so, so and so, a very polite letter and saying, if you ever come to New York, stop and see me so, well I took that as a command, of course. I had to get on the next train as far as I was concerned and with this letter and I arrived in New York and I was smart enough not to mail the answer. I went to, right to the apartment and I rang the doorbell, and I got there around six o'clock and they called up from the desk and you could tell that he, the last thing in the world he wanted to see was this yokel from Ohio, but he says, come on up. So I went up and he had this lovely apartment in the Beaux Art. The first thing he says is, are you old enough to drink? And I said, yes. He said, would you like a cocktail? I said, yes. So, very dubiously, he made them and he was very kind and everything else and, and he said, did you bring your portfolio? And I said, yes. So he opened up my portfolio, he says, good g-d the boy can draw. That was my first and I was very pleased with that.

Q. Yes, I would think so.

A. So, I hung around and hung around until finally at about eight o'clock he said, I don't suppose you have an appointment this evening? And I said, no, I don't. He said, well, would you have dinner with me? And you could see that it was much against his will but he didn't know what the heck to do with me. So we ended up in the old Tony's on 52nd street and my first night in New York City I sat in the old Tony's and at our table was Raymond Sovey, Dwight Derweinman, Betty Starbuck, Helen Hayes and her husband and Tallulah Bankhead.

Q. Oh G-d.
A. That was my first night and you know something? I've never gotten over it. And I'll never forget, I was sitting next to Tallullah, and she had a maroon satin shirtwaist dress on. A beautiful shade of ruby red, and a sable coat over her shoulders and I said, Miss Bankhead that's the most beautiful dress I think I've ever seen, and she looked at me and said, Darling, I'm so glad you like it, I have it in nine colors. And that really, I almost went mad: I didn't know anybody who had a dress in nine colors, you see. The strange thing was the next morning he says, come down to the office and we'll talk about, you know, putting you to work and so forth and so on. So I went down to the office and it was the Bergman Studios and guess whose studio's the Bergman Studios? Norman Bel Geddes. So, talk about a complete round robin....

Q. Oh, really, yes, small, small...

A. ...It was a small, small... And of course my great thrill was that...

Q. Did you know that Norman Bel Geddes came from your area?

A. No, I had no idea. I knew he came from there...

Q. You did?

A. ... But I had no idea he had any connection with the Bergman Studios and he had started the Bergman: He did all of his work there. Well of course the Bergman Studios had all the design, stage designers there, everybody, Joe Melzeiner and the, the whole bunch all did their work there, and they all had offices there, and of course I couldn't wait for the day that, that Mr. Bel Geddes arrived and I could spring myself on him and what have you. It finally arrived, and I walked up to him and
I said, Mr. Bel Geddes, I'm Shannon Rodgers from Newcomerstown, Ohio and I said, my sister was a roommate of your cousin, you know, at Miami University, and he looks at me and says, oh really? And turned around and walked away from me. It's the only thing he ever said to me, Oh really? And he walked away, that was it. I said, oh...

Q. But you were working for Raymond Sovey?
A. I went to work with Raymond Sovey...
Q. Yea.
A. ... And then, and incidentally, the first job I had with Raymond Sovey was a very minor play and, of, oh gosh, I'm trying to remember her name now, that's gone... The second one, he loaned me to Woodland Thompson who was the designer for doing a show. It was the habit, you know in their group, if they weren't busy, go to work for him for a while, that sort of thing.

Q. I see.
A. And I went with Woodland Thompson and my first really big show was the second show I did on Broadway was Warrior's Husband, which was the...

Q. Oh, that was pretty big, yes.
A. ...Which was the first show, first starring role for Katherine Hepburn.

Q. Of course.
A. And, of course...

Q. So you did costumes for Katherine Hepburn?
A. Katherine Hepburn, yea, in Warrior's Husband and that was my really big, first big job on Broadway and loved every second of it, and of course the thing is that most people don't know that, that Katherine Hepburn was our really first hippie and she was really a hippie because she walked around the whole Broadway area, literally wearing a gunnysack tied in the middle with a clothesline and Raymond Duncan sandals and this red hair with a chopstick stuck through it, what have you, and she'd been around for a long time like four years, something like that and hadn't been able to get a job because everybody was scared to death of her. They'd, what the hell is it? She'd walk in and you know, ... But Jane Cowell saw her in an audition, and she said, I think that girl's got something and she gave her a small ingenue part in Art and Mrs. Bottle and, of course it was one of those great moments of the theater. Everytime she, she only had three or four lines in two or three scenes, something like that, but every time she walked on the stage the entire audience you know just, it's like, Nureyev....

Q. Sure.

A. ... You're, you're, he could be standing still but everybody watches to see what he's going to do, and it was the same thing with Hepburn. And Jed Harris was in the audience and he saw this on opening night and she got the starring role in the second production of Warrior's Husband because he said, that girl's got it and she did. That was...

Q. About what year was this, do you remember?

A. This was, no, I'd hate to tell you, it was 1932.

Q. 1932?
A. Yea, and it was fabulous, it really was. Plus the fact that, something else that nobody's ever mentioned, she had and I don't, of course I don't know what happens today, but at that time she had the most beautiful pair of legs I think on the stage of this era on the screen. She had magnificent, but she always kept them covered up...

Q. Yes, well of course, she kept them with, covered with pants.

A. That was it, but she had magnificent legs: She wore this very short costume, and in the reviews the next morning after nearly every reviewer remarked on her legs and I think maybe that's one reason she's covered them up because she was so sensitive. "I want my talent to be known and not..." Of course that was, those were Dietrich days too and everybody was talking about legs.

Q. Yes, right, right.

A. But I went on with that sort of thing for quite sometime, was involved in an awful lot of productions and then suddenly one day I had lunch with Raymond and he said, where's your portfolio? I said, it's in the office why? He said, what do you got in it? You got some of the new thing? I said, yea, got them all. What do you want? He says, well after lunch, go back to the office and get it. And I said, what are you talking about? He said, go back to the office and get it. So I went back and he said, we're going to the Paramount building and, I'm going, what the heck is he up to? And that's really... And he says, and he took me to them, we went up to the executive offices, and we went into Mr. Raft's office, and who was sitting there but Cecil DeMille and they said, this is Mr. Rodgers who we told you about, so forth and so on and what have you.
And DeMille opened the portfolio, he says, he says, you did the things for Warrior's Husband? And I said, that's right. And he says, how soon can you go to Hollywood? And I said, I beg your pardon? He said, could you leave tomorrow? I said, you've got to be kidding? You know. And he says, no. I need you in Hollywood, I need you right away. Can you..., how soon could you do it? And I said, well I've got a job here. As a matter of fact, I had three jobs I was doing my little bit at Bergman Studios and then I went across the street and did fashion sketching from four o'clock until six o'clock for all the different houses in 530 Seventh Avenue and I carried a spare in the Metropolitan at, in the evening.

Q. How did you get the sketching jobs at, in the market?

A. Well, the, when I was working at the Bergman Studios there were two fellows, Pete Crosby and Tommy Fornier who were, had been there, as a matter of fact Tommy Fornier I own my entire life to because he showed me the New York ropes. How, how to maneuver and how to manipulate and everything else, because I was really a greenhorn. He, he'd worked with me for two weeks and then finally he said, where are you living? And I told him in this funny hotel here on 51st street called the Pickwick Arms. I don't know if you remember that or not. And he said, well I have an apartment, and I share it with another guy, and would you like to move in. The rent was very attractive and well I didn't realize until I got there that I was selected for a completely different reason; because I was the same size and my wardrobe, you know, could be passed around. They could wear it, which was the deal those days. But I'll never forget, Tommy took a look at me and he says, do you have a dinner jacket? And I said, a dinner
jacket? And he says, yes. I said, no. He says, well get up to Roger Kent's and get yourself one. And I said, well how much are they? And he said, I think they're thirty nine dollars and seventy five cents and you wouldn't even remember Roger Kent that was a ....

Q. I do remember Roger Kent.

A. Oh, you do, you were..., and I said, what for? And he says, you can't exist in New York unless you have a dinner jacket. So, I, well, you know, I'm going to take his word on it, and I almost blew my whole wad by buying that darn thing and the shirt and the shoes and the tie and everything that went along with it but I was working and I go, well what the heck, why not? And then I discovered that this is the way to live in New York because we get in our dinner jackets after work and we go to either the old Ritz which was still there or to other hotels where all the debutante parties were. And he said, now when you walk in the door, you know, be sure you go right to the chaperones, all the ladies, and say, I'm Shannon Rodgers from Cleveland, Ohio. My father is Otis Fenton Rodgers and so forth and so on, he says, that sounds very impressive and what have you and he says, be sure you spend at least twenty minutes with them. Well, within two or three weeks I was on every list in town.

Q. Oh, well, isn't that marvelous.

A. And, well, I really worked the hell out of that dinner jacket but in those days, you know that was the days of, right after prohibition had just been repealed and we ate very well and we drank very well and we lived very well because we were always being invited out because if you were young and tall and reasonably good looking and that sort
of thing, you were always invited and if you had, even half way good manners why... So Tommy was the one that really broke me into New York living and how to do it.

Q. He broke you into that and he also introduced you to Seventh Avenue?

A. Seventh Avenue. Because he always left the office at four o'clock, and he got there an hour before me, and he always had a lot more money than I had and I could, never could figure out, you know what...

And in the beginning he was very cool about the whole thing and then he used to... And finally when we became friendly, I said, where do you go? He says, I go across the street: I do fashion sketching. I said, what in the world is that? He said, well it's very easy you do it with a croquis and all... He said... - this is long before, remember, we had no such think as xerox or anything like that, so all these customers who came into these different houses and wanted sketches of what they had purchased, like Magnin's and Neiman Marcus...

Q. This is in the early thirties and...?

A. In the early thirties, yea....

Q. And this is now in the garment industry?

A. In the garment industry. And they did reproduction drawings, so we had a whole mass of kids who came in and did these things and you got paid by the hour.

Q. I've never heard of it.

A. Yea. Sure, that was, you know, oh, I don't know, Mr., what was his name? Which Magnin was it? I think it was Jack. He wanted four sketches of everything he purchased, you know.
Q. I see.
A. And also a great many stores. Neiman Marcus was the same way, they wanted...
Q. Could you name one or two of the manufacturers who did this kind of thing for their customers?
A. Oh, they all did it. The ones...
Q. They all, you mean people like Ben Reig and...
A. I worked for a house called Garfinkel and Segal and Ben Reig, everybody did it because they requested these things because...
Q. Yes.
A. You know, because they had to have some idea what their buyers were buying, and of course, in those days remember, most of the stores by merchandise. Like Mr. Magnin was a, he knew clothes better than any buyer.
Q. Sure. He was a merchant.
A. He was a merchant so, and they were covering themselves, and what and if they saw something that was particularly good or they thought was good, they'd call the buyer and say, double on that and so forth and let's make a promotion out of this and what have you. Of course, those days are gone forever. I mean, the owners very rarely even see the buyers and that sort of thing today. It's all left to the computer, but that was really merchants. Another thing was that if they liked something a great deal, they'd say, well let's make a feature out of this particular coat don't buy two hundred, let's buy a thousand and they would have it on the main floor, the second floor, the third floor and they'd have a display on every floor and every department. Well you try to get a coat display in the furniture
department in any store today. They would think you're out of your mind or something like that. But that...

Q. Were the sketches that you did straight reproduction sketches? Or were they intended also to have a fashion impact so they could...

A. No, no, this is straight reproduction of what...

Q. Straight...

A. ...Actual merchandise that they had bought and of course it was magnificent training as far as that was concerned because then we... Well anyway, in the middle of this whole thing, I was taken to Hollywood and by Mr. DeMille.

Q. So Mr. DeMille didn't care that you had three jobs?

A. Oh, no, he couldn't care less as far as that was concerned, and the rest of it, and plus the fact I, I couldn't care less either. I mean, Hollywood, you know and of course, there again I was very fortunate because I hit Paramount in its absolute palmiest days.

