

ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES ARCHIVE

Interview with Ruth Faerber

13 August, 3 September, 29 October 2013 and
25 March 2014

This is an edited transcript of interviews with Ruth Faerber on 13 August, 3 September, 29 October 2013 and 25 March 2014 at her home in Sydney, NSW, by Steven Miller, head archivist, Art Gallery of New South Wales, for the National Art Archive.

About Ruth Faerber

One of Australia's most innovative artists, Ruth Faerber (born 1922) played a pivotal role in pioneering lithography practice in Australia, before developing a unique form of paper relief sculpture. She was also represented in numerous prize competitions, including the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prizes, with works in various mediums, including prints, landscape and portrait paintings, and mural designs.

This is an edited transcript of a recorded interview. Some adjustments, including deletions, have been made to the original as part of the editing process; however, the accuracy of all statements has not been verified and errors of fact may not have been corrected. The views expressed are those of the participants and do not represent those of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Unedited audio files of this interview are in the Art Gallery's archive.

Interview on 13 August 2013

Steven Miller (SM): We're at Ruth's house in Balmoral. And I think, Ruth, we should really start at the beginning. So 1922.

Ruth Faerber (RF): OK.

SM: So you were Ruth Levy, weren't you?

RF: I was.

SM: And your parents were ...?

RF: Let me just sort of start reading your little bit that's written here.

SM: Absolutely. That would be good

RF: Because it says, 'Let us start at the beginning'.

SM: Excellent, that's where we want to start.

RF: So this was an artist talk. Do you hear me if I talk?

SM: Yes, that's good.

RF: This is an artist talk that I gave at the [Marianne] Newman Gallery [in Sydney] where there was an exhibition on called *City and Coast*, in which I had some of my digital work, which I am doing now, although until about six, seven years ago I was doing what I became more known for, and that was the cast paper bas-relief works. But to go back to the beginning, I'd been around for quite a long time. I was born in 1922. In 1963, I had my first solo exhibition, at the age of 40-plus years. So I have witnessed quite a lot of changes. Not the least in Sydney has been the expansion of the number of art galleries and opportunities to exhibit, especially for women artists in the newly founded art societies which emerged at that time. That's round about the 60s. It was a very exciting time because the Contemporary Art Society began in that period. The Sydney Printmakers began in that period. The Print Council of Australia inaugurated in Melbourne. And the mushrooming of many art centres in the suburbs in Sydney presented exciting learning experiences to normally homebound housewives. I was certainly lucky. It was a heady time to be an artist. New beginnings. To be bold and to spread your wings. Now will I go on?

SM: No. I want to go a bit backwards in terms of your family. Were you the oldest child?

RF: Yes. There were two of us. I was born 9lb 2oz, and my mother said to me, 'You nearly killed me'. So I've got a photograph of her somewhere here, and I look a very sort of aggressive child, baby, sitting up with my fists clenched, and it's a sepia studio photograph. So I've always been very strong, and I've been very healthy.

SM: And who was the second child? A brother or a sister?

RF: A sister. But there was one between who unfortunately died at – only lived for a week – and that's Esther, and that's now the name of my daughter called Esther.

SM: Where were your parents living?

RF: When I was born, they were living in ... You know, I do not know. I mean, apart from it being Sydney.

SM: That's alright.

RF: I think it was Woollahra. Yes.

SM: Were they born in Australia or were they immigrants?

RF: No, no. My grandparents came. There were two brothers from the same family – they were the two grandfathers – and they left Russia in the 1880s because of pogroms, and they escaped: one went to Scotland, and the other one went on to Australia because he had asthma and he was told to go to a dry climate. So he went to the driest place in New South Wales you could think of – that was Cobar, that was a mining town in the northwest. And he built a general store there, and that's where my father grew up. My mother grew up in Scotland, but there wasn't much money in Scotland although there was a lot of sort of academics in the family. Her father was a picture framer, but he was more interested in politics and early Zionism. And my grandmother, she had a cigarette shop at the bottom of the stairs of this house in Glasgow. So my mother, who was a very sort of adventurous type and very good looking – tiny waist. I've got a photograph [of her] in a big hat and a sort of elegant umbrella in the studio – a sepia studio photograph. She came out to Australia on her own to look for her family, because I think she reckoned she might be able to get a better life for herself out here away from the poverty that she saw there. So she came out to Australia before the First World War, and she finally sort of found Cobar. She went out there, and actually it was just out of Cobar, it'll come to me in a minute. Anyway, she found the general store and the oval that was absolutely burnt dry – you know, the grass – and the first thing she heard when they all welcomed her was 'it's a cow of a day', and she didn't know what they were talking about. So by that time, my father had left school at 13, but he was helping to run the business. His father was actually the one who established the business, but he wasn't much of a businessman. He was a Talmudic scholar. So my father was the one, as he grew up, that really took over the running of the business, and he had a horse and dray, and he used to go all over the place and deliver to the miners. It was quite a thriving centre. Canbelego, that's where it was. Canbelego, outside of Cobar. So he actually was the one who, out of all the family, out of all her cousins that my mother saw, she thought would be the best bet.

SM: They were cousins, weren't they?

RF: They were. They were first cousins, but they'd never met before, and he looked after her very well. She came down to Sydney and got herself a job. And then her brother in Scotland – who was really like the father of the family over in Scotland, because all the old ones that had come over from Russia weren't much chop as far as businessmen were concerned – he was the picture framer. So the brother sent her a cable and said, 'There's going to be a war, come back. Get on a boat and come back home'. So she did. And when she got there she said that she walked down Princes Street – it must have been in Edinburgh. And she saw all these khaki soldiers from Australia with their slouch hats on, and she went up and looked up underneath each one because she thought that Hymie [Faerber's father] might be one of them. But no, on the contrary, what he was doing: he was together with the local chemist son, and they had started an open-air picture show in Canbelego. They went out and they chopped down the trees and they made the seats and they had a roof that they could pull over when it rained. They were allowed to build it onto the back of the tin building that was the general store. Although, his father warned him, 'Stop playing with electricity. You'll blow yourself up'. In fact, when they got everything fixed up for the first show and they turned the motor on, there were such strong blasts they thought the Germans had come out to Canbelego. Anyway, that started the two of them off. There was a travelling picture show

then that used to go through the country towns, but they started their own picture-show series. The local chemist's son, he stayed in that sort of business. My father didn't. But I remember him quite well, and he opened picture shows all in the country towns. So now, where are we up to?

SM: So then, your mum was back in Europe now during the war.

RF: That's right. She was back, during the war, and he waited until the war was finished and then he sent her a cable. And his parents apparently had gone on a holiday, so he said, 'Why don't you come out again?' Her elder brother, Joe, got hold of the cable and he cabled back, 'She's been out once. What should she go out for again?' So Hymie, my father, cabled back, 'Marriage on arrival'.

She had no education. The youngest one was the only girl in the family. There was about seven over there that had any education. But Mum was so streetwise, she was always going to be ok. It's quite true, you know, we called her the sergeant major because she was so bossy in the house. But it was all a veneer, because she had no money of her own, she didn't drive a car, and if there was anything serious that had to be decided, it was 'your father knows best'. So that's how it was.

SM: That's right. In lots of houses I think, wasn't it?

RF: Yes.

SM: But she obviously liked him so she wasn't adverse to the idea of coming back.

RF: No, no. He was a very good-hearted, gentle, intelligent fellow. And he was full of ideas himself, like starting a picture show. So all the things that he did in his lifetime, and leaving school at 13. I mean, he was there making the first cabinets for gramophones, when you had those things with the radio and gramophone and you opened the little doors; so he didn't know anything about making cabinets, but he knew somebody else that could make a cabinet. Then, later on, he and his brother, M & H Levy, they formed their company. They started manufacturing the first koala bears here.

SM: The toys?

RF: That's right. And they were made out of rabbit skins. And I can remember going out to [the Sydney suburb of] Botany – because of the smell – where you bought the skins.

SM: The tannery?

RF: The tannery. Later on the Chinese started manufacturing and the bottom fell out of it. It was this whole thing of being in this sort of life where there were all sorts of ideas people had. And we moved quite often. That's another thing, you know. I mean, it was no big problem. We didn't stay in the one place for ever. If there was something that had to be done, a better proposition somewhere else ... I can always remember my mother wrapping up all the dinner plates in newspaper and putting them in boxes. We were always going somewhere else. It was no big problem – grew up very flexible. But I went to school.

SM: So by the time you were born, they were in Sydney?

