ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, F.I.T.

ORAL HISTORY OF F.I.T.

ROSALIND SNYDER

First Dean of the Fashion Institute of Technology

Date of Interview

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Interviewed by

Mildred Finger
Q. ....For the Oral History Collections of the Fashion Institute of Technology, and for the project which is F.I.T. itself--its founding and its development. This interview is with founding Dean, Rosalind Snyder. The date is November 1, 1984; the interviewer is Mildred Finger.

Dean Snyder, before we get into your life after you had joined F.I.T., would you be good enough to tell us about the origins of your own interest in the academic world? Where you were born, when you were born, and how your own interest developed?

A. Do I just talk?

Q. Yes.

A. I always wanted to be a teacher. This was my aim, and I really began teaching in the Board of Education, the City of New York, in the elementary school. I then took the next step, to go to the Junior High School, and...

Q. But before that...Could we go back before that to when you were a child? When were you born, and where?

A. I was born in Brooklyn, New York, April 1, 1905. I had my education in the public schools of New York City and I really, as I said, always wished to be a teacher.

Q. In other words, your earliest recollection of your answer when somebody said to you, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" or "What do you want to be?" might have been, "I want to be a teacher."

A. My mother told me that, as I played "school," and I believed her, and I think she was right. Because I have really enjoyed this
profession. And as I worked I decided that I would like to go into the High School, and I took the examination to become a teacher of English in High School.

Q. Did you go to college? Or ... Normal School...?

A. First I went to Normal School, and then I, continued. I got my Bachelor's and Master's from New York University. And I really did start to teach when I was only 18 years old.

Q. You had by then finished your academic...?

A. I had finished the Normal School and began to teach at the age of 18 in 1923, and I went to the High School in 1937. I accepted an appointment in the Central High School of Needle Trades, because I became interested in the program of vocational education, and they then were expanding it to include academic subjects, so it would not ... So these vocational schools would not only be trade schools, but they also would balance it with academic work. And this rather intrigued me, this area, so I joined the Central High School of Needle Trades.

Q. Was this the first high school that you...?

A. Yes. And as I was there, I was one of the first permanent appointments there. As I said, the division was beginning and expanding, and I later became Chairman of the Academic Department of the High School.

When Dr. Ritter called me into his office...

Q. Was he Principal then?

A. Yes, he was the principal of the High School. And Dr. Ritter called me into his office one day, in 1944, at the beginning of the year, and he asked me whether I would be willing to be his Assistant in initiating a
post-secondary institute for the fashion industry. And I said, "Who? Me? I don't know anything about the industry. I never worked in the industry. I've always been going to school or teaching, and I really know nothing about it." And he said, "I don't need you to know anything about it. I know, the Committee of Industry knows. What we want is a person who is sold on academic education. And will see that this school, that this training will lead people to become the executives and the leaders in the community, and that they will have a wide viewpoint."

Q. Just so we don't have any confusion here--Your married name is Ritter, but that has nothing to do with Dr. Ritter, I suppose.

A. Nothing. I did get married while I was at the College. And, as I said to Dr. Ritter, I was lucky with the Ritters, and I decided to choose a Ritter. However, they were not related.

Q. In what year were you married?

A. I was married in 1940. And so, as I said, I kept my maiden name to avoid the confusion, but I was ahead of my time. Unfortunately, all of my records with the Board had to remain...had to be changed to Ritter, so it did cause a little confusion now and again. But, therefore, I really used Rosalind Snyder. But officially I would use Rosalind Snyder Ritter, when I had to sign official documents. But I see women have come into their own now.

Q. Yes. Indeed. You said...Did you say earlier, when we were talking before the interview started, that you had been at a meeting at which the founders of the school...
A. Well, when Dr. Ritter invited me to become his Assistant, at the founding of this school, I was invited with him to a meeting at Mr. Haft's office, which was...

Q. That's Mr. Morris Haft.

A. Mr. Morris Haft's office, at which a committee of the Educational Foundation had just become incorporated. The thing that started them to ask for an incorporation in the Board of Regents was that New York State had just passed a post-war education plan, and this plan was really to meet the educational needs of the returning veterans. They were setting up various institutes over the state--the automobile industry, and plumbing, and electrical and what not--but the apparel industry had not been mentioned. And the apparel industry said, "What's wrong with us? We need an institute." But the...So they decided to ask the Board of Regents to incorporate them as an Educational Foundation for the apparel industry. And they wished then to arrange a contract with the Board of Education so they could start their Institute.

Q. Do you remember who was involved in this preliminary planning?

A. Yes. There were the main people who were involved...Max Meyer, who was the Chairman of the group, and he was really a very influential...

Q. Is that M-e-y-e-r?

A. Yes. Morris W. Haft, who was the Vice Chairman. Samuel Dietz, who was very active. The union also....

Q. The first three people were all coat manufacturers...

A. Right. And they succeeded in getting the cooperation of the union, which was very cooperative. And we had Julius Hochman and Isidore
Nagler, who represented the union. They had a councilman—Fred Cooper, the lawyer that they had who helped arrange the contracts and negotiations, with the educators. And, of course, Mortimer C. Ritter, who was the Principal of the High School. That was the major group.