Q. Year?

A. That was nineteen thirty three. The palmiest days. And, of course, that was the days of Lombard and Colbert, and you could name them. And then Dietrich was at her height, you know that. And I used to say, you know, we used to go to the commissary for lunch and they all made entrances you know in the commissary and all the stars had to eat with the working people because only the executives were allowed in the executive room. And, of course, they'd be in costume, and they'd walk with the costume from the particular picture they were making and I used to, I'd give my salary away just for the privilege of sitting there and watching all this. And I
became very good friends with a gal who won a contest in the search for beauty, I think at Paramount and her name was Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, a beautiful girl and they changed her name to Gayle Patrick and Gayle and we became (she was sort of wandering around the studio like I was, you know, we were both beginners there) close friends. I dressed her in a half dozen movies among other things and what have you and then I got her involved in a great scandal at the studio which I enjoyed every minute because Gayle, in one period, became very friendly with Von Sternberg who was Dietrich's you know, mentor and supposed to be Svengali and that sort of thing; and she was avoiding him or not having anything to do with him at this one particular time so he took up Gayle and they became very friendly. And then it hit all the newspapers that Mr. Von Sternberg has a new Trilby and that her name was Gayle Patrick and it was in all of them. So Gayle and I were having lunch in the commissary one day and in comes Dietrich all done up in a fantastic evening gown and she came over breathing heavy looks, and says, you! Well, of course the whole studio was there and of course, every newspaper in town had it the next morning and what have you. My phone was ringing, what part do you play in this? I was just sitting there but I enjoyed every minute of it. But it was a fabulous time, it really was, and the best time of the movies. Unfortunately for me, DeMille only did, you know, like two productions a year and sometimes only one production a year, and sometimes only one production every two years. It all depended on what he was involved in. Cleopatra, which was my first movie, was a two year one, and when we were finished the shooting all started, and then when it went into the can it was another six months. And, so, I was loaned out by the DeMille Production Unit to other studios.
Q. Could you take just a minute and explain how did you work
with - did you do sketches first and then, how did you find fabrics and how
did you decide on your patterns?

A. Well, it's the same thing as in the garment center, you know, we,
you conceive your idea, that sort of thing. Of course, it was a little
different, difference of doing costume because you drew your costume first.
Of course, in the garment center you had your fabric first, everything you
designed came from the fabric, which is just the reverse of what you did in
Hollywood. You did your costume first and then you looked for the fabric.
You'd try to...

Q. Buying from jobbers, I assume?

A. You did your buying.

Q. Yea.

A. And they have, of course they have quite, in those days they
had marvelous resources on the west coast with fabric, but a lot of times
they didn't, so you took the train to New York and did your shopping here.
You filled, you know, like a whole bin full of fabrics and sent them back
to the studios and like Adrian, when he worked on Marie Antoinette, he went
to Paris and he was there three months, and he bought embroideries and
actual costumes of the period and fabrics, the reproductions that they made.
He worked like a slave for three months getting all those fabrics (and
there were findings) together for Marie Antoinette. And, I'm jumping now,
let's get back to...

Q. Yes. Get back to Cecil.

A. ... Going back to Cecil DeMille...
Q. Yea.

A. But, through, through that business of being free and being loaned, I was loaned out to RKO and I was loaned out to this one and that one and what have you. And that was my career for, for three or four maybe more than five years, something like that. And then in the meantime I'd have a gap in between and I'd come back to New York and do a line, you know, for wholesale house here...

Q. On a freelance basis?

A. ...On a freelance basis. And at one time, I don't know if you remember Charlie Cooper or not?

Q. Oh, I do.

A. Charles Cooper. When he was a New York house, I became a favorite of Charlie Cooper's and I used to come and do the lines for him frequently.

Q. No, I think I remember from Cal..., from Los Angeles.

A. Cal...., Cal....

Q. That was later I gather?

A. Yea, much later, yea. That was after the war, he was in California.

Q. Yea.

A. Yea, it was right after the war he moved to California. Before that, he was here, and it was a very successful house here in New York. And then, because of my drawing ability, which has always been with me for some cockeyed reason, I'll never know why, Charlie would take me to Paris and, of course, that was the greatest training on earth because in those days...
Q. When did you make your first trip?
A. My first trip to Paris I think was nineteen thirty seven, thirty seven, something like that with...

Q. Well before the war?
A. ... With Charlie, with Charlie. And I, and of course, in those days you went to the house and you sat there and you weren't even allowed to take your hankerchief out of your pocket, you know, because if you did, they really had three people looking over your shoulder, what are you doing? You know. And a pencil, a paper, absolutely not. And they really watched you, well, of course, today when you go to the openings and you see them with their, these machines and everything else...

Q. Yea, right, right.
A. ... And pencils and sketching and everything else, you can't conceive what it was like in those days because you were literally not allowed to take a note.

Q. But pre-war were you paying a guaranteed caution?
A. No.

Q. You were not?
A. No, no. That was, that was, that came afterwards.

Q. That came..., uh, huh.
A. No. That came after the war and... because the only thing was, I mean, you could only do it so many times, you know, if you came once or twice and didn't purchase than... You couldn't get in again. The guaran..., the caution became a guarantee after the war. But...

Q. But in '37 how many houses would you go to?

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A. Oh, oh. In '37? We went to ten or twelve houses, something like that. But remember in those days we only had a very small group of people going to Europe.

Q. Uh, huh.

A. A very small group of people. There would be, I'd say at the most, twenty and, you know, and very few manufacturers went then, no newspaper, there was no press whatsoever, it was only Vogue and Harper's Bazaar, there were, you know, maybe another magazine or something. And there was a woman who used to import, I can't think of her name, gee, I wish Jerry was here. She used to import samples, show them here in New York afterwards. I can't remember, well I'll get it for you later. And, the thing was that after every showing we would tear out of the Salon and go to the local coffee house or restaurant on the corner and I'd sit and draw.

Q. From memory?

A. From memory and, but this, and of course Charlie was marvelous. He said, that's good, that's good, no, that's not right the seam didn't go like that, it went this way or this so forth and.... And we would really get most of the collection, you know, on paper before we bought and, of course, it was fabulous training for me because at this point even today, I can remember almost every dress in every collection. It's really, it's, you're really forced to, to train yourself and that sort of thing and I look at a dress and well, I know, that was Mainbocher back in Paris before he even came to New York, the beaded sheath, the one that Norell copied. And you know, if you have a total recall of all these things that you've seen all over the years because your mind was forced to do it at that time; and of course, as I said, it was fantastic training.
Q. Absolutely.
A. You know... And, of course, I'd come back here and do my work and go to Hollywood and in the middle of this whole thing Omar Kiam was looking for somebody and they recommended me and then I went to United Artists with Omar and...

Q. Oh, this was before he went to Ben Reig?
A. Uh, huh. Oh, I, long after he was at Ben Reig.
Q. Long....
A. No, wait a minute, wait a minute.
Q. No, Ben Reig, he was after....
A. Did he go to Ben Reig after the war?
Q. Uh, huh, okay.
A. Did he go to Ben Reig afterwards? I didn't know that.
Q. I believe so.
A. Well, I didn't know that.
Q. Yea.
A. Because...
Q. I will check it out though but that's my impression.
A. But anyway, I worked with, with Kiam for three years then and just, until I was taken in the service and, and just before Pearl Harbor. And that was a fantastic job because Mr. Kiam, am I allowed to say this on, on the Oral thing?
Q. Anything you want and I'll...
A. Well, I guess I can, was the most difficult man that's ever been born, I think. I've known a few in my life, that sort of thing, what have you, but he was really a difficult man and he had a large problem, an alcoholic problem; and he happened to be the nephew of Sam Goldwyn and that's the main reason I think he had the job at United Artists, and we had a real difficult time because, oh, I went to work for him and after a month or two, and in all the years that I worked for him, which is three years, I was never addressed as Shannon or Mr. Rodgers or anything like that. He had a wonderful French woman as his assistant and her name was Madam Jeanne and he'd say, Madame Jeanne, tell the boy I want this - I could be standing right next to him and, Madame Jeanne, tell the boy I want that, tell the boy to design this and that and, because, everybody was beneath him, you know, that's why like he didn't address servants, something like that...

Q. You were at that point an assistant to him? And by then you were say, twenty-nine or twenty-eight or twenty-seven?

A. Twenty-eight.

Q. Like that.

A. Yea, twenty-eight. I went in the service at twenty-nine, yea, twenty-nine. And, of course, I worked for him a very short while, and I finally said, oh this is for the birds, you know, I don't, didn't have to take this...

Q. True.
A. And, I went to the office and said, look, I've been offered something at Twentieth Century Fox, thank you very much, I'm going... And they said, you can't, he said, you've been here three months and I said, well... He said, you've lasted longer than anybody else; he said, we'll give you a fifty dollar a week raise. So I, well, you know, that's, in those days, fifty dollars was an awful lot of money, multiply it by ten for today. I said, well, under those circumstances I'll stay. So I had a marvelous time. About every four months I would get really fed up with something that happened and go to the office and say, I'm through and they kept raising me fi...

Q. What kind of money were you earning doing that job?
A. Well, believe it or not, in those days, I was making two hundred dollars a week, which was a lot of money.

Q. Yes indeed. Sure.

A. A lot of money, because I was always astonished because the junior stars, the beginning stars, they were only making a hundred to a hundred and fifty a week and that sort of thing. I ended up making three fifty a week at United Artists which was a lot of money, because a lot of the really featured players didn't make that much; but I enjoyed myself thoroughly and I had a very good time with it, and then... But Mr. Kiam, you know is, was a travelling alcoholic. He would go out for an evening and suddenly there was no Mr. Kiam and a day would go by, two days would go by, a week would go by sometimes, sometimes two weeks would go by; and then one day the phone would ring and he says, and he'd say, Madame Jeanne, I'm in Chicago or I'm in Miami, Florida or I'm in Mexico City.
Tell the boy to go to my bank and so forth and so on and get me some money right away. He went on these toots, you know, and then he ended up... Well, of course, the thing that was marvelous was the fact that we didn't have him there all during that period, and we were able to do all kinds of things. But the day he got back from any one of these jaunts was the worst day of the world because he would arrive in Los Angeles, go to the Turkish Bath and be absolutely washed out, that sort of thing, whatever, and then he'd arrive at the studio and of course, everything we had done was wrong: this was wrong, that was wrong, and so forth... And of course, everybody ran and hid for twenty four hours until he got over this thing because he had... And then we went on our merry way like we always did waiting for the next time. But it was quite a... But I do have a sequel to the story. After the war, I came into New York, I was working for Jerry and I hadn't seen Mr. Kiam in years, literally, yea, I was in the service for four and a half, almost five years, I worked for Jerry maybe two years and I went into Billy's on First Avenue and who's sitting there at a table, well, Mr. Kiam. And I was sitting, you know, and I said, Jerry, I think I'm going to go over and say hello, why the hell not, you know, so forth and so on. So Jerry says, for g-dsake, go over and see him and get it over with and stop talking about it. So I did, and I went over and I said, Mr. Kiam, and he looked at me and I said, I'm Shannon Rodgers, you know.... He was so blotto, he didn't know who I was or anything else and that was my last, last trip with him. So I thought, well, it's no, it'll always be that way. But, where are we now?

Q. You were, well actually you are almost at the war.
A. Well, my big problem with the war was, I mean not a big problem but the problem was that, that... All, of course this was all in the air, something was going to happen and everybody... and they were drafting people at that time and my number came up. In the meantime I had a lot of friends in California in all different kinds of jobs that had been drafted and several of them, several of them, quite a few of them had gone to Fort Ord which is up the coast from Los Angeles, and we used to drive up on weekends to visit them and these poor guys sat around in these barracks. They had no officers, they had no uniforms, and the uniforms hadn't come through and that sort of thing and they were sitting around there in their civilian clothes, they had nothing to do and, and, you know, nothing but sheer boredom and they're all trying to get out to get back to their jobs and what have you and.... So when it was almost my time I said, you know, we talked it over, I said, look, I'm going to get in the Navy, I'd much rather be in that than go through this thing that they're going through up there. So that's what I did, I enlisted and...

Q. In what year was that?

A. This was, this was like two months before Pearl Harbor so that's...

Q. Forty-one.

A. ... Forty-one. And, of course, in that, I was in boot training in San Diego and got out of that and much more than that because boot training was three months, it would be about four or five months and I came out of there and was in my first little uniform and what have you and I went up to San Francisco to see a friend of mine and... Actually she was the Executive Secretary for the Baron Long Hotels and she said, what, what are your plans?
And I said, I don't know what goes on from here; and she said, well, can, do you want me to use a little influence? And I said, I'd be delighted.

She says, well, let's see what I can do about getting you on board a ship and I said, what kind of ship? She said, well the Matson Liners are all being turned into troop ships and, she said, I think that would be a wonderful duty and I have direct connection with the.... Well, to make a long story short, it was arranged. And I ended up, and I made one trip to Honolulu and then on..., we were back in harbor, actually just arriving in harbor, when Pearl Harbor happened and then that's when all hell broke loose; but I was made a Lieutenant J.G. overnight - boom - like that. I made one trip and I was on the, the old Lurline for that one, that trip and...