RF: They were in Sydney and they had opened a hotel by then. The brother and he and the two wives, they went in and they served at the bar and they also sat on the till. And that was the Teagardens Hotel in Bondi Junction, and it's still there today as a backpackers place. I haven't seen it, but I'm told. So we lived in Woollahra, and they went to the hotel, and

apparently he was in another hotel before that because my mother said, 'Your father couldn't even stop working the day he got married. He quickly got married and then had to go back to the pub'. So that's the sort of background that I came from.

SM: And what about your first school? Can you remember where you first went to school?

RF: I do. I remember at Woollahra.

SM: Woollahra Dem?

RF: Woollahra Demonstration School.

SM: That's where I went to school as well.

RF: Oh no, how funny. It's only a distance of about 50 years. I can remember we had to do some drawings of what we wanted on the Christmas tree, and I drew what I thought was a very good picture of a typewriter. And I remember this because I remember the teacher coming down and I had all these round things, you see, with different letters on it, and she says, 'What is that?' and I said, 'That's a typewriter'. She said, 'Is that what you want for Christmas?' I said, 'Yes, like my father's got. I want a typewriter'. And she brought some other teachers in to have a look at this child who didn't want a doll for Christmas but wanted a typewriter. So under those circumstances, you know, I sort of got through from there. I went then from there to Sydney Girls High School and had a dreadful art teacher there. She was so boring. Because I had always sort of grown up – they could keep me quiet by giving me a newspaper and a pair of scissors, and I would cut out all the pictures and then I would stick them down in the book. So I was that sort of –.

SM: So you were always interested in art and visual things?

RF: I was always interested in something – in making things, you know, and putting things together. Anyway, by the time I got to – it was a selective high school then.

SM: We had exactly the same school background. I went from Woollahra Dem to Sydney Boys' High School.

RF: Oh well. Did the girls still talk to you over the fence?

SM: In the Flat in the middle.

RF: I thought that was rather in the gully, that backed onto the boys school.

SM: The fence has gone now but that's –

RF: So if the fence has gone, that means to say that you can cross over.

SM: They can mingle. It was a bit more strict when I was there. You couldn't cross over.

RF: How old are you, if you don't mind me asking?

SM: 50.

RF: You don't look it.

SM: Thank you.

RF: I don't look my age and you don't look yours, so we're all those sort of people.

SM: So the art teacher there wasn't very good, boring.

RF: She was terrible. And we had to draw a school hat and an apple, and we were told, you know –. We drew it with Reeves chalks. Used to sort of have a box with about a dozen at the most, of chalks. And we had these grey books with the pages grey, and you had to do your drawing in chalk, and you were told how you were going to put the highlights in and how the shadows –. Of course, I wouldn't have even known there were highlights and shadows in those days, but we had to sort of copy so we had to learn that.

SM: Very academic.

RF: And I hated that. But one day we were given a wonderful assignment. We were told we could do a poster. Now I don't know how it came about, but we were told we could do a poster. So I was in my element. I did this figure, and it had a hand up with a flag and legs wide apart. I remember this dreadful teacher coming along and saying, 'Is that a man or a woman?' And I said, 'I don't know'. And she turned to the whole class, she said, 'She doesn't know if she's drawing a man or a woman'. Anyway, she was the sort of teacher that would say to me, 'Open your eyes wide, I want to put my hat on'. She would put her hat on and see her reflection apparently in my eyes. Talk about whacko, absolute whacko. And that's a selective high school.

John Dabron. Isn't it amazing I can remember these names? He was the first person that came up in the education system that was interested in art teaching, and he made all the difference in the world to that school, but that was already later on. Before that, it was really only the dunces went in to the D class because they wanted to do art because they didn't take Latin; they didn't have enough brains, you see. Because if you were an artist, then you weren't very bright. Anyway, comes the intermediate [exams] and I get through that. And then my parents, by then, had bought another hotel with his [Hymie's] brother, which is the Langham Hotel which is just above where Wynyard, the railway station, is. And I came across an old photograph the other day, and they used to not come home til about six or seven at night, because they had to close up. It was six o'clock closing and then they had to hose everything down. And my sister and I, we had our dinner, and we had a Scottish girl who lived in and she looked after us because my mother worked in the hotel too. Well, they came home at night, and I was under the lamp post in the street with the boys with my bike. So they thought before anything worse happens, they would have me going, you know, to a boarding school. So I thought, 'Oh well, that's alright, it's a bit boring here anyway'. So Ravenswood had just opened, and I was only going to be a weekly boarder anyway so it wasn't that bad. It was good to get away from them as far as I was concerned and have something new to look at. Anyhow, I went to Ravenswood at Gordon, and Reverend Hinds and his wife were there and they looked after all the boarders in the old-fashioned little cottages that were there. But I mean, there was the big sort of tennis courts, and there was all the art room – it was lovely. And Gladys Gibbons was the art teacher.

SM: That's fascinating.

RF: And, for the first time in my life, I thought this is phenomenal because she was one of the women group, with Margaret Preston, that was doing printmaking. Her husband [Henry Gibbons] actually ...

SM: He was at Julian Ashton [art school].

RF: He was at Julian Ashton's. And she wasn't known at all and he was known very well. But it's today that she's known, you know, as a printmaker, and I don't think anyone knows about him very much at all.

SM: No, that's right.

RF: Anyway, when I got into her class, and she encouraged us, you know, to make lino-cuts, and she encouraged us to make potato prints, and altogether, you know, it was a different story. I just thought, 'This is fantastic'. I found out I didn't want to do anything else all my life. I'm going to be an artist. So I went to my father and I said, 'I'm not going back to school next year'. There was a terrible to-do. Miss Campbell was the headmistress, and she got me into her room and she said, 'You're a fool'. She said, 'You've only got one more year' – this was 40s. She said, 'You've only got one more year and you'll get your leaving certificate'. I said, 'I don't care about that'. And she said, 'Well, you'll never be able to go to university'. I said, 'I don't want to go to university. I want to be an artist'. Anyway, I think my father thought, 'Oh well, look, she'll probably get married and that'll be the end of that'. So he said, 'Alright, I'll tell you what. I'll let you leave school, but you've got to be a commercial artist and you've got to be able earn your own living'.

SM: Oh, he's sensible.

RF: I said, 'That's alright. I don't mind, just so long as it's getting away from all that other stuff and I can be an artist'. So he had an office then, with his brother, in Bathurst Street, and it was in – just a block away from the Bank of New South Wales, which was a pretty derelict old building with wooden stairs going up and on the top of those wooden stairs there was Peter Dodd's art school. Did you ever hear about Peter Dodd's?

SM: I'd heard of Peter Dodd, but I don't know much about the art school. I've heard the name.

RF: This is the phenomenal thing that's just happened in my life. You know, from one thing to another, always because I didn't want to do what I should do, I wanted to do something else. And then what I did that was something else, it's almost like destiny was sort of pushing me, pushing me, pushing me. Anyway, most parents would have sent their children, I suppose, to East Sydney Tech, that was the only sort of tech[nical college] there was then. And there was only Julian Ashton's. But mostly, you know, if you wanted to be a commercial artist, you went to East Sydney Tech. But because his office was so close to Bathurst Street where the bank was, and this art school was on top of that, he said, "Well, look, I'll go and see what's going on there because then I can take you in the morning and I can pick you up and bring you home at night". So that's exactly what he did. Now, Peter Dodd was about – maybe he was about 26 or 27 then. It's only later that I found out, you know, he was married to Una and she was Jewish, and I think that that also made my father think, 'This is a very nice place for my daughter to grow up. She'll be looked after well. This is the right thing for her'. Little did he know what was going on there. It was the whole centre of the Fra Angelico group. I didn't even know about it then. It's only later that I read about the Fra Angelico painters. They used to all meet there. There was only about six or eight students in the whole school, but there was Justin O'Brien and there was – who else was there?

SM: Not Donald Friend or one of those?

RF: Yes, there was Donald Friend, Justin O'Brien. I've just put this down here somewhere.

SM: Who's the group? David Strachan maybe – they were old friends.

RF: No. They weren't there. It was so different.

SM: But Peter Dodd was gay, wasn't he?

RF: Absolutely.

SM: Was that a marriage of convenience?

RF: No. I mean, how can I say. No, they had children. But, I mean, how convenient it was or not ... Years later I met him when he went back, after the war – I'm jumping forward a bit now. But he went afterwards to teach at East Sydney Tech when the war finished. And, of course, I met him then because I was going there then as a – with two children at home – I was going to classes that they used to have in those days for people to come in. Wallace Thornton was there then and Godfrey Miller. I had the best teachers you could imagine then, who have since become, you know, the doyens of Australian art. Anyway, Peter Dodd was teaching there and he said, 'I think Una must be an anti-Semite or something'. No, no. 'Una, I think I should divorce Una. The way she's carrying on, it's a wonder it hasn't made me an anti-Semite.' So by that stage, I think, that the whole thing, you see, had all come out then. Frank Hinder had come back from America. And he had this whole thing of – they were all serious people, as far as artists were concerned – dynamic symmetry.