Now, this committee succeeded in getting other members of the Foundation. Now, I don't remember all of the names of the first Foundation, but I'm sure they must be on file from the first meetings. This Foundation, then, negotiated with the Board of Education.

Now, I think it's interesting to note...Why did this Foundation choose the Central High School of Needle Trades? Well, in 1937, the Central High School of Needle Trades had introduced what they called a post-graduate course in fashion design. And they were getting graduates of the academic high schools who were interested in design. Although design was taught in some other schools, it was generally, shall I say, directed to the couturier industry. And the mass production industry felt itself left out. They, for instance, wanted more pattern making and understanding of patterns and sizing than was available. And, of course, and the draping and the art—these were the techniques they felt had to be emphasized. And they felt the present programs, as I said, were more for the individual designers, which were then very popular.

So, they did promote this post-graduate course in the Central High School of Needle Trades, and this had been running since 1937, and it...

Q. At the Central High School...

A. ...of Needle Trades, gave this post-graduate course.
Q. How long had the High School of Needle Trades been in existence. Approximately? And who were their students.?

A. The Central High School of Needle Trades...I don't know the date, but I imagine they were right there with the beginning of the vocational education, which I think was about...I gather it was in the late '20s. The whole idea of vocational education.

Q. And what kind of students went to the Central High School of Needle Trades?

A. Well, at that time we were having....The students were, generally, speaking...The original students...really, it was definitely a trade training, and it was to get people trained in the trades' skills. Immigration had fallen off. Most of the industry had been fed by immigrants. But immigration had practically stopped, and there was no longer the opportunity to get into the industry and have this big apprenticeship system. And this was the method by which a person could go in and learn a trade and get a job. So we had mainly...The students mainly, I would say, as a group, came from people who understood the apparel industry and wished to enter the apparel industry. And some of them had contacts or knew people in it, and that was the...It was definitely to get jobs.

However, our life was changing. Young people and their parents were getting more and more anxious that there should be ... shall I say, recognition on a college level. And the fact that one was going into a trade didn't mean that you were not academically minded. There were other levels for you to go. And the people who were going to the
colleges that were available were redirected away from the industry.

For instance, if I went to a college and said I wanted to be a fashion designer, nine times out of ten, I would end up in illustration rather than in fashion. The industry itself felt that its own people that wanted to come up in the industry...if they went into engineering, it was adapted to the heavy industries. And the apparel industry was left with no place for them to get academic recognition for their industry.

Q. Or, indeed, training in their skills, which no longer were coming into the United States from other countries.

A. Right. As I said, they did have these trades, that they would teach them definite manipulative skills. But they didn't have the larger approach; they felt they should be able to attract, shall I say, these imaginative and intelligent, creative people to their industry.

Now, merchandising was doing quite well. Merchandising had college courses. The textile industry had college courses. But the apparel production, really, was still without its college recognition. So, when this committee met...I really still love these quotes that I remember so well, and that I think was the whole philosophy of F.I.T. and it still is. I always remember Morris Haft saying, "What our industry needs is a cap and gown." Max Meyer saying "The apprenticeship system is out. It's no longer sufficient to be a graduate of C & S -- coats and suits." Samuel Dietz saying, "To attract the youth of our country with these new technical skills, we need college programs." Isidore Nagler, from the union, saying, "The plan...
Q. Excuse me. Was his name N-a-g-l-e-r?

A. Yes. And the building is named for him across the way, there. And Isidore saying, "The plants had such difficulty understanding the army specifications during the war because we lacked the personnel trained in engineering that applies to our industry." So really, the dream of this committee, really, was to get this college recognition, to attract the people to the industry and to be recognized. This was the spark that set the program going.

In 1944, by July, they succeeded in getting a contract with the Board of Education, and the Board of Education promised that it would give two floors of the high school building and ten faculty members. We were opened in 1944, in September. The Foundation would give the materials of instruction; would give scholarships and lecturers, extra services. And we opened with 100 students and ten teachers. Now, anyone who chose this unknown path, a very new path, by its very nature had a certain spirit of adventure. And the faculty had it and the students had it, and we had a very good representation from the veterans. The Foundation gave scholarships of $400 a year. And we really had, I would say, a very exciting group of people.

Q. How many scholarships did the Foundation give?

A. Anyone who was admitted was eligible for the scholarships, and in the first years everybody who was admitted (and I think that went to about 1948 or '49); and then we were getting so many admissions ... But the original idea was to attract them to this new, unexplored path.
And it was really a very exciting time.

Q. Do you recall...That 100 students. How many young women? How many young men? Approximately.

A. I really...Approximately .... I would say that probably there would be 20%...20% would be men, and maybe we had about 20; the rest were women... Well, yes, they were all young men. And of course we did start an evening division...