Q. The old what?
A. Lurline.

Q. Would you spell that?
A. S. S. Lurline. It's a Matson Liner and... L U R L I N E.

Q. Okay.
A. And I had been supply officer on board and so they suddenly, I was transferred almost overnight to the Mariposa which was a sister ship and made the Senior, the Senior Supply Officer and I was supposed to be an expert in Reefer Boxes. You know, Reefer Boxes are ice boxes and they used to use them; they, both the Lurline and the Mariposa had over, oh, I think one had twenty-one, the other had twenty-four and they used to haul pineapples, you know, in the reefer boxes back from Honolulu. And how I got to be an expert on reefer boxes in one trip, I'll never know, but I did; but all of a sudden that was the way I was designated as far as the service was concerned and from that minute on, I mean every.... And then
from the Mariposa I went to my third ship and then from there to, to the Yarmouth out here on the East Coast and she was a very small ship but, and used to haul lobsters between Nova Scotia and New York and was about, oh, I'd say, one quarter of the size or one fifth the size of the Matson liners, but she travelled very, very fast. So they made it into a sort of medical supply ship: we'd haul troops and medical supplies almost exclusively, and this was all over the world. We went everywhere and it was marvelous duty because being a supply officer on board ship is the best: you know, I had the keys to everything, the most popular guy on board ship. Oh, everybody adored me, they all loved me and then at eight o'clock, they'd say, how about some ice cream? No, but that was, no but that was, but it was wonderful duty and I had... I had the greatest opportunity because I literally went everywhere from Ryjivik to Murmansk in Russia and Casablanca and Dubrovnik and India four or five times and Cape Town and Rio and Australia, Tasmania, and I think I know every south sea island there is.

Q. You had a chance to get off the ship and have a look around?

A. Well, I mean, yes, I mean just when we were in port and that sort of thing.

Q. Yea, right.

A. And then on the Yarmouth we were the second or third ship into...
A. I had a very great friend whose name was Dick Wright, and his father was the advertising manager for... Oh.... used to be on 34th and...

Q. McCreery's?

A. McCreery's. And when I got out of the service, I thought, "No more designing. I'm through with that. I think I should get into something much more, you know, stable and... I'd love to be in advertising." And Dick more or less talked me into it. So I came to New York after.... I left the service in San Pedro and came directly to New York City after that and I went to see his father....

Q. You say that was in 1947?

A. Forty-seven, Yes. I went directly to New York and went to his father's office, got a job, and went to work the following Monday, and worked there a day and a half. And the second day, or third day -- I forget -- that I was there, I had a lunch date with Billy Clion, and Billy Clion is an old, old friend of mine who's a designer in the market...

Q. I'm sorry. Would you spell "Clion"?

A. C-l-i-o-n. And he was working for a house at 498 Seventh Avenue, and I can't remember the name of that. Anyway, we had a lunch date uptown, and he called me at the last minute and he said, "Shannon, I can't make it, I've got this and that. Can you meet me at Wilkinson's?" And I think you'll remember Wilkinson's at 498...

Q. Uh huh.

A. And he said.... I said, "I don't want to go there, because I'm going to see everybody from the market." And he said, "Don't be an ass.
Meet me there and have lunch." And I went in there and, of course, it was like old home week. And everybody was sitting there talking and Billy said, "Well, what the hell are you going to do in advertising at McCreery's? This is crazy. This is your life and it always has been... There's a firm upstairs called 'Martini,' and they've got a guy up there by the name of Sylvan Rich and his partner.... They're looking for somebody... They asked me about somebody yesterday, or the day before. You'd be perfect for them." And I said, "I don't know," and he says, "Oh, come on. Stop your nonsense. Go up there and get yourself a decent job." So I went up, and I was interviewed by Jerry Silverman. And I was still in uniform. I couldn't get... In those days you couldn't buy a suit. There were no suits in stores, at all. That's one thing I was telling you. So the first two weeks I worked for Jerry, I worked in my uniform up there. And of course the rest is history. Jerry and I got together, and....

Q. Well, let's not condense the history too much. I'd like to hear about what happened in those years. Because that....

A. Well, I was at Martini, and Jerry was.... There were five designers up there at a time...

Q. Were there five?

A. Five designers. And Martini... And then they had another firm called "Diminutives." Diminutives was sort of a baby firm, and they did what they called a petite line, which is actually based on a Hattie Carnegie figure, and that sort of thing. Small suits and that sort of thing. And Jerry was an expert salesman, as you know, and knew his business from...
And he knew a good thing when he saw it, and he knew a bad thing when he saw it and he knew what he wanted, and how many he wanted of everything, and we clicked right away. And he liked my sketches and he liked ... I had the smallest room.... And I had, I think, four sample hands and one tailor.

Q. Did you have an assistant?

A. I was my own assistant in the beginning. And then I did my own cutting and...

Q. I was going to ask you... Where did you learn to cut, in the studio?

A. You pick it up as you go along, and that's exactly what happened with me. And I didn't do it very well, but I got, you know.... Well, finally, after my first line, he decided I was worthy of an assistant and that sort of thing. But the thing was about it, when I went for my initial interview with Sylvan Rich, and he said, "Yes, .... we'll take you on, and we'll start you at $75 a week." And I said, "Well, Mr. Rich, I left a job at $350 a week. Why would I start at $75?" And he said, "Well, Mr. Rodgers, we don't know you. You're an absolute zero as far as we're concerned. You could have lost your talent in five years." And I said, "How can you lose talent?" .... And I said, "Well, I'll start at $75. Okay, I accept... except for one thing. We'll have a review in 90 days. And in 90 days, if you think... we'll go back to my original salary." And he says, "Sure." He said, "Yes," right away. Well, it just so happened that the Diminutive line... And with Jerry's help, I must say, he had a lot to do with it, he said, "Do this," and "Do that," and "Make me so many of this and give me that," and...

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Q. So that he kind of merchandised...?

A. He merchandised my line, for me, actually. He said, "I like that. I don't like that. Make me two more that look like this, and get rid of that because it's never gonna sell..." And it was the greatest help that any designer could... There's another thing. We used to have a lot of creative buyers in our market who gave you that help, you know. Unfortunately they've all vanished now. They don't exist anymore. But Jerry was marvelous, and the first three lines that I did for Martini were sensational lines, if I may say so. And right away the house picked up, and started to go like crazy. So in my review, I got my salary, which drove Sylvan crazy. He says, "You're making more than anybody else. What are you?" But I got it. And then we went on from there. And I... We... Well, I guess our bad day was the day Diminutives passed Martini, which was really the mother firm, as far as volume and money were concerned. And suddenly they made the announcement that Diminutives had outsold the Martini line, with one designer and one designing room -- just the four of us -- Well, Mr. Rich didn't like that at all. So they had a large conference and they just said, at that time, to put Jerry at the head of Martini, and they gave me the head sales manager as the head of Diminutives. So I said, "Well, you know, this is crazy. We've built... Mr. Silverman and I have built this thing up together, over a period of two or three years, and it's a great success. Why would you cut it off at the knees? Right now." And Mr. Rich said, "I'm running this business, Mr. Rodgers... you're not. I've decided this is the way it should be."

Q. What was his role going to be if Jerry was going to...?
A. Well, he was going to be head of everything, which he always was, you know, sort of... He was the, what do you call it, the major domo of the whole works, and what have you. Actually, Jerry was a senior partner in Diminutives. I think he had 52% of Diminutives and Sylvan had 48%, and it was just vice versa in Martini. Jerry had 48% and he had 52%. Rich always considered himself the head of the firm, which I guess he was, because he started it. And from that moment on, the romance was over....

Q. Now, how long had this taken?
A. It had taken three years.
Q. So it was 1952 to....?
A. Well, I can tell you exactly... We were in business... '23 from '82 is how much ....?
Q. '59 is when you started ... Jerry Silverman, Inc.?
A. '59, and this was ... This all happened in '54.... So it was about five years. So I was offered a job at Junior League, and went there and had a good time. Had a great success at Junior League. Unfortunately, my third year there -- of course Jerry and I remained close friends all during this period -- and on my third year there, Mr. Sadowsky, who owned it, passed away. And they dismantled the firm, completely, and Mr. Horwitz who owned Judy and Jill came.... picked up my whole unit and took me back to 498, and opened that up. And I worked for Judy and Jill until... What did we say -- '59 when we started?
Q. Yes.
A. It was in the sping of '59. I kept.... I kept hounding Jerry all that time, "Let's go into business together, for cryin' out loud.
With you, we made such a success of the other place, why can't we do it?"

But Jerry had only had two jobs in his life. His law practice and Martini, and, of course, this was a great giant step, to go out on your own business. And, of course, I think I would have been terrified too. But I'd had so many jobs... I jumped back and forth... If I was the least bit... As long as I had a pencil and could draw, I could get a job. Nothing frightened me as far as that was concerned. That's what comes from being young... And so we talked about it many, many times. And then finally Jerry's mother got into the act, and she says, "Why don't you go into business with Shannon? Why do you want to go on with this thing?" And of course, there's a long story... I don't know if Jerry's ever told you, but there's a story about a production man....

Q. Yes, I think he did. Yes.

A. With his wife murdering him, and then they discovered that he had dipped in the till and so forth and so on....

Q. Yes. Yes... for a lot of money...

A. For an awful lot of money. Actually, their working capital was pretty well gone. And I, fortunately, was out of this whole thing when all this was taking place, and from that minute on Martini was really struggling. Because they really didn't have the capital to work with, and Jerry was, you know, really plugging there, like crazy. And I was plugging on the other side -- "Go into business with me!" -- so, to make a long story short, we finally achieved it. That's another....

Q. I don't want to forget the anecdote you alluded to. You mentioned an anecdote about Jerry...
A. That's much later. I'll tell you now though... It's about the costume collection... This thing that we're involved in right now...

Well, we were in business. We hung our hat on the European lines from the very beginning, and we actually started... Oh, gosh... My mind... Pret-A-Porter...

We were responsible for Pret-A-Porter because *Marianne Charlier had come up with the idea. It was her idea... About the petite couture, which was getting clothing from the smaller houses, not the big houses -- forget Dior, forget Balenciaga, forget... -- go to the smaller houses, cute, young clothes, and let's work in that area. Which we did. And we were enormously successful.

We... besides our own line we had the petite couture line, which was in almost every store in America. And we had a great formula going and great success, and just.... What most people don't know is when you buy a European dress, French, English or Italian, there are like six ideas in every dress. Too many ideas. They've got a front, they've got a back, they've got this...

And of course the secret of the thing is getting the good item out of that dress and making a simple garment that American women like to wear. That's how we manipulated these things. And we did extremely well for a long period. And we would venture out to Spain. We started a thing in Spain, and everybody followed us there. We started certain things... Patrick de Barentzen was our discovery in Rome. And then we went to Tarlazzi and we were in those houses long before anybody else was. And that was the great fun of it, to be the first and find the talent. And you work with that talent and develop your own line along with it. But at one point, we had

*Merchandiser of "Miss Berfdorf" at Bergdorf Goodman
been buying heavily from a firm called Ulric. I don't know if you know...

Do you remember Ulric?

Q. Yes I do.

A. Well, on the Place Vendome on the top floor, you had to climb all those stairs... And Ulric was a very good supplier, because he had cute clothes, and again, you took this and you took that and you did your own interpretation of it. And unfortunately for us, we had a buyer here in New York City, who, like everybody else in the market, they decided they were going to do the Bergdorf thing... and have their own petite couture, and they started sending their own merchandise men and buyers over, doing their own selecting, and trying to copy our format. And fortunately, it wasn't as easy as that. Some people had a little bit of success; some had no success. But this particular lady, from a large department store at the corner of 34th and 5th Avenue, went into... was taken to Ulric by her commissionaire, and they showed her a dress, and she said, "Oh, I already have that dress in my stock. I sold 500 of them. I got it from Jerry Silverman." And Ulric almost fainted dead away. Because that was the first time he'd ever heard the figures. So we didn't know this incident happened, so the next time we were in Paris, we walked into Ulric, and we walked into a buzz saw. And they were... "From now on we want a royalty on every dress that you sell, and we want this and that..." And they had all these new... And, of course, we couldn't go along with that. We couldn't afford to as far as that was concerned. And they refused to sell us the line. Mr. Ulric gathered together all the small manufacturers in Paris, and they created Pret-A-Porter to sell their own merchandise to the
American stores. So this little girl's one remark really started the whole thing. Because he instigated the whole.... And we checked on her, and she only sold 32 of that dress; she didn't sell 500... But I think it's an interesting story.