SM: That's right. Jay Hambidge or something like that.

RF: That's right. And he brought back with him Margel, his wife. She was a sculptor and he was – I've got a book of his here from the Bloomfield Galleries. They took up a lot of his work. But this [dynamic symmetry] is what he taught Peter Dodd. He talked to him about it. And Peter Dodd talked to me about it. Now I don't know if any of the others got interested in it, but I took to it like a duck to water. It was intellectual because it was to do with geometry and, although I couldn't be bothered with school, when I applied it to art, I found it worked perfectly, you know. There were all the different proportions and everything. And so I did this work all based on the dynamic symmetry. Now that wasn't being talked about at East Sydney Tech or at any of the other art schools then. This was from this Fra Angelico little group that were working on their own, but they were so progressive. Now during the war, they had also formed the – when you cover something up ...

SM: Camouflage?

RF: The camouflage artists.

SM: Frank Hinder was doing a lot of that.

RF: That's right. Frank Hinder was one of the driving forces then. So he sort of told Peter Dodd all about that, and Peter Dodd then closed down the school and –.

SM: So you would have enrolled about 1939 or something like that.

RF: Just before the war.

SM: Just before the war.

RF: That's right.

SM: And the other students? Can you remember any of the other students that were there with you at the time? Did any of them continue as artists like you did?

RF: No.

SM: Right, you were the only one really.

RF: But I do remember that I met someone who had married one of those later on, and I can't remember his name now, and she's dead.

SM: Right. But none of them really continued and made a life as an artist as you did?

RF: No. The funniest thing is that Peter Dodd did quite a bit of painting, because I used to visit him at his house in Paddington. I was invited there. And, of course, I was sort of older than perhaps some of the normal students would have been, you know, that went straight to the Tech or something like that, because I was already sort of married by then. 1946, Hans [Faerber] and I were married. So by 1948, when I had Esther, it would have been about – it was just before [my son] David was born that I went back to Tech for part-time teaching. I didn't do the teaching.

SM: No, but you went back.

RF: That's when I met Wallace Thornton and all those.

SM: So during the war, Peter disbanded the school and went to work with a camouflage unit with Frank.

RF: That's right. And he worked with them. And I can remember –.

SM: What did you do during the war?

RF: And during the war, I got myself a job at the Market Printery. Now the Market Printery. I had a lovely sort of recommendation from Peter Dodd, who sent me out into the world with this, and it actually says what a good person I am and full of energy and so forth and so on. And he also says, 'I am sure she will go far in the art world'. I think, you know, I was just this sort of nature that probably people mistook it for being more talented than I was, because I was such an active person.

SM: You were engaged.

RF: Yes. I was engaging people all the time. Anyway, it's getting a little bit confused now.

SM: So at the printing place during the war, were you doing some commercial work there?

RF: It was as a commercial artist that I went out into the world.

SM: So your father must have been happy with that?

RF: That's right. And not only that, I said to Peter Dodd, after two years being with him, I said, 'I've got to go and get a job. I want to be able to earn my own money'. So that's what happened. And I did do a lot of different jobs in a very short period of time, but this one, at the Market Printery, was excellent. And as a junior commercial artist, I went in there and they had a new process called photogravure. And the only other printing place that was doing the photogravure was *The Sun*, I think. Anyway, I had – there was a manpower shortage so I had a woman boss whose uncle had been working for *The Sun* newspaper and she knew all about this from her uncle, and the man that ran this Market Printery was a Chinese or Japanese man, I'm not sure. Anyway, we were in a little building off the main building that was attached by a ramp. She and I – she was about 27 then, and I was about 17 – we became extremely good friends and I learnt so much from her about the process,

which was working on a copper plate, very similar to making an etching. But I didn't know then, you see, that it was so. Anyhow, this girl, Maddie Griffith, she and I became real mates, and she drove a little Swift car – if you remember the Swift at all?

SM: Yes.

RF: And I grew up very quickly. We used to go on trips together and drive. She was very much like me, but she was much older and, of course, I admired her very much. So we went to dances together at the Town Hall, and there were army people there. And by that time, my parents had bought an orange orchard up at Gosford.

SM: They changed a lot.

RF: That's right. Because my father was thinking that there might be a Japanese invasion, that's how serious it was.

SM: That's true.

RF: He always wanted to get back to the country so I think he grabbed hold of this opportunity and he bought this orange orchard. And my mother, who was much more an urban person, she liked to play cards. Although she was very romantic about being amongst the beautiful-smelling orange blossoms when she first got there, she got very bored up there. But, in the meantime, I used to go Gosford on the weekends and work down in Sydney and stayed with a friend of hers in Rose Bay who had a flat, and I had a room there where I used to sleep. I can remember when the Japanese came and bombed from Darwin, and then they came down and they dropped a bomb in Sydney Harbour. Anyway, I can remember the whole thing like today – it went *weeee booom*. Anyhow, everyone in the block of units was going with the alarm, and there was no shelter, but we all got underneath the staircase. And I remember people coming out without their teeth and all sorts of things. We sat underneath there for about maybe half an hour, that's all. And then it was the all-clear. Anyway, I just thought I'd put that in because it was the only time, you know, that there was anything happened in Sydney. Nobody ever thought, you know, it would touch Sydney or something like that.

SM: That's true. A lot of people like Donald Friend and some of those artists got their apartment up in Potts Point because they were so easy to get.

RF: Yes, there was a whole group of them that lived up in Kings Cross – Merioola.

SM: That's right. In Woollahra, wasn't it? Merioola, the big house.

RF: I thought that was in Kings Cross but could be wrong.

SM: I think it was in Edgecliff Road, overlooking the harbour.

RF: See, isn't that funny? I can remember going to visit with my husband then, because I was married, and Wallace Thornton was living with them too.

SM: That's right. He was one of them.

RF: And I thought it was ... It might have been Rushcutters Bay then, because it wasn't as far away as ... You were saying it was ...?

SM: I thought it was in Edgecliff Road, the big house in Edgecliff Road.

RF: Well, you might be right. Anyway, whatever it was, Sydney during the war time, was really a very sort of wild place around the Cross. Now there was a building where they put an exhibition on too, and they've just had a retro exhibition there just recently. Yellow –.

SM: Oh, the Yellow House.

RF: The Yellow House, and that was dedicated to Vincent van Gogh.

SM: That's right. Up in Macleay Street.

RF: By that time, I was doing art reviews for the *Australian Jewish Times* because I had been – I'd already had my first exhibition in 1963.

SM: So we've jumped ahead though. Going back to the war. So you were working doing ...?

RF: At the Market Printery. That's right. And some of the things that we did at the Market Printery were the posters. I cut them out of big pieces of lino. They were printed and they went on the back of the trams, when the trams went along Pitt Street and George Street. And they advertised what was on, you know, at the Prince Edward Theatre or something like that. But there was also work that we were doing for the – that made us a protected industry, so nobody was called up. Because that was a pretty important thing in those days, that you didn't get called up. I remember it was all very well about the ones that volunteered but there were plenty that didn't want to be. Anyway, we did the 'I surrender' pamphlets that were set up in type and they were printed and they were dropped by the airmen over Japan. If I'd have thought about it then, I should have kept some. They'd be worth a fortune now. And then there was another one called 'Hush, hush, the enemy listens', and that was put up in hotels and places like that.

SM: To stop people –.

RF: That's right. There was another girl. Now she's a woman that I still know [Joan Gray, nee Slutzkin]. She was called the Dyomee and she was a model. She was at Sydney Girls High School when I went there – that's how long I've known her. She lives up at Cammeray now and she's an old lady like me, but in those days she wore the brassiere called Dyomee and that was absolutely unheard of – to have a poster of a woman showing off her breasts, you know, with this Dyomee bra, so she was the Dyomee Girl. Now a lot of her photographic works are down at the Manly Gallery because they've got most of her stuff down there.

SM: That's fascinating.

RF: So that's what was going on. And also, we were doing a magazine that was sent to the troops in New Guinea. We were printing that. So we had those sort of things that kept us –.

SM: As a protected industry.

RF: That's right, protected industry.

SM: So you were there right up until the end of the war? Or did you –.