Q. When at the outset, were the students separated into groups of all male and all female?

A. No.

Q. Well, they were always divided up by subject.

A. Right. There were two majors. The question became, of course, "What shall we teach?" And we opened with two majors, one in fashion design and one in scientific management. And these were our two curriculums. And then we had to get the balance between how much we should do in the specialized vs. the general; the immediate needs that they might have on the job and the ultimate paths we though they might aspire to. And so these balances...As I said in a speech I made, the conferences were just, shall I say, teeming with excited opinions and differences of opinion amongst us really led to very great creative thinking amongst us. We utilized the direction of the industry and their opinions, and also of the students. And although our facilities were very limited...

Q. That's when you were still....

A. We were still in the high school. We were in the high school
until 1959. So our facilities were very limited. But, we had the richness of the whole of New York City. The industry was very generous in having us visit their plants. And, of course, the conventions and the fashion shows. And then, of course, we had the theatres and the inspirational museums, because, as it was said, it was very good to have techniques in expressing your ideas, but you have to have some ideas to express. So we emphasized the museum. And at that time the Costume Institutes were divided between the Brooklyn Museum and the Metropolitan...They had not yet been consolidated. And they were an integral part of our curriculum. Right on the program, it said, "Go and study at these research centers."

And we also had Virginia Pope, who was the dean of the fashion editors, arrange to take them to the opera on Monday night, the elegant night. and they would go into the opera club and there was a table reserved, at which they could have coffee, tea or a soft drink, and meet some of the artists. And what was their assignment? To write what fashion was being shown. The idea was that you have to develop... To develop good taste, you must be exposed to it, and they were invited to the homes of people. In other words, the whole attitude was that you were in this world of the arts, and that fashion is a reflection of how people live, think and feel. And in order to get this feeling--architecture, music, literature--it all vibrates to what the society is. And one can, almost by looking at the clothes of the period, tell the, shall I say, the ideals of that period and what is held as "the"
thing. And, of course, in '44--the '40s--we were still in the age of real elegance.

Q. Indeed.

A. And it was really a very stimulating, exciting program of integration of all these areas.

Q. The ten people that you refer to...Are you talking about the total staff or about the teaching staff. You said that you started with 10 professionals and 100 students...

A. Well, we did have...We had lecturers who would come in, and these were mainly from the industry...

Q. Right. Who supplemented the teachers.

A. And they supplemented the teachers.

Q. So when you talk about your staff, that would include Dr. Ritter and yourself, plus the others who were teachers, right?

A. Yes.

Q. Teaching various...

A. Those ten were mainly teachers. I have the names of the original ten. But, as I said, they were...At first, when we were first founded, he was the Director...

Q. D. Mortimer Ritter was the director...

A. Yes. He was the Director, right. And I was called the Assistant Director...

Q. Rosalind Snyder; right.

A. And we had the Admissions...And she had classes in English.
That was Marion Brandris. And fashion art...Helen Klupt and Dorothy Donnelly. Apparel design--Ernestine Kaupf, Nancy Angelier and Estelle Stern. Millinery, Fanny Sylvar, and...

Q. That's interesting...
A. Millinery was still on there.
Q. Sylvar is S-y-l-v-a-r.
A. Yes. And Management was Bertram Frank, and textile science was George Lincoln. And then we had technical consultants that the Foundation employed on a part-time basis, and they were really educators who were the consultants. Molly Sloane and Nathan Brown. And we really had...

Q. Nathan Brown taught social studies? Is that...
A. Yes. Uh huh. And he later became Principal of the High School and Superintendent of Schools.

Q. And ultimately he founded, or helped to set up, Shenkar College in Israel...
A. Yes. Unfortunately, he's not with us anymore.
Q. Yes. I know.
A. You see we had a very good group of people. Most of these people had been...Dr. Ritter had chose them from the high School. They had indicated a certain ability and a certain alertness to this whole problem. And it really, as I said, was a group that was very alive; everything going on and change...

Now, of course, during this period we were anxious to become a community college. The State had finally set up community colleges
and so... They, however, wished to keep our own Board of Trustees, because of our whole development and the whole industry being involved. And so finally they had what they called... what Mr. Cooper, our lawyer, called an F.I.T. law, in which the community college was authorized to be set up, with the Board of Education. So we were organized in 1951 as a community college, and our curriculum was registered with the State University.

Q. And that was a curriculum for a two year program...

A. Now, at that time (that was the two year program that led to the Associate degree, so we were at least degree granting; of course, now we've gone on. We always knew that eventually we'd go on to the higher degrees, as the need allowed). And of course, during this period, we also started to expand our curriculum. Now, the curriculum started to get expanded due to the fact that first, of course, the leadership of the industry was very active. And when they saw needs... And they saw them, for instance, in buying and merchandising; they felt they wanted more emphasis put on this buying in apparel, and all of this, which... So they decided to open it to that. And then of course there were other areas... fashion illustration; they could see there was a tie up with that; those who were interested in fashion design.

Now, we did have, of course, in the design area, we were emphasizing the... You have an idea, how are you going to express it? You have the sketch, you have the drape, you have the pattern. And these techniques were part of that. But if you were good in a particular thing, you
could specialize.