Q. Oh, it is. It's great.

A. And it really just started from a casual remark. "Oh, I got that dress from Jerry Silverman. I sold 500 of them". So the French figured immediately if they're gonna sell 500, we'll sell more than that, and that's how it all started. Anyway, all these trips that we made to Europe... I always disappeared once or twice during each visit, because I started collecting costumes, just by accident; period costumes, through a friend of mine. This gal, who's the Curator of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and I had lunch one day in London. And she met me and she said, "Shannon, this is going to have to be a very fast lunch. No more than 45 minutes." And I said, "What are you talking about?" And she said, "Today is acquisition day. I have to go back to the museum." I said, "What's that?" And she said, "That's when they bring things from all over the British Isles, you look through them, either for donation or for us to buy. And the board sits on it and makes up their mind what they're gonna do; what they're gonna take." I said, "Gee, it sounds fascinating. I'd love to see it." And she said, "Sure. Come along." So we had a 45 minute lunch. We got back there and we sat at this table, and these people were bringing in boxes and bags, and taking things out and showing them, and one particular woman brought in a Victorian walking dress -- absolutely magnificent piece -- and I looked
at it and I thought, "Oh, brother." You know, the bustle, and the velvets, the tassels and everything... Just enchanting.

Q. These were private people bringing...?
A. Private People... And some of them came as a donation...

Some of them to sell. This lady wanted to sell. And Madeleine said, "No, thank you." So I turned around and I said, "Madeleine, that's one of the most beautiful costumes..."

Q. What was her name? Madeleine...?
A. Madeleine Ginsburg. And I said, "Why would you say no to that? That's one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen." She says, "Shannon, we have so many of that type and that period, and we can only take care of... Our wardrobes are only that big..." I said, "Well, she wasn't asking that much. Would you mind?" And she says, "Not at all. Be my guest again."

So I went into the corridor and made my little deal. I came back and sat down, and Medeleine turns around and says, "Did you get it?" And I said, "Yes." And she looked at me and said, "Do you know what you've done?" And I said, "No." And she said, "It's worse than dope." And I said, "What are you talking about?" And she says, "You'll see. One leads to two. Two goes to four. Four leads to eight. Eight leads to 16... And on and on. All of a sudden, one day, you're swapping six for one good one. You're hooked." And I... "I only want the one." Of course, she was right. Because once it starts you can't stop.

Q. What year was this?
A. This was... Gosh... Over 15 years ago.

Q. In the mid-sixties?
A. In the mid-sixties. Yes. And it just has gone on and on and on. Of course, I was floundering there for a while, because I was getting so much stuff and I really didn't know what I was doing. And so Stella Blum at the Metropolitan said, "Shannon, get yourself a very good mentor. Get Cora Ginsburg..."

Q. Yes. The antique dealer.

A. The antique dealer. And she's a great authority and appraiser, you know, for the United States government. And no relation to the Ginsburg in London. So I met Cora, and, of course, that was the beginning of another big romance. Cora and I have done the world together now -- Japan, Asia, the whole thing -- And she, of course, is so knowledgeable and so complete... She knows so much you couldn't know of, about everything.... laces, costumes, prints... It's an education just to be with her. Of course, that's a great delight. Every time I look at her, it's just sheer heaven. And getting back to my original story -- which I'm digressing from all the time -- I would disappear... And it got to the point where I would meet these dealers, meet these people in different places in Paris and Rome, and they would show me things and I would purchase them and bring them back to the hotel and hang them in the closet. Well, I don't know if you're aware of it or not, but a costume on a hanger, without its underpinnings and without a figure -- it needs restoration and cleaning -- it is a pretty sad looking thing hanging on a hanger in a closet. And Jerry used to look at those things and, "Good G-d. What'd you buy that for? What is it?" And I'd say, "It's a beautiful example of 1820, and it's a marvelous example of 1865,"
And he'd look at these things... And as it went on, as time went on, he'd say, "We're going to go to so and so this morning to look at Jean Muir, and I'd say, "Why don't you cover Jean Muir" And he'd say, "Not those damn rags again. Shannon, really!" And I'd say, "I'm going. I think it's important. You go cover Jean Muir... You don't need me for that." This went on and on and on. Well, four years ago... Jerry tolerated it but he wasn't very happy, because it always meant that we had three or four extra huge suitcases to bring through customs again, and usually when we arrived in customs, he'd say "Goodbye. I'll see you later." And he left me alone with the suitcases. Because he wanted no part of this whole thing. Four years ago, when they opened the Shirley Goodman Resource Center at F.I.T., they had this exhibition booked for the opening day, and something happened at the last minute -- four weeks before it was supposed to happen -- They cancelled the exhibition. Whoever was going to show; I've forgotten. So Shirley called me and said, "Shannon, could we set up your collection to open the Shirley Goodman Resource Center?" I said, "Well, I'd be delighted to open but we only have... You can't mount a costume exhibition in four weeks." She says, "Well, we're going to try." And Marty Bronson, who was their expert down there, says, "I think we can do it." To make a long story short, I said, "Okay, let's try." So we showed 70 some pieces from my collection, and Marty Bronson did a brilliant job, working day and night, literally. And my entire designing room was working down at F.I.T. for three weeks. And Jerry was... "What's going on here anyway? Where is everybody...? We need clothes...!" And I said, "Wait until it's all over
with and we'll get to work after that. So to make a long story short, we got the thing in... We literally were laying the last nails in the thing at 5:00. Well, the opening coincided exactly with "Press Week" here in New York, so we had 350 ladies of the Fashion Press from all over America, plus our own guests, so it was a big mob. And we got a group of celebrities to sort of host the affair, and Jerry heard all this going on, and he used to say, "What's going... For crying out loud, aren't you coming back to the office?" And that was the way it was going. Well, anyway, that night -- opening night -- they had a large party uptown here somewhere, and then they came down there for cocktails at 6:30, 7:00, they all came down by bus, and of course Jerry comes in with two or three babes on each arm -- You know he loves the press and how he carries on with them. And they came down the staircase and they walked into the big exhibition hall, and this was the first time Jerry had ever seen these costumes, you know, cleaned, pressed, restored, on figures, lighting... To make the thing look like a garden. It was all white birch trees with artificial leaves hanging down. It was absolutely beautiful. And they opened the doors, and Jerry was the first one ... And he looks at the room, and he says, "Oh, my G-d." And in two seconds he is saying, "Now, our collection..." And from that minute on, it was "our" collection. But I'm delighted, because I need his help and I need his expertise badly, and he's so great at it. That's what's made the switch that we've done recently....

Q. Before you go into the F.I.T. showing, of the 77 pieces, what were the periods, or how did you pick which of the pieces...?
A. We started with American colonial and went right straight through the 1920's.

Q. All American?

A. All American. Yes. American Colonial -- 1820 - 1830.....

You know, Scarlett O'Hara, right through the Victorian and the 1910 and 1920s. And we cut off at the 1920s. It's a beautiful show. I have a lot of slides of it. You'll have to see it sometime. And Marty did a fabulous job.

Q. Descriptions for each one..?

A. For each one... And it was very exciting, and it was a wonderful opening for the building too, as far as that was concerned. But the great thing was that from that minute on, it's never been a "rag" again, as far as Jerry's concerned. Everything has a possibility now. He looks a little dubious, and says, "Do you really think that...?"

Of course, you know the wonderful story about the blue Chinese robe at Sothebys? This is only... I don't know if we told you the last time you were here or not...

Q. I don't think so.

A. Well, you know, Jerry's never been an avid collector. He's approved, and that's about... But he never actually has ventured into it himself. And four months ago, five months ago, they had a sale at Sothebys which was extraordinary, because they had some magnificent Chinese pieces, which don't come up very often. And these were a series of ten or 12 which were really outstanding. There were two in particular that I wanted, plus
a child's robe, so I looked at everything very carefully, and, of course, there were three or four others that I would have loved to have had. You know, when you're budgeting, you have to stick with your budget. And the sale was on a Saturday and we were on our way to the country, after the sale, and I said to Jerry "Will you go to the sale with me?" And he said, "I don't want to sit..." And I said, "Well come on, we're going to the country." So he says, "All right, I'll go along." So, anyway, these things came up. And of course you know at Sothebys they have the circular revolving stage and the spotlights, and I must say, when they come up it is spectacular to look at. And this red one came up and I was absolutely flipped over it. And that was one of those I had to have. And then the child's robe... I got the three things I wanted, but I blew my budget. I was finished. So, I was ready to go. Jerry said, "Let's stay, I want to see. I want to see." And finally, this cut velvet, deep blue, royal blue, came on. About 1860, 1870... It's a magnificent piece. And of course the lights were on it, and Jerry looked at it, and he says, "Cosh. Aren't you gonna buy that?" And I said, "Jerry, that's way beyond... The estimate on that is so high... And remember, you've got two or three really big dealers here." And he says, "But G-d, that's the prettiest thing I've ever seen." And I said, "I know it too, but I can't afford it, and I'm not gonna buy it." The bidding had started. It had gone up to $4,000... And there was a long pause, and Jerry gives me this thing in the ribs, and he says, "Bid." And I said, "What do you mean?" And he says, "Bid." And I said, "I can't afford this, Jerry." And he says, "I told you to bid." And I said, "Are you going to buy it?" And he says, "Yes!" And of course
once you bid it starts again, and this thing got higher and higher and higher and higher. And finally every time he would say, "Bid," and I said, "Jerry, you're out of your mind." And he said, "I think you should have it. Now that's an important piece." So we finally got it.

Q. For how much?

A. I won't tell you! So it was all through, and I said, "You know what you've done." He said, "What?" I said, "There's a 10% fee on top of this. And he said, "Oh, my G-d, why didn't you tell me that at the beginning?" I said, "You're going to quibble about 10% after what you've done?" Well, from that moment on, it's been... "Now I'm a collector. I'm really a collector." And everytime we talk about it he says, "The best piece of the collection is mine." He keeps that up and keeps it up. But I think it's marvelous. But he really is vitally interested in it now. He always says, "Shannon, get a good one. Don't buy that. Get a good one." And I say, "Look, you have to have both, you know. You can't go around with supreme examples of everything." And he says, "I wouldn't waste my money on that. Get a good one." And I say, "You buy the good ones. I'll get the ones that I want." We're having a lot of fun with it.

Q. Yes. And I must say, that in his interview, which you are perfectly free to read, when it's been transcribed, he gives you complete and total credit for it.

A. Really?

Q. No question about it. Absolutely. It's your collection.

It's the Silverman-Rodgers Collection, but it is your collection and it is your work.
A. Well, I'd say that up until recently... I mean, but now, he's as involved with it as I am.

Q. Well, that may be but...

A. He has one of those... Well, you know, you've been in business with him... He has one of those incredible retentive minds, you know. He can get the entire history in one reading. That sort of thing, and what have you, and retains it. Which I can't. I have to go back and check my facts. But he retains, which I think is extraordinary. And he's getting to be a damn good authority, on an awful lot of things. Really.

End Tape 1 Side 2
Q. Shannon, in your varied experiences in the market, you have worked for individually owned companies, for companies which have been acquired, and I would very much like to have you talk about some of the circumstances, some of the situations you have worked in, and how you feel they compared or contrasted.

A. Well, as I said before, it's really... We're talking about three different things. We're talking about working for somebody, working as your own boss, I mean, as an owner of a firm. And then working as a part of a great conglomerate, and they're three, literally three different lives. Because when you work...

Q. Okay... Excuse me... Could you talk about them in great detail, because I'd like to know the whole story.

A. Oh... Of course, when you start out, usually, before you go into your own business, you have lots of jobs where you're working for other people. It's a very peculiar thing. In business, in the garment business, everything winds up on the designer's shoulders. Now this sounds crazy, but it is true. If the season is bad, it's the designer's fault. If... You know, if the stores aren't doing well, it's the designer's fault. He's the last man on the totem pole, and everything sort of comes down to him, and the only thing is that the salesman... Well, "We didn't have the things that we should have had..." It isn't that at all. It's just that there's so many different reasons why a season can be bad. It can be the business conditions. It can be a million things. And the thing is that the garment business usually is the one that's hit the first. When there's the least bit of a recession, or something like that, because people are very
intelligent. That's the thing. They need food. They need the dentist and they need the doctor. So clothes can wait. And when times are affluent, our business is sensational. You have very understanding bosses, intelligent bosses who realize these things and go along with you and say, "Okay, let's try this, let's try..." And you also have some bosses who have no concept of the business whatsoever, they're just in it by accident. They made a lot of money at it as a contractor or a lot of money as a piece goods salesman; they think they're geniuses as far as the garment business, and they're going to have no concept of how to run a business, and we're at their mercy too. But it all comes under education. You end up getting the darndest education in the world, because you've been hit from every angle and finally... "I've been up that road so many times. Don't tell me. I already know it." That sort of thing. That's the one thing. Then, when you've reached the point where you decide you're going into business for yourself -- which I was very lucky to do because Mr. Silverman and I have worked together for so many years at such close harmony, that we decided the thing to do was to go into our own business. We were very fortunate. We hit with the first line, and that's what everybody dreams of...