RF: Yes. Now, Maddie, who was my boss, had red hair, and she was very sort of – not bad tempered, but she was quick tempered. And they complained about something. She got very angry about something that she'd printed, and they complained it wasn't right or it wasn't this and it wasn't that. Incidentally, we used to also cook in that place because it was over the ramp and on top of the fish shop that was down below, and we would sort of use the gas ring that you used to heat the copper plates up on, for cooking our sausages and things. And

then we'd get a shock and we'd see Mr Harper, that was his name, coming across – marching across the ramp towards us. 'Mr Harper's coming! Oh god!' We opened the drawer and we put the frying pan in the drawer and we closed it up, and Harper would come in and he'd say something, and he'd say, 'There's a smell of something cooking here' and we'd say, 'Oh it's from the fish shop downstairs'. We were a couple of wild ones. Anyway, Maddie in the end sort of had this big fight, and she was given the sack. And they brought in an Englishman, who was a printer, to take over her job. I remained there, and I got all of her samples out of the window in the front, and she would –. It was on the roof of the fish shop below. So she wanted to get herself another job somewhere, you know. So anyhow I got all this, got it down, and she got it away. Anyhow, that's another story.

So this was the beginning of another thing when this Englishman came in. And when I said to you, you know, we were doing photogravure and it was on copper plates; he had been an etcher over in England. And although we had the Etchers Society that had hung here and hung on, it had gotten weaker and weaker and the prints all together were not really sort of valued very much at all. People didn't know the difference between a print and a reproduction. And I got some instruction from him on how to do an etching, and I did actually my first etching on a copper plate about that big when I was working at the Market Printery.

SM: That's interesting.

RF: So it's good because, with that experience that I had there, it was a commercial experience where you learn how to work efficiently. And although, you know, I was just lucky that I got something out of it that I could use later as an artist, it was marvellous because as an artist I already had the practical abilities that was built in since being 17 that I could be more efficient. And that's when I sent away in – no, we moved to –. 1963, I had my first exhibition.

SM: Before that you must have –. At the end of the war, you met your husband?

RF: That's right. I met my husband, and I met him at a dance.

SM: Was that during the war or just after?

RF: No, it was during the war. But he had been –. He disembarked in Melbourne.

SM: And he was in the forces, wasn't he then?

RF: Yes, well, he joined up. He was considered an enemy alien, as a lot of them were that came out without papers and who escaped. And amongst them was some very well-known artists like – from the Bauhaus.

SM: That's right. What's his name?

RF: [Ludwig] Hirschfeld-Mack.

SM: That's right.

RF: So those fellows, you know, they were put into the employment company, and that was the most stupid thing they could have done with them because most of them were academics. They were doctors and lawyers and solicitors and all sorts of people – certainly they weren't labourers – but they all had to work. Hans was moved from Melbourne up to Albury, and they had to move all the armaments from one railway line to another railway line because they had different size gauges between New South Wales and Victoria. Anyway, from that point, he was then moved on to Sydney, and I met him at a dance and that's when

he was on his own. Someone had given him a ticket. That's how sort of strange it is that somebody's at a certain place at a certain time. Someone gave him a ticket to go to this Purim Ball that was on at Grace Brothers, down near the railway. I had gone there to sit with some friends because I belonged to the Zionist Youth Movement then. And my sister, who was six years younger than me, had her first date, and my mother said to me, 'Aren't you going to that?' I said, 'No, I wasn't going to go'. She said, 'You'd better go. You've got to keep an eye on your sister'. And I said, 'Oh Mum'. I said, 'Don't be foolish. She'll be alright'. 'You do as you're told. You go there and you keep an eye on your little sister.' So that's why I was there at all.

SM: I suppose her first date didn't end up being her husband, did it?

RF: No.

SM; But you met your husband there.

RF: That's right. That's exactly right. As a matter of fact, he already had a girlfriend in Melbourne, but he joined our table. I said, 'Are you here on your own?' He said, 'Yes'. So he joined our table and that was when I discovered, you know, he played tennis with my group of young friends, and then I saw that he was somebody that had this artistic, creative flair and I was really impressed by that. That's when I decided that this is worthwhile pursuing. So he had to go back to Melbourne, and he had to be demobbed in Melbourne. So he got a job down there, and I didn't hear from him again. But during that period, some guy who was in the merchant navy, an Israeli actually, working in the American merchant navy that used to go between Sydney and San Francisco and carry merchandise. I had met him at the Zionist youth rooms that were somewhere in George Street. We used to go up there and we'd have camps and all. It was a very strong movement in the young Jewish youth because it was to do with the key being on the kibbutz and that was also to do with being left-winged. So it was really quite exciting. Also, most of the people there, as far as I was concerned, were very interesting because they came from Europe. So, you know, I could sort of glean all sorts of things, you know, about what had been going on in Europe. So this fellow who was an Israeli, he found his way up there too. They used to have lectures and they used to have singalongs and they used to all dance in a circle. It was really quite full of enthusiasm and ideas. It was idealistic.

SM: Was it associated with any of the synagogues or was it just its own group?

RF: No, it was not. It was encouraged by the progressive Jewish synagogues in Woollahra, but there was a lot of the orthodox rabbis that thought you should be quiet. Don't make too much noise about what's going on and about Israel because we will bring all the anti-Semites down on our head. So, of course, you only had to say that to young people and that would be enough, you know, to make it rise in revolt. Now, the other thing that was quite interesting talking about the other side and being in revolt was the fact that – have we got to me being in Castle Cove yet?

SM: No, we haven't even – because we haven't even got to the marriage yet. This Israeli sailor, was he keen on you as well?

RF: Yeah, he wanted to marry me. I said, 'No, I don't want to marry you'. He was alright. He had a motorbike, which he carried me around on, and I rode on his motorbike a few times. But he was too short for me; I didn't like short men. And he was a rough diamond, but hence he wanted me to marry him and go live in Israel. I said, 'I don't mind going to Israel to live, but I'm not going to marry you'.

Anyway, when Hans went down to Melbourne to be demobbed, he happened to be coming back and he said to me, 'I believe you've been going out with somebody while I've been away'. I said, 'Yes. What's all that about?' So he said, 'Well, what are you going to do? Are you going to marry him?' I said, 'No, I haven't even heard from him'. I said, 'I know his name and I was keen on him. But there's nothing between us'. So this fellow, he was actually a lieutenant or something; he had things on his shoulders. So he said, 'I'll find out about that'. He went down to Melbourne, and he sussed out where Hans was working, and he went up to him and he said, 'Are you going to marry Ruth Levy?' and Hans said, 'No'. So he said, 'Well, that's alright, let's go for a swim'. So they went for a swim together. And he came back and he said, 'Well, he's not going to marry you'. I said, 'I told you he wasn't'. He said, 'Well, now we can get married'. I said, 'No, we can't. I'm not marrying you and that's the finish of it. Go away'.

In the meantime, my mother's sister, who was her younger sister, had come out some years before, got married here, and she was the one – the only one of the girls that was educated in the family. And I had a lot more in common with her, with my art actually, than my own mother, who was a loveable person and encouraged me, you know, to go to concerts and things like that but had never had the benefit of the education that her sister had had. So this younger sister had got married here to a Scottish fellow who came out and worked with His Master's Voice record company. And we had a wonderful collection of His Master's Voice 78s, and my son's got that now. God knows what he has done with it, but I gave it to him years and years ago. But they were going down with their little daughter, who is now dead, and my mother to Melbourne to do some business. And my mother said to her sister, 'For God's sake, will you take Ruth down with you? She's driving me insane. She's moping around here'. So the night before I went, this fellow, Benny, came up – he was still hanging around – and he said, 'Look' and he pushed this across the dining room table. He said, 'That's his address. Do me a favour, go and see him and straighten this thing out. Get him out of your system'. So I did. I went down there and I rang him, and he was at work and he came back on his pushbike that night and he picked me up, and I sat on the back and he sat on the front and we pedalled and we went back to where he was living at St Kilda with another friend and the friend's mother. And he introduced me, and then he said, 'Are you going to marry Benny?' I said, 'No, I'm not going to marry anybody'. Anyway, in a little while that sort of changed. So that's how he asked me to marry him, because I went down to Melbourne and I don't know to this day if he'd have ever come up to Sydney. It just happened. That's the way another person kept pushing things in my life quite often. And we got married, and I got married here in the Temple Emanuel at Woollahra, and we went down to Melbourne, and we lived in a room and a kitchen. I remember afterwards thinking to myself, 'He got married to get what I got married to get away from'. He had lost all his family and he had probably sort of recognised that I had a very good family relationship and that this was part of the attraction. I thought, on the other hand, 'Get those family off my back and I'll forever more be free'. So I went down to Melbourne. We were down there six months, and my father was missing me too much. Very clever man he was, although left school at 13. He had a relative over in Perth so he drove the car down with my mother. Am I boring you?