Q. In other words, you had more than one course in...

A. How to express your ideas. In other words, we wanted to give a person some breadth of availabilities and avenues. And if not, we also gave a little understanding of the other side of it. For instance, if I were a major in apparel production, I should understand the design, at least in order to know what I'm trying to produce. And a designer should understand the problems in the production room, so that when it's designed some of the problems can sometimes be avoided if you understand it. So there was an integration.

Of course, the faculty, as you see, was small enough to be integrated, and the conferences were, as I say, very close and alert. The community itself was also very helpful. The...faculty and students had real vision. They really did. And I would say that their vision, this constant growth and alertness to the needs, and we were not hesitant about changing. If a thing had to be changed, we did it and we did it together.

Q. So that you had a very flexible attitude toward....

A. Everything was very flexible. The evening division started to develop right from...As soon as we opened...

Q. Really.

A. Because there were many adults in the industry who wanted to learn either some of the techniques or some other areas, and it became very popular. Our register went from the 100 to 450 in the daytime, and 1,000 at night, and the reason it went to that number...that's all we could accommodate in our space. We were certainly crowded to do that.
So then the City and State decided that they would build a building, and they did build the present building on 27th Street. Now it is interesting to note that there were other sites available for this building, but finally it was decided that we should stay in the district of the apparel industry. And because this was our laboratory, this was truly our campus, we, instead of having farm land, we had the apparel industry as a campus. And this, I think, has proven very helpful both for making it available to people in the industry so they can come and study there and go out and work, and the whole work study deal; and also to have the assets of what's happening. So I think it's worked to mutual benefit of the whole community.

The achievement of the graduates was also very good. So, consequently, we had... As soon as we opened... We thought we were going to have a big, overcrowded... That we were taking care of so many, three times our size; we were going to have 1,200 day students and 3,000 evening when we got to the new building. I understand we got over crowded immediately, as you can see, what happened—two more, and more buildings. So there was this demand.

Q. How much of it continued to be industry money, that went into the growth of the institution?

A. I would say that the setup... Now, I'm not too cognizant of this... But I know that when we became a community college, one third came from the City government, the City and State, and I don't know exactly how much is City, or how much was State... one third... Oh, I know now. One third... Pardon me, I'm....
Q. That's all right.

A. One third from the City, one third from the State, and one third from the students. And that one third from the students is sometimes subsidized by scholarships, which is mainly from the industry. Now the scholarships... Now the industry, in addition, does give gifts and things of that nature.

Q. Through the Foundation.

A. Through the Foundation, right. And sometimes they even give buildings and grants to do certain things. But those are not demanded. I mean, legally, it's supported by City, State and students.

Q. Let's just review the annual goals of the institution in the early years, and the dates on which you achieved various of these goals.

A. Well, these goals, I would say, led us up to the part when we became... before we became a community college. And we were just then working on this special institute level. And, of course, in '44, the main thing was the organization and our objectives. And, as I said, our main objective was that we were going to become on a college level, and we were going to act as a college. And therefore there was to be a balance between the general education and the technical education.

In 1945, we started the work study program. This was one of the major assets, we thought. In the senior semester, the student went on a job for a week and came to school for a week, and they were paired. And the industry was very cooperative and the college...

Q. Were they paid for these weeks?
A. Yes, they were paid when they worked, by the employer. And this was work-study. In 1946 we had the first graduating class.

Q. That must have been thrilling.

A. It was. And everybody...The placement was I think about...

This I really don't know accurately, but I know it was maybe about 85%, because the others were going on to other colleges, due to their being available to placement. And we also initiated the evening division, because we were getting demands from the industry for those already employed who wanted to have more training.

In 1947, we introduced the textile design as one of our.... another curriculum.

Q. And that was in response, I assume, to...

A. ....to the industry....to student demand. In other words, they had these wonderful textile schools in Philadelphia, and the head of our Textile Department, Dr. George Minton, was considered an authority on textiles, and he's written many textbooks that we have. There were many textile schools available. However, this was from the standpoint of applying it to apparel, again, to the manufacturing. So this was felt to be a need in New York. And also, people in the industry wanted to know more about the textile industry.

We also introduced the public relations division. I believe this is when Shirley Goodman came to our program. Samuel Dietz was very influential in trying to interest a broader range of people...

Q. Incidentally, were you at this point getting students from other places other than New York or was that...
A. Right from the very beginning we had students from out of town.

Q. Oh, you did!

A. Now, this is interesting too, because originally the community college was just to serve the community. But we never wanted it to be just New York City. We thought that our community was the fashion industry. And when our law was passed, it said it was not to be limited to New York City. So it started immediately not being limited. And, of course, we also got referrals...like sons of manufacturers and people of that kind who were out of town, who felt that this was an important path. So when we started we immediately, in our first class of 100, I remember, we had four people not from New York City, but they were, I think mainly from New York State, in the beginning. But now, as you probably know, they come from all over the world. And certainly when they went to Israel, in that period, we got many from Israel who came over to study and go back...So that it really...But from its inception it was done with the idea that the fashion community is worldwide. . . So it was always a broad concept.