Q. Could we just go back... What, in your eyes, is the ideal situation in a job, where you're working for somebody else. Ideal for a designer in terms of the setup of the design room?

A. Well, I think the ideal situation is a man -- and we have quite a few of them in our market -- who knows the business and knows designing and knows there's all sorts of ... Understands the designer and the designing room. He knows it doesn't operate like anything else. And
they are very compassionate about... "So, okay, take it easy. We'll cover somehow." Or something like, "Go back and try it again."

Q. What does your design staff consist of, and how do you work, starting with fabrics, starting with sketching, or whatever...

A. The basis of every collection is fabric, because no matter what you do, you have to have something to work with. And, of course, you're always looking for something that's the most beautiful. Or the most unusual. Something which is a variation on a very good theme, because that's what we're really looking for. Because there's that constant memory thing, you know. Last season, season before, we had such a great success with that, could we find something that's similar to it but isn't the same. So we can go on with the same success. And particularly as far as fabric is concerned. I happen to love prints. I love to work with prints. I have a reputation for having beautiful prints in the market. And I happen to love space prints, which are the hardest ones to find. And I used to really comb the market, both in Europe and in America, trying to find that type of print. Because whenever I did, I had a sure fire thing. I love working with them... I also like floral types, which is inconsistent... the small and the large. But, you know, you lean toward certain things. I love combination prints too. And these things are all very salable. And if the color is right, if the print is right... So you are constantly on the lookout, because... that's the basis of your designing.

Q. To the most fundamental of the fundamentals... Do you go out into the piecegoods market, or do you let it come to you...?
A. Oh, definitely. Actually, the best way is to go out into the market, because many of the salesmen that come to you select from their line... They say, "I think you'll like this." Well, I'm not interested in what he thinks I'm going to like. I'm interested in what he's got. And nine times out of ten, when you get to the actual place, you find things that you have never been shown, and that you really want. So that's... And, of course, there's a lot of fabric manufacturers that you work with very closely, like William Rose, you know, was always a great resource of mine and I worked extremely closely because he had a great resource in Europe and had new things coming in constantly. Beautiful things coming in constantly, and several other houses the same way. And it was easy to work with them, because they knew you and understood you and they knew what you were looking for. And they'd say, "Oh, Shannon, I have something that's just come in. Come over and take a look at it." And you valued their opinion so much, you'd literally drop what you were doing to go over and take a look at it. As I said, this was the beginning of all design. Of course, the most horrendous part of designing is that first meeting after you open the line and... Jerry was very famous for this story... We were having an opening, and as the crowd.... There had been applause and everything else, and if they stayed, to write, you knew you had a very good line. And as the applause died down, and everything else, Jerry would turn to me and say to me, "What are you doing now in the designing room?" I'd say, "Can't you wait until they get outa here? Before starting the next season?" But that happens to be our business. What's coming next? But actually, when you start a collection, you have that horrible meeting with all the sales people and you have to listen, because they really do know. And, after all, they're the ones...
Q. You say this is when you start the collection?

A. When you start the collection. And you sit there and you review the last line, with them. Now, these are the men that have been out on the road with the collection. These are the men who have sold in the showroom. These are the PR people who have worked with the press... The entire staff...

Q. And is this pretty much the pattern wherever you worked?

A. Well, not really. Actually... It was more or less... The great pattern of Jerry Silverman. But we did it at other houses. At Judy and Jill, Jack Horwitz's house. We did it at Junior League. And it's the house that doesn't do it that isn't important. Because your designer gets an awful lot of information from that meeting. Because, you say, "Well, look we did so well with such and such." And, "But we didn't have enough. If we had had three more of that type of style, we could have gone on from there, and so forth. We lost a lot there.... That was a waste of time. You shouldn't even have... Because we all tried very hard to sell it, and knew from the beginning that it wasn't going to move. And there was too much effort put into that, and so... Don't stick us with something like that again, please." And you learn very quickly that faddyclothes are the least sellers. That sort of thing. And in some peculiar, strange way, at this "recap" meeting, as we call it, the darn shirtwaist dress always turns up as the best seller of the line and you never can understand why. It's the same dress over and over and over again. But it's a confidence dress. This is what a woman buys when she doesn't know what else to get. And so we always have made a habit of having at least six good shirtwaist dresses in the line, and at least three or four hundred in stock all the time. Because it is the safety plug. It really is. And we pay a lot of attention to that dress too.
Because, you know, it pays for the light bill and a few other things.

But, as I was saying... That sales meeting is very important, because sometimes it gets very bitter too. They can really let you have it. Because, you know, "We did this and we did that, and you let us down because you told us, this was coming in 14 different colors, and all of a sudden we went to sell the darn thing, and there was only two. And why did you pick something that you only had two colors?" Well, because originally I was promised 14 colors and I ended up with two. So... You're always on the defensive as far as that's concerned. But you have to respect these men and these women, because they know their business, and they know what their customer wants and they know... And when they ask you listen very carefully, and you try to fill their needs, and you try to be original at the same time. You know, you have your own ideas of what you want to do, but you do realize that they do have problems, and you try to fill their needs. That's it.

I've discovered one thing. It happens with most young designers. They...

"Oh, he doesn't know what he's talkin' about. He doesn't know what he's talkin' about. Listen to him and you'll go crazy." That sort of thing. And... You find that most young designers get fired, because they didn't listen. And they beat around and beat around and beat around, from one house to the other, until one day they finally get the message. And, you know, a lot of our most prominent designers that we have today went from job to job to job to job and finally that day comes when they really clicked and it's because, I'm convinced, because I've been around so much in this business, I've got to start listening to what's good. Take Bill Blass for instance. He's one of the hardest working designers I think I've ever come
across, and he knows his business. He knows his customer, which is the most important thing. He knows these people personally. All over the country. Almost every state. He goes to their parties. He knows how they live. And his line is never trendy. You will never find oversized shoulder pads and that sort of thing. He does clothes for women who are wealthy; who know how to dress, and like to dress well. And want to spend the money. But you'll never find exaggerations on them from Bill. Another thing is, Bill covers his line clear across America. He goes to the stores. He goes into the dressing rooms. He works with the women. And there are only two or three other designers in the entire market who do this. And they are the successful ones. It's the ones who sit in their ivory towers and make these proclamations who have the usual lifetime, which is a good four years and three bad ones, and they're usually out of business in the seventh year. That's usually the cycle of the thing.

Q. Now, you've had your recap meetings and you've paid attention... Now what do you do?

A. Well, then the thing is you go to work. And you work very hard.

Q. First in the fabric market?

A. In the fabric market. And, of course, you've been working in the fabric market all year around. You never drop that, because it's always this constant... "Something's coming in; take a look." The next thing is you... It's just like building a bridge. You build your chart. In our particular firm, like Jerry Silverman, we were very successful with jacket suits. We always had 15-20 on the line. At least 15-20....

Q. So when you say the "chart," you mean that you have a chart that you have in that category...
A. We categorize everything. So many dressy dresses. So many cocktail type dresses. So many evening clothes. So many covered evening dinner dresses. Now you chart the thing out. Now, I was very fortunate. I have two large rooms. I have 14 girls in one room and 7 in another. And five tailors, between the two rooms. That's a big designing staff. I had two assistants and, unfortunately, I did all the sketching myself, which was ridiculous. I should have had a sketcher. But I like to sketch. I like to draw. And I can get it through quicker myself, just going boom, boom, boom, like that. But it would have saved me a lot of work if I hadn't done that. But, as I said, I enjoy it. Most designers do have a sketcher or two. Now, these are people with certain...

Q. In addition to at least one assistant and...

A. Oh, a sketcher is completely different. A sketcher... A sketcher takes... I say, "I want a dress that looks like so and so and so and so --- v-neck, and so forth," and he takes your idea and makes it, makes a creation out of it on paper and you can say "No..."...

Q. And to that paper you put a swatch of the fabric you're going to use...?

A. That's it...

Q. And then you put it up on your chart...

A. On the chart. Yeah. It's very small sketches, for the charts. And regular finished sketches for the machines. Typical, eight by eleven. That sort of thing. But the girl usually has, up on her T-bar, in front of her while she's working... And what we try to do is to have one dress in the machine, another dress in her box, which, when this dress is taken
out of the machine and is being fitted on a model, or the designer is looking at a figure and says, "I don't like the way that drapes," she isn't sitting there not doing anything. She has a second dress that she works on. And the safe thing is to have a third dress in a roll in the box. So if there is some sort of a mishap--like the thread didn't come in for this, or the collar... we can't find the binding or whatever... she can go on. So we have three dresses in action all the time.

Q. And one of your assistants always prepares a garment for the sample...?

A. Yes... With all his findings. And, of course, there's always crises of every kind. You send some embroidery out and it was supposed to be back on Wednesday and it comes back three weeks later because the gal who was doing it fell over in a faint and took the embroidery down the sewer with her, and... You get the most incredible excuses you've ever heard in your life. So sometimes you can have four or five dresses just hanging, just waiting for something that isn't happening. So you have to have a backup. And this is also the way you get production.

Q. At what point did you begin to do fittings on models? Did you use a house model, or a duplicate model?

A. Actually, my first big job after the war was with Martini, and they had... They were an enormous house, you know, and they had two sets of models. Now, it was completely different in those days, you know. There were house models for every house, and Martini had eight house models, and these were all showgirls. I mean, girls who usually worked at night at one of the nightclubs, on the stage, or something like that. And they got
additional income. And they sat in this model's room from like 9:00 in the morning to 4-5:00 in the afternoon, and they showed all day long. And they were enormous lines. Now next, in our models' room, the other side of the models' room, we had a second firm, called Diminutives, and we had five... models in Diminutives. So all together, we had like 13 models, and they were there all the... Of course, the whole picture changed as time went on, and we started using rental models. Because these girls that we had steady worked all week for $75....

Q. So the era of the house model probably came to a close somewhere in the fifties I would say...

A. Yes. Then all of a sudden these girls started getting $150, $250 a week, and then they started doing all the magazines (illustrations were dropped, and we started doing photography and all) and the top girls were getting enormous salaries. Well, then it became the vogue... At that particular time, when you had an opening, you used the magazine, or the top models in the market. And this grew up gradually to the point where today, they're getting $1,000, which is incredible. We used to have like 20 girls for one month for $1,000. But that's the way times...

So the house model had really gone by the boards...

Q. Well, perhaps I was using the term incorrectly. When you finished... Or when a sample hand finished a dress, at what point did you begin to fit the dresses to models to get ready for your show?

A. Well, you see, we always had two... At least two models and sometimes three; mostly two models... who came in during the day. And we had fittings on them. And this was from the very beginning... We could do just the bodice of the dress and fit it.. Do the bodice and the skirt
separately, and then fit them on the girl. That sort of thing. We fitted everyday, as far as that's concerned. And some people held their fittings... I know one of the designers I know had a fitting day, where they fitted all day long. I couldn't go for that. I couldn't wait for a dress, sitting there for five or six days, waiting for fitting day. Because the work backs up so that way, and we just... What's so ridiculous about it. We spend hours, a tuck here and a nip here, and getting the skirt to hang just right. Comes opening day, and we hire all these models from all the agencies, who have no relation to what you've been fitting, and they put the clothes on and hope it all comes out all right anyway in the end. And you know... What did I waste all that time for? I should have just fit it on a Size 6 figure and let it go at that. But somehow or other the industry has never accepted that. And a couple of houses do do it, but they're looked down on. That sort of thing. Strange... spend all that time fitting on a girl, and then another girl wears the clothes. But it happens all the time.

Q. I guess the major... a major, use of the models is at the time you correct duplicates.

A. Well, you know, this has been a running battle with me and something I've had for years and years and... with everybody in the market. It's been dinner conversation and cocktail conversation as long as I can remember. I've never been able to understand why I had to build a dress on a girl with a 14 shoulder, with a 4-6 waistline, and with a maybe 6-9 hipline, and oversize. I mean, almost 5 ft. 10 (in.), 5'11", almost, 6 ft some of them.