SM: No, this is great.

RF: He drove the car down and he said, 'I'm going to catch a plane from here. We're going to catch a plane from here and fly over to Perth. Not going to drive all that way. I will leave you the car, Hans, while we're away'. So Hans had a driving licence. I don't think I had one then. We had nothing but our pushbike, and this was great. We had the car for about a couple of weeks or so. It might have been three weeks. My father came back with my mother and that's when he said to Hans, 'What are you going to do with your life?' Hans said, 'Well, I was trained to fix machinery, particularly printing machinery. I'd just like to have my own business. I'd like to have a little workshop. I've got some money that I've got from

deferred pay' – they always got their deferred pay when they got demobbed – 'but I don't think that'd be enough'. So Dad said to him, 'Well, I can't help you here, but if you come back to Sydney, I can go guarantor for you with my bank'. So that's exactly what we did. We packed up our few belongings out of the kitchen and the bedroom and just flew over, and we got a half place in Vaucluse that we went to live in that was belonging to a Viennese woman. We had a motorbike by that time. I can remember, you know, that he was always getting into trouble, because he was pushing the motorbike and it standing on the grass and it was dripping some oil – so all these things. Anyway, they went out and that's where they got some money from the bank. Dad went guarantor. And Hans had a partner who had also been in the army, Gunther Glogauer, and together with his money and Gunther's money, and Dad as guarantor through the bank, they had enough to buy this place in Chippendale. It was a place about – I think it would only have been about twice as big as this kitchen, that's all. And they started working there. He was an engineer too, this guy.

Now in the meantime, Hans' sister had got out of Germany and she got to South America, in Chile, and they hadn't seen each other since. So while they were doing the machinery repairs, that's when the Cadbury fellow came in, and his machine was broken down and needed repairing. Hans looked at it and it was all imported from America or Europe or Germany or wherever. There was no manufacturing of confectionary machinery here because there wasn't a big enough market actually. Anyway, Hans said, 'Look, I can fix this up for you but it's terrible. It's old-fashioned. It's cast iron. It should be made in stainless steel. It's too heavy. It's too clumsy'. So the fellow, Mr Burley from Cadbury's, said, 'Well, I'll give you an order. You make one for us and we'll try it out'. At that stage, you know, it was a machine probably about that big. Now the machines are about three times that width. But anyway, that machine then became quite functional, and there were Nestle's that ordered it and a few other people, but there wasn't a very big market there.

Hans said he wanted to see his sister, but he wanted also to see someone who he was in contact with by mail, who had been in Buckenwaldt with him and had been taken out at the same time and he was selling machinery in Canada. So we went off then, and we didn't have any children, of course, then. And so went off and went across in the *Marine Phoenix*, which was a boat that was carrying all the war brides back to America. And it had big dormitories. There'd be sometimes 30 or 40 people in those dormitories. Women. And there was one woman I remember who had somehow or other – she had smuggled in her dog. And she was giving this dog a wash in the hand basin. There was a row of hand basins. And I can remember someone complaining – saying, 'You can't do that'. And the dog's name was Matilda. And I can remember her saying, 'Listen Matilda, don't take any notice of them. There's plenty worse than you being washed here'. Anyhow, that's what went on in those days. It took about six weeks to get over there. We stopped on the way. We went to – one of those islands.

SM: Honolulu?

RF: Not Hawaii, no. It wasn't a big island like that. Vanuatu. That's it then. I remember we stopped there. And then we got off at San Francisco. And we bought a second car. We bought it at night. We thought it was blue, or we thought it was black and it was blue or something. It was only the next morning –. And then we decided that we would drive all the way down to Florida and park it and take a plane and go down to make a connection with his sister. Well, we didn't get very far before there was a blow out of one of the tyres, and we finished up in a ditch on the side of the road. I can remember climbing out backwards, and somebody was behind me saying, 'I've got you' – thinking I was hurt – and I said, 'I'm alright'. And Hans got out and he said, 'Stay with the car and I'll get someone to give us a tow'. That was, I think, only about three days out of San Francisco.

Anyway we got – it was a Chevy, and we had to get a new top put on, which was an Oldsmobile, and we finished the drive. We got down to put it in storage at Florida, and we took a plane that took us as far as Panama. And when we got off at Panama, we had to change planes, and we had to stay there and wait until the next plane came in. And I can remember that we went into the airport there to register or something like, or fill in some forms or something. The American that was there said, 'You're born in Germany?' to Hans, because you had to fill in. So he said, 'Yes'. He said, 'Well, what do you think you're doing here? You're German'. Any anyhow, Hans said, 'Well, actually, I'm not. I've got an Australian passport now'. And he said, 'Oh, once a German, always a German'. Well, Hans put his hands down on the counter and he swung himself right up – he's very athletic – and I had to really lean forward and grab him and pull him back. I said, 'Listen, we'll never get out of this place. They'll put us in jail or something if you assault anybody'. So I managed to keep him quiet. But I mean, that was the feeling that was still there after the war, you see. Anyway, we did get down to Chile. And Hans' sister met us in Santiago, and we went out to Temuco, which is down further south; to Villarrica, where there's a volcano and lake – a beautiful part. And we stayed five weeks with her.

SM: And it would have been lovely for him to see her.

RF: It was amazing.

SM: Because he lost his mum in the concentration camp and his aunt.

RF: That's right. Now, when he got down there, he found that her marriage wasn't very good because she really wasn't very keen about this fellow anyway. But she had taken her chance and got out while she could by marrying him and getting down to Chile. But she didn't want to continue, and it wasn't a very happy marriage. So she later on, she came to Sydney and worked in Hans' business; it was expanding then. And her daughter now is a grandmother. That's how long ago.

SM: In Australia?

RF: Yes, yes.

SM: She stayed in Australia.

RF: Oh yes. She was 14 when they came. And they'd lost all the family, you see. It was just the two of them. So she came. Now, how did she get here? It was very difficult to get her a visa, because in those days women weren't considered, you know. They gave the visa to a working man. Anyhow, we knew somebody called Mr Dunstan, who had retired from the government with – one of the early prime ministers. He was in Chifley's government. And he had retired from there but he had a job in something to do with government still. No, no, I'm getting mixed up. He had retired and we met someone who said, 'If you want to get a visa for Viva' – that's Hans' sister – 'you'll have to probably slip somebody some money to get that through. I'll put you in touch with Mr Dunstan because he knows how to handle this'. So Mr Dunstan actually was a very nice man. He had a stick and cripple – he was a bit of a cripple from the war. He said to me, 'Look, this is the man you've got to go and see to get a visa, but you'll have to do a Mata Hari sort of act. You take the book under your arm and, in that book, you put two £20 notes. You go up to his office and make an appointment. Then you go in and, after a while, after you say, "How do you do?", you say, "Have you read this book?" And you just open the book and then you push it over to him and he'll take the money and he'll get the visa'. And that's exactly what happened. Now that was Mr [Arthur] Calwell that was sort of doing a lot with the immigration. I think it was Calwell then. But there was a lot of underhand stuff going on too with that. There were all these people, you know, that came out later that did the Snowy Mountain. They were Europeans because they were

all the Czech people and the Austrians; they were used to working in the snow. So where are we up to now?

SM: That's Hans' sister. So you've got your factory down – you've got your work space down in Chippendale. So you're living at Vacluse then.

RF: No. We were living at South Coogee, once I gave birth to the children.

SM: That's right.

RF: That's right. So Esther was born in 1948. And my mother said to my father – we were living in [their] Vacluse place – 'Hymie, go and buy them a house. She's going to have a baby'. Oh my father, he looked so uncomfortable. We got a house anyway. In Pearce Street, down near the water. And we would have taken the one behind, but the one behind was £3500 and this one was £3,250 or something so we took the one that was the cheapest. It was just built before the war, I think, or just after the war. Not sure. It was 11½ squares because there was a limitation on the houses that were built then.

SM: That's right.

RF: And it was right on the water's edge of the cliff. A wonderful position. But it had no footpath in front of it yet. That's right.

SM: Because there was a big shortage in housing after the war wasn't there?