Q. Yes. Now, you were saying that in 1947, the textile division was founded. And then...

A. And in '48 we also had certain specialties. Now these we introduced because we could see where the placement of some of the students was going. And so then you could take a related course in certain areas. Children's wear, shoes, and handbags. Notice, way back in 1948. And then in 1949 there was...We looked at our curricula and decided to weigh them,
and the big weighing at that time was to study the placement and weigh what was needed on the first job vs. the ultimate job. We tried to balance, and to have available from people, if they needed a certain technical skill for the first job, a course in that skill. So this was a weighing of that.

And in 1950, we introduced the research program and the one year program so that you could come into the college if you were a college graduate, because now there were college graduates who wanted this specialized preparation, so what shall we do with college graduates? They felt that having a degree or study from F.I.T. might help them placement wise, with their skills, so we introduced the one year program.

Q. The assumption then was, I assume, that the liberal arts part of their training has already been done.

A. That's right.

Q. At the colleges they had attended.

A. Yes. And we were offering this to liberal arts graduates who needed some specialization. And so then in 1951, we became the community college with the power for the Associate Degree.

Now, of course, now we really wanted to become a recognized part of the college community, so we applied to the Middle States Association for accreditation and we were accredited by Middle States in 1957. And then in the meantime, a new building was going up. So we moved into the new building in 1959....

Q. Is that the building that now called...

A. Building C. And we really felt we had new paths to explore
in Building C. And we really felt we had a lot of space. We didn't
...We weren't that much of a vision realizing how much more depend
there would be evolved...technical advances...

Q. At that point there were no housing facilities...

A. We had made arrangements...We had no dormitories, but we did
build one dormitory that was going up at that time which is the Nagler
Hall, right across the street... But we made arrangements with different
housing facilities...You know, the Salvation Army had some and a few
others, which I was not immediately involved with, but I know they were
made to house the new students. And we knew we had to expand the dormitory
facilities, which were being extended.

Q. Are you aware of what the union's participatory role was during
this period? Or was it just a union representative on the board?

A. It was...I know that they donated money to the Foundation. I
remember being very excited, right at the very beginning, because they were
one of the first who gave us $25,000, which we thought was a fortune.

Q. That's an enormous sum!

A. We were delighted that the union was coming into this, and
that we got this. Now, the exact figures, this I do not have. But I do
know that we were very pleased, and the fact that a building is now named
Dubinsky Building, proves it; and we have the Nagler building, you can
see that their part was very positive. Because they felt that by building
this type of program, we would improve the industry and it would be for
everybody's welfare.
Q. Yes. Now, let's talk about what happened after... From 1951 on. 1951 was when you became accredited...?
A. No. That's when we became a community college.
Q. A community college.
A. Right. The '40s were just getting set and getting our facilities...being able to stop creeping and start walking. And then when we hit the '50s... The '50s were particularly good to us, because it was a period of our becoming recognized academically, and also by the whole community. And the whole admissions was...

Q. Let's talk a little bit about the school hierarchy. How was this working at this time, in the early '50s? For example, was Mortimer Ritter still the head of the school?
A. Mortimer Ritter, unfortunately, became ill. He had a heart attack and it was really a very sad period for us. And this was before 1951. You must realize this is a long time ago, and I may be a little bit inaccurate. But I know it was before we became a community college, because Mortimer C. Ritter was inaugurated as our first President, and that must have been '51 when he was inaugurated, and he was very ill.

Now, Max Meyer, who was the Chairman of the Board, was really practically our acting President during the illness, and Mortimer died, I believe in '52. I'm not positive but it was right there. So we were in a period where we were searching for a new President. Now... Whom did we want for a new President?

Well, for the second President, we really thought we would like a President from the academic world, because we wanted a complete feeling
of that. So eventually we...They had several candidates who applied, and Lawrence L. Bethel was selected as our second President. And he really had been a specialist in management in college, so Dr. Bethel brought another area to us, and he really the one who was in charge during this period of time. I myself retired in '63, and Lawrence Bethel was still there, as President.

Q. Getting back to when he became President, what was the administrative staff like?

A. Well, at this point he was the President. I, at that point, was called the Dean, really, of Faculty and Administration. I was really his Assistant. I still retained that position. Then, of course, we did have a public relations officer, which was Shirley Goodman. And then we had an Admissions office, headed by Marion Brandris, whom I mentioned. Then we had a placement office, headed by Eleanor Fried... I'm talking about the overall administration. And then we had chairmen of departments, that were gradually becoming their departments.

Q. So that you really had...The administrative staff had grown as the school had grown...

A. Right...

Q. How many departments were there...?

A. Basically I still was the overall person of the instructional and the administrative people.

Now, as to the number of departments, I really...I would have to look at one of the old catalogues to know. But basically, the
departments, as I remember them, we used to consider it... There was design... We still had in our mind this design and management. Basically we would have the design, and we would have the fashion and we would have the textile design--that was our major. And then we put in the fashion buying and the merchandising... That was during this...
A. And then of course, we had a ... Right from the beginning we had a very wonderful Fine Arts department. I don't want to leave this out. We had a Dr. Paul Zucker who was an art historian for the History of Civilization, which was a very rich, beautiful program. And the reason I'm emphasizing this art part of the program...The leaders of this...(like Max Meyer), were so intense that you cannot have good taste without being exposed to what is, without knowing. And right from the beginning, the arts were just as important as the technical work, to develop creativity. I think that the '50s, as I said, was a very good time for us. We had Dr. Bethal, who became our second President, and the working during this period...It must have been the time of the baby boom. Applicants were very, very many. And our only problem was how should we select them?