Q. That's for the showroom?
A. That's for the... We showed on them in the showroom and for the show. We built the line on them. We built the line on these girls. When the thing is over with. When the opening is... When you know what your running numbers are going to be; what your great numbers are, and what your fords are going to be, that sort of thing, that dress has to be taken to a production department and done all over again. From scratch. And they do it on a size 8 figure, with an 8 waistline, and an 8 hip and an 8 shoulder. And they either grade down or grade up from that master pattern. I've never been able to understand why they couldn't use a Size 8 to begin with, and eliminate that one whole process. Because there's no point to it. None whatsoever. They say, "Well, the buyers don't like to look at a Size 8. They like to look at models. But I say, "That's ridiculous." They sell them to Size 8s, they sell them to Size 10s. "But it pleases their eye." Well, they're also business women and business men... They're holding up the works at least two or three weeks by doing it that way. But I've never been able to get over that hump. You do it on models, and you redo the entire line. And that's where Shelly comes in, our production man. He takes the model's dress, takes it into the production department, and re-creates the same dress.' So it's double work that isn't necessary. But you're never going to change it, because the... As a matter of fact, the models now are getting taller and broader... and more slender. And now they have no butts whatsoever. And... Why do they have to look at a dress like that, and then come back to the normal woman? But... it's still going that way, and my cry in the wilderness has never been heard. But someday, somebody will do it, and then everybody will do it. Because I assure you, that's what the Japanese will do.
Q. Well, what about the moderate priced market? Do they not skip that preliminary step?

A. No, they fall... I've been in the moderate price market and it's a snob thing. It's really a snob appeal. I don't know, I'm sure there's houses at 1385 Broadway and that sort of thing that eliminate the thing... As a matter of fact, what's the big house in Boston? That does very simple clothes? They do everything on a figure. But that's a huge... Almost like a...

Q. Baron-Peters. They make large sizes...?

A. Well, they make everything. But they.... It's almost like a mail order house... The sizes come through and you buy so many dozen and what have you? But it will eventually come to our market, because it's now gotten to the point where it's extraordinary, that people can make a $6,000 - $7,000 dress, and we can show it seriously. Because it's not only vulgar.. I think it's really bad taste. Not only bad taste, I think it's asking for trouble. Because it's really dancing while Rome burns. Because I think people are going to have to start thinking the other way...

Q. You're talking about how does that sell clothes? Whose wholesale cost is $6,000...?

A. It's preposterous. It really is. I have a wonderful story... The wife of the President of General Motors went to a show the other day, liked a dress, heard it was $6,000, and she said, "G-d, anything that costs $6,000 should have a motor in it." And that's just about it.

Getting back to designing... Of course, the thing is, unfortunately, you always wait till the very last minute to do your glamor

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clothes. And, of course, they're the fun part of the line, and they go the easiest, because you know what you want and they roll out and, unfortunately, you don't give them the time that you do the good staples, and that sort of thing. And I'd like to be able to do a whole line of nothing but fun clothes just once in my life, and see what it was like. But you do... The greatest training in the world is to be with a large house, like Jerry Silverman, and produce a general line and do it season after season. This is an enormous challenge. An enormous challenge. And you really have to work very hard, and there's a wonderful sense of satisfaction, when you walk into that stock room and you see literally thousands of dresses being packed by dozens of packers, that are going here and they're going there, and I go, "Gee, my clothes are all over America." That's so nice.

Q. Shannon, one other thing... When you design a collection, is it sometimes true that while you're designing a collection for the following season you are still working on last minute correction of clothes of the previous season?

A. Yes.

Q. So how do these things dovetail? How do you make them...?

A. The thing is that... After an opening... We have an old famous saying, you know. I think I mentioned it before... You can always tell whether you've got a good line or a bad line because when... After the opening they all stay and have a drink, and kiss you on both cheeks and hang around, and have a very good... And make a writing date right away. "I'm going to be in tomorrow afternoon," or this evening, or something like that. Then you know you have a very good line. But when they kiss you on
both cheeks and go out the door, "Shannon, it was just lovely," you know you're in trouble. So... what you usually do is you have a very good head of sales, like we did, Bob Kaufman, to say to him, "What was it Bob?" And he'll say, "We're too heavy on this," and "they didn't like that funny mustard color. And I say, "But they can get it in blue and green," and he says, "Yes, but they don't see it that way. They see the mustard color." And he'll say, "You were very weak on a couple of jacket suits." Something like that. So, fortunately, most buyers have so many collections to look at, that in our market, they don't come back to write until a week or two weeks later. And in that case, you have a breathing spell where you can really fill your holes fast, and you work day and night to fill those holes and make your corrections. In the meantime you're still working on another line but you still have a leeway. The pressure hasn't hit you yet, really. And, of course, it's completely different now. In the old days, when we had great gaps between the lines...

Q. When you say "old days,"

A. I'm talking about the late forties, the fifties, and going into the early sixties, we had huge gaps between the lines... two weeks, three weeks, maybe six weeks, between the fall collection and the spring collection...

Q. And there were four collections a year?

A. Four collections a year. Now it's completely different.

You design all year long. You never stop now. Because you're constantly feeding that mill... because the reorder business has become a thing of the past. In the old days, people used to buy a dress from you, fall madly in love with it, get it in their store, and have maybe 25 pieces of one style.
They'd sell 12 in one day -- and they'd reorder 250, because they knew they had something. And then there'd be another reorder on top of that and another reorder... And you could run a dress all through the season. So they would end up using over a thousand dresses of one style in one store which was just par for the course in those days. But now you rarely get a reorder. When it comes in, they want something new. "I'm not going to buy the same... Show me something new." And so you're providing something new for them all the time. And the reorder business, people are afraid of it these days, because deliveries are now so bad. "When am I going to get it? I'm going to have to wait eight weeks for that." By that time it's all over with. In the old days, when they had fabric, we could fill a reorder within 6 to 12 days. But those days are also over too, because most of our fabrics now come from, as they say, "over there."

Q. Well, you'll be interested to know that "those days" are over even at quite different price ranges. Much lower price ranges, reorders are not gotten very lightly.

A. That's what we used to look for all the time, the reorder numbers. They were called Fords... as you remember. Everybody loved a Ford... our opening dress, style 101.

Q. Now that's what Jerry Silverman said... Now we're talking about when you are participating in the business, you are an owner, and the difference there between that and working for other people...

A. The difference is that Jerry had worked with me at other houses... another house... And I had been his assistant, more or less, at that other house. He knew what my talent was, what I could produce, and he was a
wonderful sounding board for me, because he would say, "Shannon, that dress is great, BUT..." He'd give me something... He knew what could come out of that room... So when we went into our business there was nothing new about it, because I had been working so long for him at the other house. So...

And, of course, the great thing was that he had complete confidence in me. And he was a marvelous boss for another reason. I'd say, "Jerry, what about this?" And he'd say, "I don't know anything about designing. Don't ask me. I'm a salesman. You design it and if it's bad it's your fault." And of course he did know a lot about designing. He knew when it was a good one and when it was a bad one. But he took that attitude. You're on your own, kid, make it good. It was a wonderful help, it really was, because it kept you on your toes constantly. He could tell you very quickly... It was marvelous because when we started our own business, it was Bob Kaufman, Jerry and myself. We were the only ones who previewed the line, and Bob Kaufman was the head of sales. And Shelley... who was... Shelley was in on it too. And we would sit there and we would look at the line, and we edited it ourselves. As time goes on, and you get hot shot sales people -- men and women, that sort of thing -- they were offended. They weren't included in the previews. And we used to say, "Here's the line. Now sell it." And they felt they were being completely ostracized and left out, and so forth, that they had a lot to give. So we started expanding and expanding... First with a few and then all of a sudden the piece goods man was into it, and a couple of other people and so forth. And finally the showroom was full of people, at a preview. Literally full of people. And I think we lost a lot of our momentum that way. We really did, because there were too many opinions.
Too many opinions about this, and too opinions about that. It's like running a government. If you've got one guy doing it it's a heck of a lot better than when you've got 20 people doing it. But we managed because we had a very firm head, which was Jerry. We managed to keep it very... He was marvelous, because he was not only a diplomat, but he also knew how to run that ship and keep it on an even keel. And he said yes to everybody, but we did pretty much what we wanted to.

Q. When did you begin to open other divisions? When you were still privately owned, or after you had sold?

A. When we were still privately owned, yes. And...

Q. What were the divisions?

A. Well... We did a less expensive division, which did extremely well for quite a while.

Q. Which one was that?

A. That was Jeremy. Yes. Extremely well. For quite a while. It was priced one division below our... the Jerry Silverman price... and which retailed for $25 - $50 less than the Jerry Silverman clothes.

Q. Did you design those too?

A. No, I had nothing to do with the Jeremy line. That was a separate designer.

Q. Now, in the case of a separate designer, like that, here you are... You're a part owner of the total business. And now there are two divisions, one of which is under you entirely. What happens when things... How did you work things out when, let's say, you both shopped the fabric market and by accident ended up liking a particular...
A. Well, it didn't happen very often because most salesmen would say, "Mr. Rodgers has already selected that." And naturally I got preference. And it would work both ways. A lot of times I would see something and they'd say, "Oh, terribly sorry, but your Jeremy designer has that." And I'd say, "Okay..." But I learned very early in this game, particularly when we had the second designer and another division, to stay away from that designer. Because one designer cannot talk to another, as much as people seem to think they can. It's not possible. For one thing it's for your own good and your own safety, because, so help me, if you said, "Well, do this and do that on your line," and it doesn't go well, and the other division says, "Well, Mr. Rodgers told me to say that," or do that... So if you stay away from them you can't be blamed for that. So I let them all go on their own hook. And we did extremely well until the escalation of prices started. Then their fabric started to cost almost as much as our fabric did. Their labor began to cost... And it got to a point where Jeremy and Jerry Silverman... There was almost no differentiation in the price. And one was more or less competing with the other. And that's when we decided to kill it... But I started something on my own hook, which I did design for. Another old idea of mine that I wanted to go through with. Because I had been out on the road so much, and had been to so many stores, and after every fashion show...

Q. With Silverman?

A. With Silverman, yes. And all over the country, dozens and dozens of times. And after every show, always, there would be a group of ladies who would attack me. You know... And they'd say, "Look, I'm a size 14, (or a size 16 or an 18) and, I don't want to go to the women's department
to buy clothes. I want to wear these clothes in my size." And we'd say, "Well, I can't do anything about that, because your buyer will not buy 14s, 16s, and 18s. They'll buy 10s, 8s, 10s, 12s.... They'll buy a few 14s, or something like that." "Every department I go to, they have one dress or two dresses in 14, and nothing in 16." And I'd say, "That's not the designer's fault or the manufacturer's. That's your buyer's fault." And this went on for a long, long time. Because buyers bought what was safe. And I always said there was a huge group of women out there in that world who wore 14s, 16s and 18s who wanted to look well, and they resent going to a woman's department, because they don't feel, you know, that category at all. So we did a collection -- and it was at my instigation; I did the whole doggone thing myself -- and we did a whole... And it was an absolute fiasco.

Q. Really!

A. Yeah. Because A, number one, we sent out brochures and told them exactly what we were trying to do... Stylish clothes from 14 to 18, with a few cut in 20s... Well, every woman's buyer in the country came in to see them. Because they were going to buy the 20s... And they'd say, "But there aren't 'women's clothes.'" "They're not supposed to be 'women's' clothes." "But this is a 'women's line." "It is not a 'women's' line." And then the other buyers, from the other departments, said, "I don't have any money to buy 16s and 18s. I have just enough money to buy 10s, 12s and a few 14s." So... I got no response... So that great huge group of ladies still have never been designed for. Someone's going to make a fortune when they do it. And they can get the message across to the public that they do have stylish clothes in 14s, 16s and 18s. And, of course, you go to any store, and the racks are always empty.
Q. So the collection lasted how long, then?

A. Not very long. It lasted like three seasons, four... The strange part about that collections, though... At Bergdorf Goodman -- which has always been one of our favorite spots -- That collection became the number five seller. At Bergdorf Goodman. Because they got the message up there. But we couldn't sustain it. It was too expensive. It was too costly. That sort of thing, and what have you. And we had to do away with it.

Q. You did have still another division at one point. Designed by Patti Capalli.

A. That was a sportswear division. Yes. That's when everybody was going into sportswear. And we just acted like every other house. We decided we... But Patti Capalli... There wasn't a Jerry Silverman customer that came in to look at that line. And we thought we had... I don't know how to judge Patti's clothes because I never understood them. They were extreme, and they were extravagant, and they were so costly. You know, I've been trained completely the other way. But she was a very costly designer. She bought a lot of fabrics in Italy and France. And, of course, with my down to earth training, I guess you would call it, I would buy a sample cut... Ten yards was extravagant as far as I was concerned; you should only get six. But I'd buy ten just to cover myself with a duplicate or something like that. And this young lady would buy six pieces of six different colors. So we'd end up with... What's six times... 36... just of one pattern. In six different colors. And then she'd say, "It's
too heavy; I'm not going to use it." But I'd say, "You've got all this fabric here. What are you going to do with it?" "I don't know." So we had racks and racks of fabric. Which I didn't understand. I thought a designer should have more discipline than that. And certainly a little more background and education. Because a manufacturer can't stand that cost. And this is what you learn when you become an owner. You've learned to look at everything then. You're no longer a designer. You're aware of...