RF: There was. And there was a big shortage altogether with services like putting in footpaths and things like that. It was at the bottom of this big hill that went up to the top where the school was at South Coogee. It was an out-of-the-way place, you know, then. I can remember my mother and father saying, 'Oh everything will rust. You're right next to the ocean'. And, of course, they were dead right. But it was a wonderful place for the kids to grow up. And they were like wild goats, you know. They clambered all over the rocks, and we used to go down and swim in the water. Of course, around us – we were there for 14 years – around us it blossomed. Quite large, beautiful homes went up. But ours certainly wasn't. It was just a red brick cottage. It was about 11½ squares, and then we had – it was long and narrow with a Hills Hoist at the back. I've even got a photograph of me sort of hanging out some nappies or something on the Hills Hoist. And a rough path that went right around the cliff edge to the garage at the back. But I grew my own vegetables there, and we made garden beds at the back and the high fence to keep the winds off. I used to grow carrots and beans and all sorts of things. And I think we took out about £10 a week from the business and that's all. So all the money that we made went back to the business. I have done an e-book about it but the solicitor has it at the moment for some other reason, for something that's going on. But it's got one of the first of the bank returns there, the income tax returns.

SM: You were helping out with the business before you had the kids. What happened when you started to have the children?

RF: Now, Gunther Glogauer got married, and his father-in-law said to him, 'What are you wasting your time and your money working in this place for? You'll never make any money here. I'll set you up in a hardware store and then you'll get some money to feed your children'. So Gunther said, 'Alright'. And a lot of these boys, you know, they didn't have family. They'd come out, just like Hans had come out, from all sorts of circumstances. Anyway, he wanted to leave the partnership. So I got money from Dad and I became Hans' partner and I took over his share. And the whole thing, you know, was not a big investment so much in those days, but it had its potential. So when we went overseas to see Eva,

Gunther was still in the business and stayed there. And while we were away overseas, Hans saw Fred Rose, who had been one of the boys who had come out.

SM: That he wanted to see.

RF: And he was selling homogenising equipment for milk in the States, in Canada. When he knew about this machinery that Hans was making, he said, 'Let's go over to Chicago. There's the exposition for the confectionary trade'. So we drove there, across from Canada, down to Chicago, and we went to this trade fair. And when Hans saw there, he said, 'My machine's better than that and it's cheaper'. Because in those days, it was £2 Australian to – how was it? £2 Australian to \$1. So it was ever so much cheaper. It was competitive, and it was also more advanced. And I have still got some of the early things, you know, from the confectionary trade magazines where he advertised. And Hans actually had got export awards then because they were encouraging people to emigrate. They wanted to build up the population. So Calwell had a great – it was Calwell then, and he had a big immigration policy going on, and they encouraged export a lot. So Hans' got, still in the factory today, a wall full of all of those export awards that he got. Now that would have been coming up to about the 60s. That's right.

SM: So in that period, from when you were married up to having the children and establishing the business, your artwork must have been pretty much put on hold. You wouldn't have any time to do that.

RF: Well, I did because he went away sometimes for three months at a time. He chased orders. He went to Europe and he went to various places. And I sort of took advantage of that, you see, and he made me this studio when we got to Castle Cove – that was 1963.

SM: But when you went back to tech to do a bit of study with Godfrey Miller and the others, was that the late 40s?

RF: No, that was in the 50s.

SM: So your first child was '48.

RF: '48. And then David was four years later.

SM: OK. And then you went back and did some extra study at tech.

RF: That's right. As a matter of fact, they said, 'This child may not be born with a golden spoon'. I had a big stomach. I stayed there until just before he was born. That's right. Because I remember, you know, we had a party. Where were we living? We were still living at South Coogee then. We were still living [there] because it was 1963 when we went across to Castle Cove. So we were still in –.

SM: In the 50s you were still at Coogee.

RF: In the 50s we were still at Coogee, and I was going, in the early part of the 50s, to tech. And then David was born. He may not be born with a silver spoon in his mouth but I wouldn't be surprised if he has a palette knife. Because everybody was painting with the palette knife. It was a big thing. That's right. So when I came to Castle Cove, that's when I got into contact with Joy Ewart.

SM: So did you have a studio before you moved to Castle Cove?

RF: Yes.

SM: Where were you working?

RF: I was working in the garage at South Coogee. And I ran children's classes on Saturday morning there because I had put up a great big sort of bench all down – we extended the garage, where I also had the vegetable garden, and the sandpit for the kids, and all the rest was all rough rocks all around there. But it was funny, you know. There were a lot of people that were living quite rough, in a way, like that. And they came and they brought their kids from Maroubra and all over the place, and I don't know what I taught them to do. But we had classes there on the Saturday morning, I think it was. And we would have been about – I think I got it from my sister actually. I got it, the idea, from my sister because she had trained as a teacher. I never trained as a teacher ever.

Have we not done the tape yet?

SM: We have. It's going well.

RF: Amazing.

[End]

Interview on 3 September 2013

SM: Today is the 3rd of September. It's for the second part of talking to Ruth about her life and her work. We need to go back to mention [Desiderius] Orban, because we did talk a little bit about your studies in the 40s.

RF: That's right.

SM: And Orban. Was this in the 40s or the 50s, do you think?

RF: No, this was in the 40s.

SM: OK, quite early on.

RF: Let me think. I might have gone in the – that's right, I went there in 1946.

SM: And where was his studio? So Orban was part of the great wave of immigrant European artists that came in the wake of the war?

RF: That's right. He was a Hungarian artist who escaped from the Nazis because he was Jewish. But he was also very contemporary and he was part of the School of Paris. He had left Hungary to go to be in Paris, and he was the one really that, sort of, was the first one to bring all the theories of [Paul] Cézanne and cubism. Up to that point, the only other person that had had a very strong element of that was [John] Passmore, who was teaching at the –.

SM: The Tech, was he?

RF: No, no. He was teaching at –.

SM: Julian Ashton.

RF: Julian Ashton's. And he influenced, later – one of his students was John Olsen. And John Ogburn went in, but I know John Olsen did. But anyhow, where we're up to now is that

I was working at the Market Printery and I heard about – through my sister who was still at high school – that a Hungarian girlfriend of hers who was there was telling her about this artist who had come to Sydney and was opening his own studio down at the Quay. So I thought, 'This is my opportunity, you know, to really sort of learn more about painting' because what I had learnt at Dodd's was a very lucky introduction to the basic principles of art, although it was a commercial art school, but it was mostly as applied to the elements of design. Like we talked about, like Frank Hinder came back from America also with the –.

SM: Dynamic symmetry.

RF: Dynamic symmetry. And it was as applied to lettering, and also we did life drawing, but actually we never did really much real painting. So that's when I went down, and I was one of the first students on the Saturday afternoon class with Orban. And he was really a breath of fresh air as he came into Sydney. The Contemporary Art Society had been formed then and he became the president, I think, of the Contemporary Art Society. I'll just see if I can check up and just find because –.

SM: Was his English good?

RF: His English was very good because he had been doing some music reviews for a newspaper in Hungary. So he was a quite well-educated man. 1943 to 1945 was when I first went to Orban's studio. That was while it was under D Orban, Desiderius Orban. Later on, I got married in 1946, went down to Melbourne, and when I came back, Orban was teaching with two other teachers that he had taken in – that was John Ogburn and John Olsen, so that was the three Os studio. And that would have been about 1950, the early 1950s. And I went back there and I went to classes – first from John Olsen and then from John Ogburn. And after that, John Olsen and John Ogburn broke off and opened their own studios and Orban kept teaching. And this was at the Quay.

SM: Right. So whereabouts was the studio where Orban taught? Down in George Street?

RF: It was right on the front of the Quay. There was no railway there, and there was these big windows, and you went up the wooden staircase above the fish shop, and we could do all these paintings that we did, looking through these big windows. And then later on, that's when they put up the railway, that blanketed that out.

SM: Right. So down near where the Customs House is and all those buildings?

RF: Yes, that's right. The Customs House was on the right and I think this was on the left of the Customs House. But it was in that area. Let's say opposite what would be now about number four wharf. That's exactly where it was.

SM: And did you have to pay? How did it work out?

RF: Oh yes.

SM: Did you pay for your class on Saturday or for a term?

RF: No, you paid for a term. Well, I did anyway. I mean, there might have been others that he might have made other arrangements with. But there was only about four or six of us there. And I remember one of the people that was there was a man called Oscar Edwards. Have you heard about him?

SM: Yes. I have heard of him. He became a collector as well.

RF: That's right. And he was sort of doing some collage work, but I don't think he ever exhibited very much and he didn't make a name for himself as an exhibitor. But he certainly made a name for himself as a collector.

SM: He did, yes.