Q. How did you select them?

A. We really had many discussions on how we should do it. Should it only be...We even went in for a little side experiment, which we never really did get too far with...It's not only IQ that makes for a creative person. We felt there must be a certain sensitivity and a certain imaginative approach to things, and we had a little experiment going with some people in the industry that we asked to come in, and I remember that we were trying to see whether we couldn't test for space relationships or line relationships...

Q. A test for those...

A. Yes. We never did come up with any real...
Q. Of course, when you have people who are going to be technically trained, they don't really have to be as creative as people who are going to be trained as designers...

A. But we really did not have our aim...Shall I put it this way? We were really teaching the technical for the expression of the creative idea. I would say that our major idea was to have the creators. We always felt that the technical...You could always take a course just for the technical knowledge. We were not mainly on the technical, except if you were already in the industry and you wanted to come back for some technical know-how. But the students that we were selecting we were hoping would became leaders in the industry, on the leadership level. And this was what we were trying to attract. So even though we only had limited space, we were trying to fulfill the dream. And as I said, when I was visiting the Institute, I am very excited to go back to the Institute today, in 1984, and see the same spirit--they're always going someplace, always exploring--And we had that...It's still the same.

Q. You bring up an interesting point. You, yourself, retired in 1963, at which point the school had obviously grown many times since its inception. And from your observation of the students and/or whatever your observations have been since then, can you talk a little bit about what the student body is like now and what...

A. The question that people say to me, "isn't it different?" when I visit. "Isn't it different?" And my answer wants to be, "No."
It has the same spirit of excitement, of growth; in fact, I think it retains the spirit of beginning, which I think is totally in harmony with the fashion picture. It has an aliveness to it. Now, true. They have many more students; they have much more space; they have larger physical things. But that...is not the important thing to me, that they have helped. And it makes me feel that it is still going and reflecting the needs and the directions of the times, and it's not becoming stagnated. I mean, just because something is good.... You know, very often, when something is good it never changes, and it becomes old. But this ability to...Maybe it's because we have so many faculty from the fashion industry. And also the people who come into it must have this kind of thing.

Q. Oh. That does raise another interesting question. What were the qualifications that we required of faculty members of the school over the years? I assume the qualifications have changed too.

A. Well, I really feel that...We really, certainly, as far as the academic work was concerned, they were generally leading toward the PhD in academic areas. But when you hit creative levels, at least in my...Maybe things are changing now...But I always remember one of the professors I had in a creative education course in my youth who said, "You don't get a PhD if you write a novel," if you have a real creative ability. And he said the tendency was not to...And sometimes the creative person is a little bit rebellious of the organized routine, the strict routine; and he doesn't get all the right credits in all the
right places. So, when we were selecting people we also considered....

Q. As faculty?

A. As faculty. We tried to consider, particularly, as I say, in those days (things are changing now since more people have degrees who are coming up), but in the beginning days a person who became a top designer, would very rarely have academic recognition.

So, we would try to evaluate his record on what his accomplishments were; what his reputation in his field was, and what he had accomplished. And the same was true, then, when we tried to select students. We would try to see what creative thing he had done in his life. Now, if you're applying, and you're 18 years old, you must have done something. It didn't have to be in...It could be in music; it could be in literature; it could be in art. It could be in anything. You've done something; what have you done? And consequently, when they came to be admitted, true, we had the normal tests. But we would ask them to bring their work in from what they had done, and many of them had selected certain things in their high school curriculums to show that they had this, shall I say, direction in their thinking and their feeling. So we did try to weigh the accomplishments and what had been done.

Q. In the evening program, were most of the instructors people who had been in the industry at some form or who had been in the industry...?

A. Yes. In the evening programs...Of course, they did have some of the academics...No...But if they were getting degrees from their
evening, we also had some of those. But as far as those in the
technical areas, they generally were selected because they were
known in the industry as top producers in their areas, and very often
they were consultants.

Now, when we first started the management area, we had very
great trouble getting any instructor who had applied any of the
principles of engineering to apparel. So we went to the industry...

Q. I was going to ask you--what do you include in that?
A. And they went to the industry and asked...We asked them to
recommend some of their employees who might have this ability. Because
what had happened up to this point...If they had an engineering degree,
they would learn the apparel on the job. So the industry did lend us
some of their instructors. And we, for instance, would employ an
engineering major and then he would work with this person from the
industry, and see the applications.

Q. But, what kind of management are you referring to?
A. Production.
Q. Production.
A. Yes, production. Basically production. This was our
major deal then. I know since then they've gone into it in many other
specialties.

Q. But it's interesting to know what was considered management.
...So you're talking about a very important area skill, which is
that of the production manager.
A. We're talking about production, basically. Not about the...