Q. You're a designer within the context of....

A. Yes, but you suddenly are very aware of publicity and what it costs. Ads in newspapers, what it costs. This, that... and you're aware of everything that's going on. And you don't live in your ivory tower...

Q. Including the mark downs....

A. Mark downs... and the returns. You watch the return boxes coming back in. "Why is that being returned? It's one of the best numbers in the line?" They'd say, "There's a pinhole in the neck." And they just don't accept it, because they're looking for an excuse. And suddenly you're a business man whether you want to be one or not. And designing becomes another part of you. It's interesting. You learn an awful lot. About stores. You learn an awful lot about personnel. People... You learn how many talented ones there are and how many untalented ones there are. But it's interesting.

Q. All right. Now let's talk about what happens when you work for a public company... That is to say, not your own company which has gone public -- because I don't think you've worked for that kind of thing...

A. No... We went with Warnaco.

Q. You were bought by Warnaco?
A. No. No, we merged...


A. We were bought, but it's always called "merged."

Q. So Jerry Silverman, Inc. never went on the stock market, because that would have been a different thing. Stockholders...?

A. It was always Warnaco. And now we go into a completely different life. Because... It's marvelous when you're successful and you're a real hot shot house, like Jerry Silverman is...

Q. And was.

A. Was. Because you're wooed, you really are wooed, by these large corporations. And we had a dozen of them... General Mills, and this one and that one... We had some incredible propositions. And, of course, we... Everybody loves to be wooed. And we were wined and dined and vacationed and that sort of thing. And, of course, there's nothing I like better as far as that's concerned. And they would do this for us, and they would do this... And, of course, during the engagement period, they promise you everything under the sun and the stars. And we'd say, "Well, look, we're a completely different house than any other house in America, because we're flamboyant. We spend an awful lot of money on publicity. We do things in a very lavish and extravagant way because we feel it's good for our business. It brings business in. And these are the things you have to understand. "Oh, we do. We know a lot about your background. We've looked into this and we know what you do." And everything is fine until you sign those papers. And then
after you sign those papers there's a honeymoon period that lasts maybe two months. And you can do no wrong, and you get wined and dined all over again because you're now a member of the clan, more or less. And suddenly dozens of people start arriving. Little men. I walked into my sketch room one day, and I said... There were six men sitting all over, in their shirt sleeves, with masses of books. And I went to Jerry and I said, "What's going on?" And he says, "Those are auditors." And I said, "Auditors? Already? We've only been with them three months!" Or something like that... Well, that's the beginning. And it's just a mass of every kind of auditing, bookkeeping, that sort of thing, that goes on and on. And they're slightly disapproving. They look at you like you're a man from..." Because these people have no concept of our industry. None whatsoever. They don't understand sales. They don't understand a darn thing. All they understand is those columns of figures and the bottom line and the top line. That sort of thing. And I remember one incident that we had... This man came to me and he said, "I don't understand something, Mr. Rodgers. Will you explain it to me?" And I said, "What?" And he said, "In Chicago, at such and such a store, you had black dresses; last season. And they ran ads, and you did X amount..." And I said, "Yes." And he said, "They have none this season. Why? Didn't you design them?" I said, "No." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because black dresses are out of fashion. I couldn't give them away in the showroom. They just dropped dead overnight. Period." And it's a concept that they couldn't get through their head. And their whole attitude was, "Well, why didn't you design black dresses? Because I'm sure if you had, they would have sold." And I said, "Look, we tried it. It didn't
work. Buyers are just not buying the little black dress. It just went out the window. And it happens overnight. And that's what happens with fashion." They can't understand that. They can't get it through their head. And they can't understand it when one day you have a whole line of slim skirts and the next day they're out of fashion, and you've got to have full skirts. And they say, "Well, women are not going to throw all those slim skirts away!" And I say, "Oh, yes they are." So, it's a concept that business men can't get through their head. Particularly when they're involved in some other kind of business. Fashion is a great mystery to them. The proof of the pudding is, nobody's done well that's acquired a fashion business. Nobody.

Q. That's assuming that General Mills and David Crystal together don't include a fashion business.

A. No. I wouldn't call David Crystal a fashion business. They fill a very important segment, in sportswear and men's shirts and women's shirts, but I wouldn't call it a fashion business at all. And, of course, their children's business is a huge thing; those are basic, classic clothes, and that sort of thing. It has nothing to do with where you have a line you have to change every season. Which is fashion. That's what it is. Now where are we at?

Q. Well, we're just now coming to the end of this tape. I would still like to hear a little bit more about the experience with Warnaco. And I know this is going to go off in just a second, but could you talk a little more about... Apart from the instant introduction to the six men who came to see you.... What other kinds of things were you confronted with in the
next several years, or were you personally not really involved, because you were the designer?

A. Well, I was involved to an extent yes, because I went through it every day, as far as that was concerned. And you personally, in a strange sort of way, are very affected by it, because...

Q. When you say "you personally," you mean you the designer...?

A. As the designer of the business, and ex-owner of the business... Because you've lost an awful lot of your speed. Because suddenly, you say "Well, let's do so and so and so and so and so... and..."

End Tape 2 Side 1
A. But there's a strange atmosphere that comes in, and you're not free anymore. You've got this feeling that someone's looking over your shoulder all the time, when you're in a large cor... And they are. Another thing... You become exposed to an awful lot of nepotism. There's an awful lot of people who are related and, Mr. So and So, and he's with such and such a division, and so forth. Now, his wife and... You suddenly get to the point where you... like, I guess, being in politics, because you're very careful of what you say, because you don't know who you're talking to and you don't know what's going to be repeated. And, so help me, everything's repeated. Two or three times. What you say. From one division to another. Something like that. And you lose something that's been very precious to you. A wonderful flamboyance, I guess, where you can say what you damn please.

Q. And the spontaneity...

A. Spontaneity... I hate to say it, but it gets a little dull. It really does. Because you're constantly being checked. On your figures for this and your figures for that. And, of course, if you've been successful in business, and you haven't even thought about figures, all these years, and suddenly this month and that month...

Q. And the five year plan...

A. And the five... What's your project... What's your projection, rather, for the next season? And it becomes... There are things that you're not interested in and don't want to be interested in, and suddenly they become a vital part of your life... No, anyway... It's not a happy time. And they're always introducing new methods and trying something out,
and you sort of, you're querulous, and you say, "Why?" You know. "Well, we think this should be this, and that should be that way," and you know there's a group of men sitting somewhere, either in New York or Bridgeport, Connecticut, who come up with these dandy ideas, that have no relation to business.

Q. When you finally came to the point where this was going to come to an end, I assume that you were delighted with the whole thing, and anxious to get on with the rest of your life, which is where we are now... about to talk about.

A. Well, I have a very amusing story to tell you. We were on a... We signed contracts. And I think two and a half years before I left the firm, which is a year and a half ago, the time came up, and ... I said, "I'm not going to sign this time." They said, "Why?" And I said, "For the simple reason that I may in six months time decide that I'm leaving next week. Or maybe a year from now. And I just want to have the freedom.... I don't want my name on the contract that I would have to fill out.... The time that I would have to fill out." So they said, "If you do that, you can no longer be a Vice President of Jerry Silverman." And I said, "That's no big deal, as far as I'm concerned." So I'm Vice President. What have you? So they said, "You're going to lose that position right away." And I said, "Well..." "And then you won't have the benefits ... The Warnaco benefits." I said, "That's all right too. I have my own benefits." "I just want to have the freedom," and it happened. I was drummed out of the corps... There is usually a very large Christmas party, at one of the executive's homes in Connecticut. And I was there, and at one point I said
to Jerry, "I get a very funny feeling here tonight." And he says, "What?"
And I said, "They're just a little unfriendly." And he says, "Oh, you're
talking through your hat, Shannon." And I said, "It's ... I can feel the
difference in the attitude." One of the gentlemen, I had known during our
association, I turned to him and I said, "What's going on? Am I being drummed
out of the corps?" I said it to him as a joke, and he said, "Well, after all,
Shannon, you're no longer a member of the team." So, that put me in my place.
I was no longer a member of the team. So... That took care of that. But, it's
so ridiculous. You sit there and you listen to these conferences, and all I
could think of was when I was a boy, in Newcomerstown, Ohio, up in the hillside
behind Canal Street there was a rock formation. There was a cave. And there
were all sorts of games that we played there, in those caves. And we formed
this... You know, Robin Hood, and that kind of thing. Bandits and cowboys
and this and that... And then there'd be the bickering about whose side you
were going to be on. What part you were going to have. And your cousin...
And you can't do that, because you did that yesterday and I'm going to do
it today... I used to sit and listen to some of these guys, and think, "It
sounds like us as kids on the hillside."

Q. That puts it back into its proper perspective.

A. Sure. It really does. Because, here's grown men acting like
absolute spoiled brats. It's interesting, and I'm glad I went through it.
But I'm happier now. Much happier now.

Q. Okay... In a couple of seconds, a couple of minutes, let's go
on to what we were talking about at the end of the first meeting. Which was
really the story of how you made your acquisitions. Now... And how you had
your first show at F.I.T.'s opening of the Shirley Goodman Resource Center. And how Jerry has become involved, using his kitty on some of the things that you have acquired. So now let's talk about Kent State and what led up to it, and so forth.

A. Well, Kent State was a pure accident. I didn't know the school at all. As a matter of fact, I'd never even been there. And four years ago... If I remember correctly... Four years ago, I won this award they call the Golden Roses Award in Ohio, for a man that's done the most for a community, which was Newcomerstown. And they had a dinner and a cocktail party and so forth, and they presented things. And as part of the festivities, they asked if we would give a Jerry Silverman show.

Q. This is when you were given that award?

A. The first award.

Q. In 1976?

A. Yeah. The first award, which was the Golden Rose. This year was the Governor's award, in Columbus, Ohio, which is a different thing entirely. But the Golden Rose thing... This was done by Rachel Rettinger who was the creator of "Trumpet in the Land," which is a "Son Et Lumiere" thing which has been running in Ohio now for 12 years, very successfully, and she created it herself; built the amphitheatre, along with State help. And they were going to have the show in the amphitheatre, and I said, "Ooh, no. No fashion shows outdoors," Because I'd been through that. I've been through windstorms, where the models have been blown off the runway. And I've been through tornados, and everything else. This doesn't work. Because we usually don't have a place to dress, in those places. And it's quite true.
They have all kinds of things, but never a place to dress, or for the girls to make up or anything. So they said okay, we'd go to the country club instead. So we went to the country club, and it was a beautiful spot, but it only held about 300 people. So they decided that was never going to do... I came back to New York, and they called me from Ohio, and said "What about Kent State University." And I said, "Well, what about it?" And they said, "Well, they have a beautiful auditorium that seats 1,100 people, with a stage and..." And I said, "That sounds ideal." They said, "You'll love it." So, this Chestnut Society, which is an alumni association of Kent State, also mixed in with this whole organization, became the sponsor for the show. And we decided to do the Jerry Silverman show, for the first half of the show, and then we'd do some of the costumes from the collection as the second half. Well, we went out there and put on a razzle dazzle show, if I say so myself. And it was an enormous success, and everybody was so enthusiastic and complimentary and everything. They ended up by, in a final speech, by hoping we'd come back and repeat next year. So, the following year, we did. And the second year we were there we did a retrospective show of all the things that I've designed through the years, from Hollywood and everything else. And it also was a lot of fun.

Q. You had kept quite a few...?

A. I had kept quite a few things, yes. And then we did the Jerry Silverman shows as the other half of the show, and it too was a great success. And it was after that show, the next day, we were at the President's house -- we were his guests as a matter of fact -- and he said, "I understand you're having a little trouble getting your museum started in Newcomerstown," which was my original idea...
Q. Oh?

A. My collection was going to go in my home town, which is Newcomerstown, Ohio. And we were having a little difficulty with the local people about it...

Q. They didn't want it?

A. They wanted it, but they wanted to run it themselves. Actually, we were having trouble with one lady. The President of the Historical Society. And she decided it was going to be a marvelous thing for her, and... Let's not get into that. Because it was a period of the story that...