RF: I can remember going and visiting him down at Coogee. And he had all these sort of serviettes etc, paper serviettes that had a drawing by [Pablo] Picasso on it, with Picasso's name, and he had that framed and put on the wall. And he had something from [Henri] Matisse. It was quite amazing what he did have, when I think back now. I mean, I looked at it then and thought, 'That's interesting' but today I think it's quite amazing. And he told us all these stories of how he'd travelled. And he was always in communication, writing letters to all these great artists. So he was one person.

SM: He was one of the students?

RF: Yes.

SM: Was he the same age as you or older?

RF: No, he would have been – well, you see, I really didn't start – I was already sort of in my late 30s, early 40s then. I guess he must have been about the same age. And his wife too, I remember her. And they lived in Coogee, up on the hill overlooking the water. I remember going to their house quite well. But that's the only person – apart from John Olsen and John Ogburn that he got in as teachers – that he had coming to the studio who, in memory now, sort of remains as somebody that had any ...

SM: Kept a connection with the art world.

RF: Connection with the art world. But what he did do was he really brought a complete sort of open mindedness to art, to generation after generation of housewives. It was quite amazing. For example, Joy Ewart, who later opened the Workshop Art Centre, was a student of his. And, in fact, you know, she is known. When I said that I didn't know her as being a student there, but I have since found out that she was, but she taught according to Orban's teachings and so did I.

SM: So he had a big influence.

RF: He had a tremendous influence, that man. And it's surprising even today when I meet people, you know, of my age or a big younger, who say, 'Oh, I went to Orban. I went to Orban'. But they were mostly sort of well-to-do middle-income housewives. But, instead of the sort of housewives that learnt to do flower paintings or ducks on the wall, he was lecturing them and showing them the very, very latest of the School of Paris and modernism.

SM: So what would you say were the distinctive features of his teaching that you in turn passed on to your students?

RF: It is very easy to sum it up. He believed in creativity, not imitation. And John Olsen, later on, in the forward to a book that Orban wrote – because he wrote three little booklets on understanding art that were published, and John Olsen wrote in the forward that – and John Olsen, of course, out of the three of them, came to be the best known – he said that, at that stage, he was the first person he had ever heard talk about creativity in art. So it was the creative imagination that Orban put the emphasis on. And he made the distinction between the painter and the artist. And the painter was like a virtuoso that could play the piano, but the artist was like the composer. And he said the artist had to be three things: he had to be

the composer and the virtuoso and I can't remember what the third was. But I know there were three things. But it was all based on form and colour relationship. And he said, you know, that the subject matter was only going to be important providing the basic analysis of structure was established. Now, this is something which I absorbed and felt very happy with. It lead to abstraction without any subject matter. But I must say that later on I found that that was not as applicable as he himself had – I can remember him sort of drilling it into us. And that was probably because he came from a background that would be equivalent maybe to the British establishment. And he was part of a revolutionary new movement that was known and producing masterpieces in Europe but was hardly known and followed here. But I believe, you know, now, that he was also a bit narrow minded. But in those days, he was absolutely the most liberating of people. Bad tempered and aggressive and –.

SM: How was he with women? Was he condescending with women or did he treat you equally?

RF: No, no. I can remember, you know, we had this little ditty. Because he said 'form and colour', so we made up the song 'Form and colour relationships, ship, ship, that's Mr Orban's tip, tip, tip'. Anyway, I came back and showed him something I had done – I think it was something to do with the traffic going over the Harbour Bridge, so it had all these verticals and it had something else. He draw on his pipe and he looked at it and his brows drew together. He says, 'You've been copying. I do not know which I dislike the most: the form or the colour' and, of course, I just crept away in absolute sort of...No, you had to be very, very sort of strong minded, and you had to believe that he was absolutely honest, and then you could learn amazing things from him. But I've seen students just go away in tears.

SM: So he was quite formidable.

RF: Oh, he was, he was. As he got older, he got more gentle, of course, because his eyesight started to go and his hearing started to go. But he still sort of came up and looked at things, you know, and he'd say, 'The gesture's not there'. He mightn't have been able to see enough, you know, to talk about the particulars, but he certainly saw about the gesture and the movement. But he was really quite amazing. Let's see if I've got anything that I put down here.

SM: I tend to associate his palette with a darker palette – I don't know why – in his own works that I've seen.

RF: It was. His early work that he brought with him from Europe was much darker. And then he changed philosophically as he got older. He became a Buddhist. And he did a lot of sort of ethereal, spiritual works. He won the Blake, I think, twice. I'm not sure. But he also taught me a love of materials because he encouraged the use of different materials.

SM: That's interesting.

RF: And he himself sort of used quite a lot of different things, like glitter paper and all sorts of strange things – collage. He was far in the head with his teaching of other places. I'm sure, you know, that if I had done what would have been the normal thing by going to East Sydney Tech or to Julian Ashton's, which later on I did go to – but going to him first, it was like it's just answered my nature, that I love to be cutting and sticking and making. And it was a printmaker's mind really that I had. And his methods of experimentation, and based on a very strong understanding and search for form and colour relationship, that really made me the printmaker that, I suppose, my reputation rested on. Because I was an inventive person.

SM: That's very interesting. I've heard many people speak about him very highly as a teacher.

RF: Really?

SM: Yes.

RF: And are they women?

SM: Quite a few women, yes.

RF: Do you remember any men, apart from John Ogburn and John Olsen?

SM: John Olsen. Not really.

RF: No, there you go, you see.

SM: Yeah, you're right.

RF: But he was there in the meetings that we used to have. Now there was a big sort of battle going on between the myth-makers that came from Victoria.

SM: The Antipodeans struggle.

RF: That's right. And that was Bernard Smith. And they were inclined to be left-wingers to some of them. Certainly Bernard Smith was. And then there were the abstractionists that were from New South Wales, from Sydney. So Sydney and Melbourne were at loggerheads.

SM: Yes, you hear that, don't you?

RF: That's right. And there was quite a lot – almost come to fisty cuffs, you know. They'd have their meetings in Adyar Hall in Bligh Street.

SM: The theosophist hall, is it?

RF: I think so.

SM: I think it might have been theosophist there.

RF: I think there was a bookshop there.

SM: Yes.

RF: The Adyar Bookshop, was it?

SM: I think so, yes.

RF: And I can remember we used to go downstairs, and Guy Warren was also on the committee and I was on the committee.

SM: So this was the Contemporary Art Society?

RF: This was when the Contemporary Art Society was formed. Now, the Sydney abstractionists, they took their affiliation from the New York School because a lot of those emigrant artists, they went to New York. But the Victorian ones, they had their affiliation with the nationalist school of Heidelberg, perhaps, going back. I'm not too sure about what their roots were.

SM: I get the sense that they wanted art – they still wanted a figurative element in art. Their criticism of Sydney was that Sydney artists were going after an American fad.

RF: That's right.

SM: And that these artists were making an art that had no connection with life.

RF: That's right, exactly.

SM: And, as you said, with the left-leaning that a lot of them had, a lot of them thought art should have a political content and a social message, which figuration is much better for.

RF: That's right. Yes. You see, I mean, the idea actually was not so wrong because eventually a lot of the content that was in the abstract art became boring. It was too formalist.

SM: They all turned away from it eventually, didn't they?

RF: That's right. They turned away from it.

SM: It went to as far as they could and then they –.

RF: That's right. It was sort of, you know, absolutely – you'd seen it all. Couldn't take it any further.

SM: Yes. It's interesting that.

RF: I mean, there were all sorts of things that happened there. They tried to sort of make the shaped canvasses and they tried to –.

SM: Tony McGillick and people like that.

RF: That's right. That was Central Street Gallery, and he opened Chandler Coventry. Opened his own gallery then later on, and carried on very much so with the same artists that had been in Central Street. I think Central Street closed up. I'm not sure.

SM: It did.

RF: And that would have been, of course, in the 60s, 70s.

SM: That's right. So those days of –. So did Orban take a position on that, between Sydney and Melbourne?

RF: Absolutely. He said, 'If you want to tell a story, you should write a book'. He had that all worked out that. And that's where I think that, you know, he actually missed something because I found later on that there was –. One had to have the basis of the structure, the abstract structure, to make the forms work, but if you actually didn't engage the viewer in some sort of emotional response on a deep story level, then I just felt, you know, you were blocking off a certain part of what art had to give.

SM: That's interesting.

RF: So I really sort of based and I still would always base it on the first importance being the structure. And then, because I have such a love of process, then to sort of say, 'Well, be

experimental and find out. Have a dialogue with your materials'. That's what he used to say too. And that's suited me down to the ground as a printmaker.

SM: They must have been exciting times with that.

RF: It was.

SM: And what about Weaver Hawkins? He was very active.