Q. Do you have any feeling about the school, when you were not part of it any longer, from '63 on? For example, do you have any awareness of what happened at the school during all the student unrest of the late '60s? I don't mean the F.I.T. unrest, but I mean other schools... Was F.I.T. affected by that?

A. Well, what's interesting is that when they were discussing in this period of recollections that we had the other night, they had one of the faculty members discuss the '60s, when there was this period of unrest, and there was very little unrest at F.I.T. And probably, if you realize...If you look back at the '60s, most of the unrest was with those who were in the liberal arts colleges. If you were in the medical schools or the schools that had a definite...You had made up your mind what you were going to be, you were not that restless. Now, I think they've had...Of course the teachers were more restless, according to her report, than the faculty...

Q. Who was that who spoke? Do you remember?

A. I think that was...I think it was probably Sylvia Galvern.

Q. Miss Snyder, why don't you tell us some of the things that really have stayed in your memory about the years when you were all getting started.

A. Well, when we were all getting started, what really...As I look back upon it, the range of concern we all had about everything. We were in this together. And we really didn't know quite where we were
going. We had to set up these goals, and consequently, our duties we varied and we were really working very hard. We had no concept of hours or time. And I always like this little incident when I went into a restaurant with a friend of mine, into a cafeteria, from the school, and she looked at me and she said, "Exactly what is your duty in this place?" And at that moment, somebody had dropped a try in the cafeteria, and the manager came over and he nodded to the person in the back of the counter, and she shook her head, "No," it wasn't her business. And he looked at the cashier, and ... No ... He looked around, and he finally got a mop and mopped it up himself. And I looked at my friend, and I said, "That's my duty. I'm in charge of doing anything that isn't done."

But it wasn't just me either. It was anybody on the staff... would do what wasn't done. I think we all appreciated that we were interdependent, and we all always talked about what the other guy should be doing too. And so we had all these conversations. Sometimes we would get pretty heated, and one of my favorite sentences was that, "Hey, listen you you're paid for your brains, not your emotions. Leave your emotions out. "or, I would say, "Let's have more light and less heat." But in the course of this, it was a total devotion and dedication.

Q. Did you have contact with students yourself, or...?

A. I had very little contact with students except for the committee, when student representatives were called in, to give us advice...

Q. When did this happen? In other words, you had student panels who helped set up the curriculum.
A. Well, when we would have it set up, at the end of the semester we would call in particularly some of our outstanding students, and ask them where they felt insecure....

Q. Oh, that's very interesting. You really had student participation.

A. Yes. From their work study particularly. Where were they insecure, and what would they like a little bit more of to feel security?

Q. That sounds like a great idea. Was it the idea of the students to do this, or...?

A. I would say it was our faculties idea. Because, as I say we were...And then we also called in the industry, the employers wh were employing these peole--what would they like them to have? And only the other day I was in and a person was taking me around showing me the expansion, and they were showing me how they had this training in that they could pick out materials; they had swatches of all kinds and they were picking this out, and she said, "The industry said they needed this." And I said, "Oh..." How I feel at home. Because so many of these things...The whole spirit still remains there. And after 40 years, to have this complete spirit still there, I think it speaks very well for F.I.T.

Q. In the early days, how often was the curriculum reviewed or looked at?

A. I would say every semester.

Q. Every semester.

A. At the end of the semesters. And we were always expanding, all the time, so things that had become related sometimes went into
a major. For instance, textile design started out as a related subject, and all of a sudden it became a major.

Q. What do you mean by a related subject?

A. Say I was majoring in fashion design, but I'm in apparel, but I would take one course in textile design...

Q. And that was called a related...

A. In other words, it would be related to my activity. It would not be general, in that sense. But then, all of a sudden, people wanted to get into that.

Q. So that a related subject might be an elective, and then you're saying it could become a core program.

A. Right. Eventually it became core. Now, when you look at the curriculum today you see how many majors they have. All of them probably started out in some way being related or elective. And then the more offerings you have, when you started getting all these electives which you have to choose--how much of your percentage of your program should be required? So this was another big discussion. How much freedom do you permit a student to have. I understand now...We did not have that much freedom in the beginning days. In the first place, we had no space. We were sort of blocked in what we were doing, and maybe that's why we had all these conferences about it. Because we were really blocking it. But now I believe they have much more individual...Because they have more possibilities.

Q. There are more courses...
A. There are more areas for them to go into. More paths for them to travel.

Q. Have you any recollection of the first graduating class? What the ceremonies must have been? Because this must have been awfully exciting.

A. Well, the...I really...I just know we did not wear a cap and gown until '51. And I really haven't got such a...As I say, I just remember what I do remember. It's sort of sad...I remember the...I really haven't got a clear picture. It was just a pleasant graduation. I don't have any anecdote that sticks in my mind about it.

Q. But those original students, as far as you recall, were placed, perhaps 85% of them, in the industry...?

A. As I said, the people who were involved in admissions or placement would know the figures better than I. But I know it was very good. And I do know that the placement, or the achievements of the graduates were very satisfactory and that led to the whole reputation. Because we were...If you came to visit us and you walked into the high school building, it was nothing impressive for you to see.