Q. Yes. But it is interesting that you had already planned to take your collection...

A. I had planned to take the collection to my home town.

Q. Right.

A. And I purchased a building there and restored it. But, as I say, it just didn't work out. And Dr. Brage Golding said, "I understand you're having a little difficulty," and I said, "How?" And he said, "Oh, the grapevine. It got around. Would you be interested in bringing your collection to Kent State? And building a curriculum around it?" And this was, of course, like the clouds opening and a voice coming from heaven. Because it's exactly what... It's a much larger concept than I had. Because I had only conceived of a museum. But to have a school and a museum, was really the ideal thing, as far as that was concerned. But, the third show we gave -- two years ago -- was given on that basis. That the whole thing was coming to Kent State. Well, of course, then the momentum gathered. The entire town became involved and everybody got involved with the idea. And the next thing was, where were they going to place it, in the school, in the university itself?
And I, very facetiously, and it was in Dr. Golding's office, which used to be the library. And they made it into executive offices because they now have this skyscraper tower, which is the library. Brand new. Beautiful building. I think the tallest one in that section of Ohio. And, of course, the old library was built in 1910, and looks a la Metropolitan Museum, you know. Thirty foot ceilings and wooden paneling and marble pillars and marble staircases and... We were talking about where... And I said, "Dr. Golding, I think this building would be marvelous." And he says, "What do you mean?" And then he says, "How dare you?" And it was a joke. Really. The whole thing was a joke. Well, believe it or not, about a month later, I got a phone call from Golding, and he says, "You know, we were discussing this. And with the adjacent building, the computer center, which is being completed next to the tower, the executive offices really should be there because it's the center of the campus, and we're way off to one side. And the idea of having the school, and the museum, and the library, which is Rockwell Hall and the school behind it, is really a very good idea. So your joke turned out to be a reality." So that's what happened. So now we're being housed in a magnificent building. Really a magnificent building. And the school is in one of the best buildings on the campus. So... We're attached to the library. So it's just been fortunate, all the way around. Couldn't be better. Then we've had enormous support from everybody. All the foundations. One of the people... people that you don't know or never heard of, sending a $5,000 check or $10,000 check saying "We think the idea is so great," and so forth. And this has been happening all over. The Hoover Foundation, and the Gunn Foundation and the Cleveland Foundation. And then, of course, the great thing
was the State of Ohio appropriated and the Governor signed a bill for $5 million to match our grant. Which, you know, is... Now it's become a $26 million project.

Q. Good heavens!

A. And it's really going to be one of the most important things in America, as far as fashion is concerned. And design. And, of course, we're wild with enthusiasm now. And every day we hear more good news and more good news.

Q. How much of a faculty have they had in the past?

A. In fashion? Well, they've had a fashion illustrating class in the art department. They've had... In Home Ec. they've had dressmaking and so forth. All homemaking. They're taking all of those out of those departments and putting them into the new school. The new school is going to be built exactly on the F.I.T. premise in New York City. You know, everything from merchandising, retailing, photography... Anything connected with the industry. And the thing that is so marvelous about it is the incredible support that we've gotten from parents. Because, it's the most popular course in America now, particularly as far as this small business of retailing is concerned. Everybody wants to be in one phase or another of clothing of some kind. The kids love it... Like... But New York is so limited... Plus the fact, they have no place to house people when they come here. And the people that are housed here are ganging up six and eight in a room because the rents are so horrific. Out here you have a 2,200 acre campus. Some of the most modern buildings you've ever seen. Their own airport, their own aviation classes, and that sort of thing. Everything under
the sun. A fantastic medical program. A fantastic opportunity for students.

Q. What about this whole collection that you've got here? All
of the sculptures and the porcelains and so forth. How do you see all that
being set up?

A. Well, actually, our inspiration is that the City of New York
museum, up here at 105th Street and 5th Avenue... Have you seen the model
rooms up there?

Q. Probably not recently...

A. Well, you know, they have Victorian rooms. They have Directoire
rooms. They have 18th century rooms. They have early... They have 1640....
Like Mayflower rooms. And they've used their costumes beautifully. Because
each room is populated by children, men, women -- that sort of thing. In
the costume of the period. They have a beautiful collection there, incidentally,
in New York..

Q. That's JoAnn Olian?

A. JoAnn Olian. She's doing a Worth exhibition in a couple of
months. Actually in October, and I've seen the clothes and they're
spectacular. They really are... She knows a lot about costumes... As
an administrator I don't know.

Q. So what you're talking about is doing rooms that will have the
background for the costumes?

A. ... For the costumes. And another thing.... Of course, we
have an ulterior motive too, because in that section of Ohio -- We're talking
about Akron, Canton -- Remember, that's all rubber country and steel and
roller bearing and Hoover vacuum -- You have many extremely wealthy industries
there, and people who are... They're not ostentatious by any means, but they're what you call in Ohio, "well fixed..." And they have beautiful, beautiful items there. Lovely homes. Particularly... Of course, we're very greedy. We're hoping that what we are donating to the museum will just prime the pump and get other things started rolling, because we have enough area to do a great many things, as far as that's concerned. And the Cleveland Museum of Art is one of the best institutions in the world. And one of the great... But here again, it's a small museum. They're absolutely jam packed. And to acquire anything, they have to dispose of something because they have no place to put things. I mean, the Windsor-French days are over, where they can do $10-15 million wings, and that's not happening anymore. And it shouldn't happen anymore, because it's ideal the way it is, and otherwise it gets into the Metropolitan Museum area, where it's so vast, and there's so much, there's no way of really keeping track of anything. And then you can't really enjoy that museum because it means... You can do one segment at a time, and you really need a week to ten days to do the Metropolitan. And who has a week to ten days to do a museum?

Q. Now... But your idea with the Kent State Museum is that, essentially, it is really for the costumes. And the rest of it is to be used as background?

A. Right. But... It could vary too, let's face it. Because I'm the costume guy... Except the things are coming out of closets, and people are calling and saying, "I have this and I have that." Some of them very good. That sort of thing. As a matter of fact, one lady in Elyria, Ohio...

Q. How do you spell Elyria?
A. Elyria. Oh, you've got me. E-l-y-r-i-a... Sent a box of 1920 things here... Absolutely spectacular.

Q. But they are still clothes...

A. They're clothes... And a box of incredible costume jewelry of the period. 1920s. Which are really very good. Because they would be marvelous in anybody's line right now, in New York City. It's astonishing how one thing has pulled another, and one thing has gone into... And it's growing and growing... every day. And as I say, every day we have good news. You know, somebody got interested in this and... Because it's the first up thing, and people are so tired of being all down, down, down. And suddenly... we've got an area that is really being beaten with a stick, now, because in Ohio, people really are suffering. Because it's purely industrial. It's an industrial state. People are being laid off and all the rest of it. And suddenly there's something good coming around. And....

Q. Not to mention the fact that Kent State had some very sad years.

A. They had terrible years. They really did. And this was...

This school... Actually, I'm not telling you anything out of line. Because President Golding will tell you this himself. He said that "Your first fashion show here, Shannon, and all the activity that went on with it, was the turning point for Kent State. Because until that night, the town and the gown had been completely separated. The townspeople were frightened to death to have anything to do with Kent, because of the bad publicity. Suddenly that broke the barrier, and people started pouring back into the school." And it's been that way ever since. And he said, "We give you full credit for it." And he's just retiring now, and he repeated that in his farewell speech. Which we're very proud of naturally.
Q. And which is something to be very proud of really.
A. Because it really was a gesture that worked out extraordinarily well, and nobody had the slightest concept of what was going to happen. But it did. It happened, and it happened all for the good.
Q. Well, I think that's terrific.
A. But... If you get a chance, you must come out and see the school. And that sort of thing. Because, really, I was...
Q. Shannon, you had just started to say that you had gotten such cooperation from other sources, other than Ohio sources, only. On your project. Do you want to repeat that?
A. Oh... All I can say is that the cooperation has been absolutely incredible. I mean, everybody.... They're so enthused about the entire project... The Brooklyn Museum, The Metropolitan Museum, Stella Blum has been... Ann Coleman has been incredible... JoAnn Olian and The City of New York and the art museum. F.I.T... I'm sure Jerry's told you about their complete cooperation. And another thing is, you know, last year we did masterpieces of design, as a show. You know, each year you have to come up with a new gimmick, and last year was "masterpieces of design." And I thought we should try... I thought well let's do American designers. So I contacted everyone I knew in the American market. Everybody I knew from California and the studios and the business out there. And I had complete cooperation from every single... Even Bob Mackie gave me Cher's clothes. And Edith Head, G-d rest her soul, gave me the gold lame dress of Princess Grace from "To Catch a Thief," and one designer after another were all just as enthusiastic as they could be. They thought this was a terrific project and
they wanted to be part and still are to this day... Scaasi, Halston, everybody. Bill Blass... Oscar de la Renta. Oscar de la Renta has been an incredible source of support all through... It makes you feel there is a great movement among these people and all they need is a cause. And in my particular way I gave them some... And they were behind me 100%...

And still, today, I'm getting calls "What's going on?" and "What's happening next?" and it's fabulous. It really is. Because there is a great feeling, among American designers... Of course there are competition and jealousies, and everything else, but let's face it. Every business has that... But when it comes down to really projecting and doing something for a worthy cause, they really get together and do something... I'm so pleased. I really am.

Q. Shannon, could you comment on what you think the best prospects are for young designers getting out of school today? How should they go about getting their jobs or deciding... What they're going to do?

A. Well, of course, the main thing is that if you can get placed in a house on Seventh Avenue, or... at any area, as far as that's concerned, and start in as a beginner, it's the most valuable education in the world. Unfortunately, there are an awful lot of people who are too impatient to do this, and they have backers already. Because they've shown extraordinary talent in school, that sort of thing, and people are so eager for something new... I think they encourage too fast. But if you're going to do it, the main thing is, remember, you cannot do this by yourself. I don't care how good a designer you are. And if you're going to... And you have to have a top production man and you have to have a top salesman...
Q. You're talking about... When you say, "If you're going to do it."
A. Go into business for yourself. Yes. You have to have a top production man and you have to have a top salesman.

Q. And how much money do you think it takes these days?
A. I have no way of judging that. None whatsoever, because every month I hear a different figure. And for a long time a lot of people went into... Now it's a half a million dollars. And that's scraping the barrel, I understand. Because everything is so ghastly expensive, including... Well, if you want to take my own situation. I have this lovely loft on 8th Avenue, and in one year my rent's been tripled and my electric's been doubled, and everything else... These are all things you don't expect, you know. It comes, and boom! And you don't know how it happened. And you have no protection either, when you're in business you know. It isn't like renting an apartment and being able to go someplace in New York and have a judgment do something in your favor. Because you have no protection whatsoever. You're at the mercy of your landlord. And he can do anything he wants to with you. And that's a very costly proposition when you go into business, because your space is... And remember, everything else is vastly expensive. Paper. Boxes. A perfect example of what I'm talking about... The little single box that we used to ship a dress in? It used to be 9¢... The corrugated thing... It used to be 9¢. Now it's 54¢. So you figure, you ship a thousand dresses in two or three days, or something like that. Figure out what that bill is. Plus the fact, your string has gone up ten times. Tissue paper... Now, this all sounds silly but this all comes under "doing business," and everything you do is vastly more expensive than it was five
years ago, ten years ago, that sort of thing. You have to take all this into... I don't care how good a designer you are, that's the thing that really... And that's what does you in in the end. Because the electric lights, and the water bill, and your security system. These are all terribly expensive things. And your mailing and your phones and... And it goes and goes... And you're sitting there writing checks out for monthly bills, you can't believe how fast it flies out.

Q. And certainly with the expense factor considered, we get back to your original advice to get a job. And make sure you know all these things.

A. That you know all these things. You know all these things before you even start. But getting back to what I said... If you're going to do it, and you are backed like this... You have to remember that these things are also part of your business, besides the designing. And another thing is, you've got a salesman, and let him do the selling. Because a designer is always the world's lousiest salesman. There's one exception in America, and that's Galanos. He sells... He does everything, as a matter of fact. I think he even sweeps the floors. But he's a very talented guy, and he does every phase of his business. But that's an unusual exception. Because salesmen are terrible... I mean designers are terrible salesmen. And they usually louse up the firm by their selling, because they never know how to say "No." And they're always taking on impossible projects. "If you do this for me..." "Do those four styles in black for me, for my windows." They don't realize you're holding up your entire production to do four styles in black for one customer, like Lord & Taylor's or Altman's, while 16 other customers
are suffering. And they never say "No." They always say "Yes." And these are the things that a designer going into business has to remember. That he's in business to do business and to make money. And you can lose it so quickly in our business it is not to be believed. And you've got to have someone who tells you no, you can't do that. And that is one thing that designers have to hear. I know. I've been through it so many times myself.

Q. Thank you very much Shannon, Thank you.

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