I have an anecdote...A little anecdote that I told the other night too. I think it's silly. Talk about being in the high school building...One of our faculty members was showing around an important visitor, and she saw some water on the floor, and she said to this...Another faculty member came along and she said, "Will you get someone to mop this up?" And so she left. And she came back and the faculty
member was mopping it. So she looked at her and she said, "I
didn't mean you." She said, "Well, you told me to get someone.
I was the only one..."

In other words, again, we were so close, and there was communication.
That was in many ways...Anything that's growing, I think, in the
excitement of a small group, you have that advantage. Now, of course,
there were disadvantages. When you look at the college today, you have
a much wider breadth, and you have people with specialties in so many
things. You gain in this breadth of vision, but you do lose a certain
intimacy. You can't have everything, and you have to balance what you
have. And I think on the whole it's been good. It did well then and
it's doing well now. It's balanced. And I think it's really faith
that is making it.

Q. Well, it certainly is making it. Thank you very much.
... Dean Snyder, why don't we just sort of have a recap of the sort of
things that you were doing, because after all, as the Assistant to the
head of the school, you had your finger in so many different areas.

A. Well, I would say that...Of course, Dr. Ritter was mainly
involved with the Educational Foundation and the Board of Trustees. I
mean, he was mainly involved in getting the legislation and the setup
and the whole picture of the school, and therefore delegated to me was
the detail of evolving the curriculums and getting them set and showing,
shall I say...And also in sort of setting the teaching methods...Many
of our faculty members were coming straight from industry, with no educational
principles of teaching methods...
Q. Excuse me. Were these principally the ones who were teaching in the evening sessions, or were these the daytime...?

A. Well, this was, of course, mainly with the evening division, but we had some in the day, as we expanded. The original teachers did have some teaching experience, because they came from the high school and they had had, in order to be eligible for their licenses, they had to have a certain amount of educational courses and principles of teaching. But some of the others were...And then so many were stimulated to write textbooks. There were really no texts in their area. This was a very lacking thing. It had nothing to go on.

Q. Yes, that is interesting.

A. And it's really amazing the things you take for granted, when you go into an established program. Here you had a whole new path without text. And you find that the...So, from mopping floors, you were very often asked to write a textbook, or to put on a fashion show. And when we were putting on the fashion shows, we didn't have money for professionals to come in and do it. So we all sort of did it...

Q. Putting on fashion shows as part of a course? Or was this a way of...?

A. This was really a way of of showing the Foundation what we were doing. Also, this was a motivation for the students to show part of the things that happened in industry, to show their wares...

Q. And you were having shows as early as the '40s.

A. Oh, immediately. We had a fashion show...In fact, the
high school had had a tradition of fashion shows. So this was no new thing, even though we were now an institute. We said if they can have a fashion show, we can too, certainly. So we did, and we started immediately, the first semester. And sometimes when... I remember being very sad that we didn't have enough equipment, technical equipment, and it was hard to get the money for it. And somebody told me the story that sometimes it's good not to have the technical equipment, because then you have to improvise, and when you get a job it doesn't have all this technical equipment, so this is a stimulation to your thinking. So, instead of using it as a handicap, use it as a springboard, to think of a solution. So this was another way.

And then, incidentally, you noticed that we did have millinery design, at the start, because the millinery design...We realized that millinery design was gradually....Women were not wearing hats. So eventually that became more of a related area because there just wasn't the demand in that area, unfortunately for the millinery industry.

Q. So in terms of your own job--you were involved with curriculum. You were involved with teacher selection. You were involved with teacher training. You were involved with mopping floors ...And you were involved with working with a lawyer on various aspects of your problems. So you really had an involvement in many different ways.
A. Yes, but basically I was not, I would say, that much... I was involved policy wise in the setting up of admissions and placement, but I was not involved in the implementation of the policy, except if there was a problem. Of course, as I've often said, one of the main questions during this period was, to me, what is our policy? I was responsible for policy. And when this question came, I knew there was no policy and I had to be cautious as to how I would answer this question. And I would always say, "Now, you know, when you're asking me what's our policy, that we are not yet firm, but this is what we will do in this case, and we'll see how it weighs and what we will do."

But I used to have another little favorite saying, and that was, "I may be in doubt, but I'll always give you an answer. So don't feel that the answer is final if it's in a new area. We have to weigh this."

Q. So, for the first years of the school in any event, you were feeling your way—all of you—to...

A. To setting policies. And how we would set and what we would do. And I think that should always remain open....I don't think a school, or any organization, should get so firm in its decisions that it becomes stratified, and can't be changed at all.

On the other hand, you have to have some rules and regulations or you'd have chaos. So you need a balance between the two.

Q. And you have to be able to change from no policy to a policy, or from one policy to another....

A. As the need or demands require. And that's what I think,
again...I do think the present organization is still doing. I think it still has that spirit. When you're around it, you can feel it. It's constantly going and it's not afraid to try a new path, of exploration.

Q. Thank you very much.