RF: Oh yes, I knew Weaver Hawkins. Yes. I got to know him better when I came to work at the Workshop Art Centre with Joy Ewart, when she opened the lithography there. Now that was an interesting thing too because I met someone called Michael West. Did you ever hear of Michael West?

SM: No.

RF: OK. Michael West was an English architect, trained in England but he'd also studied lithography in England, and he came out here. He was only a short fellow. He was only a little bit over 5ft 3 or 4, something like that. And he was a very good printmaker. When we started with the lithography classes, and they were the first lithography classes in Sydney. They did have a press at East Sydney Tech then, but nobody was teaching lithography there. And if you wanted to learn lithography, like I did, and you went down to the Union place, they just said, 'There's no women that are allowed in the Printing Union'. So there was no chance there. And that's when I met Joy Ewart and she said, 'Just wait on. I'm going to start something. I'm going to start something at Willoughby'. So she started this lithography, and got this retired printer from the Lands Department. And she picked up these stones that were in a path that was being laid with the new University of New South Wales at Kensington. They had all these lithography stones down, making a pathway.

SM: Really?

RF: Yes, limestones. Nobody knew that they were so valuable and everything – old, thick. Anyhow, they were all brought back to the workshop and Rod Shaw, who I don't know – Rod Shaw was a friend of Michael West. Now the retired printmaker came in, and we had these stones, and we all learnt how to put asphalt – it was a grainy, dark powder. Anyway, that was put down and then it was moved around and around. So they just ground that down so you got a perfectly smooth surface. Now on those stones, there were also some old maps of Sydney. We should have at least taken an impression to find out what they were but we couldn't get to it fast enough. You see, there were only about four or five of us in the class. And when we got it all, we learnt how to do it properly. And, mind you, we had no trolleys or anything. We both lifted up these heavy stones and carried them from workbench. No wonder my back gave out. Anyway, we learnt how to get all these different surfaces and then to draw on them. And we were all mad with the abstraction so we did wonderful sort of slothy, gestural things. And this fellow thought he was wasting his time. As far as he was concerned, this was just something anyone could do, a child could do this. So he packed up and he went away. So Michael West took over the class there. And Joy Ewart, of course, had done lithography as had – I just said his name a minute ago. He was over in America.

SM: Not Hayter or one of those?

RF: No, no. His works in that show – there's a lot of his work in that show at the dynamic symmetry.

SM: Jay Hambidge, was it? Frank Hinder?

RF: Frank Hinder. That's right. Joy Ewart and Frank Hinder were the only two people I knew that made a name for themselves doing lithographs.

SM: That's right. Frank Hinder did quite a few of them, didn't he?

RF: He did. And he was very sort of encouraging to me because I loved lithography. I could see, you know, that the mark you make is the print you get. And like the rest of the other things where you had all these other processes of putting it in acid and then you cut out this and you put that on. As far as lithography, that was a draughtsman's, an artist's sort of direct way of making wonderful prints, especially with the different grain that you could get with the chalk or whether later on you used a wash. It just suited me down to the ground. So Frank Hinder and Joy Ewart, they were sort of the two people that knew about lithography. But Michael West, who had come from London, he took over the class and he was a very good teacher too. And he introduced me to Rod Shaw. He was a friend of Rod Shaw. I don't think that Michael West had any political affiliations.

SM: Rod Shaw certainly did, didn't he?

RF: But Rod Shaw certainly did. And he was part of the Shaw & Edwards printery that did all the catalogues for the Art Gallery of New South Wales. And they had this print workshop down at Sussex Street and for 10 shillings a week, I was able to go in there and use one of the rooms as a studio. And I went during the day, after I'd taken the children to school and kindergarten and dropped them. I think my youngest then was probably about five or something like that, or four. And then I'd go back and I'd work in the studio and I'd pick them up and then take them home. So this was a studio. But every morning when I'd come in to do my work there, I'd see Clem.

SM: Clem Meadmore or Millward?

RF: Millward. Clem Millward's paintings that he'd done at night. So he used it at night and I'd use it in the day. And that's where I did my first exhibition, working there. That's right. And I had that in a place called The Little Gallery, which was just above the Macquarie Galleries in Bligh Street, and it was run by an emigrant artist and his name –.

SM: I might have a catalogue here.

RF: I'm not sure. John Ogburn opened that show, and I have some photographs somewhere of the opening.

SM: So it was called The Little Gallery?

RF: That's right, it was The Little Gallery. And it would be on some of my things. Anyway, he was from –.

SM: 19-23 Bligh Street.

RF: That's right. And it was 1963.

SM: OK. He must have had another one in 65 as well.

RF: Now where's this from?

SM: That's from our file, from the Art Gallery [of New South Wales]. So that's another one there in '65.

RF: All the lithographs, and these are all the paintings. That's right. And they were all on hardboard.

SM: So that's at The Little Gallery as well. So who owned that gallery, Ruth?

RF: Yes, I'm just trying to think. By that time, there was quite a lot of emigrant people came into the arts from Lithuania, and they weren't Jewish artists,

SM: OK. Latvia as well.

RF: Latvia, all those. That's when they had the fisty fights that were going on because –.

SM: Uldis Abolins and Edgar Aavik.

RF: That's right. If they had disagreements about art, they'd jump up and the Jewish ones would call them fascists. Because the other Jewish artists came out in about the 40s, or the late 30s even, escaping from Hitler. And the others came out in the 50s and amongst them there were quite a lot of Nazis. When I say 'quite a lot', there were Nazis that got into this country, and they had even a neo-Nazi sort of movement going here. Now that brings me to another group that were active about that time and that was the School of Realist Art.

SM: SORA, that's right.

RF: And down at SORA, that was down near the Quay, that sort of – I can remember exactly speaking to someone there who looked the epitome of a Nazi – he had a bull neck and blond hair, a young fellow, and he was very sort of aggressive and –. It was really to do with figuration but it definitely had a sort of leaning, and it opened itself in the politics to someone who was not sort of in agreement, let's say, with a lot of those early Jewish artists that came out.

SM: That's interesting. Because SORA also had a strong left-leaning as well.

RF: It did.

SM: You had people like Bernard Smith that were very active in it.

RF: Absolutely.

SM: Noel Counihan and all those artists.

RF: That's right. Well, Bernard Smith once said to me, in the '70s, when I went to Sydney University to do a Fine Arts course – that was when [Gough] Whitlam came back, and he opened up the free university to seniors. I don't know whether to talk about it now because we're not really up there.

SM: No, you can.

RF: I had been writing reviews for the *Australian Jewish Times* for about ten years then. I took over from someone called George Berger.

SM: He was quite significant.

RF: He was.

SM: He was a great intellectual figure. Bernard Smith writes about him as being –.

RF: It's very interesting that you should say that because there's the other Berger from England.

SM: That's right.

RF: It wasn't him.

SM: No, but it was George.

RF: I knew George very well. George was married to Mimi Jaksic-Berger, and she was the wild Yugoslav. Somebody who didn't hang her paintings at the Ashfield show got their glasses taken off their face and smashed on the ground. I tell you, there were lots of things going on in the art world in those days. She was not Jewish, but she took exception greatly. She was very important in a way. She followed Henry Salkauskas in lyrical abstraction.

SM: Was Henry Salkauskas Jewish?

RF: No, he wasn't.

SM: So he's part of that group that –.

RF: That's right. Yes. But he was a very –.

SM: [Stanislaus] Rapotec and all the others.

RF: That's right. Now look, they were good blokes, they really were. I mean, whatever their background was in Europe, you didn't know anymore. But certainly here in Sydney, they were amongst the most creative, most forward artists. And by comparison to today, they were very, very interesting.

SM: So what did Bernard Smith say to you, you were saying?

RF: Yes, Bernard Smith said to me –. By that time I had been the secretary of the Sydney Printmakers for some time, when it was first formed. And Bernard Smith came and opened one of our shows, And always after it was opened, we usually went down to have dinner, all sitting around in one of these Lebanese cafes, down near the railway. And I said to him, you know, 'When I went to the classes at Sydney University, I was much older than a lot of the others and we went to the tutorials and it gave me a bit of a shock because of the way this guy in this tutorial said, "Well now, you can see here in Cézanne that his eyesight wasn't too good". That's because, you know, he was sort of searching. And this fellow was saying he couldn't see properly where to put his cubes, and analytical cubism. And I said, "You know, all those kids were coming directly from school. I had the experience to know that what he was saying was a load of rubbish".' I might not have been as forward as that to Bernard Smith or not, but I said to him that I thought that they were being taken for a ride. I said, 'That's not right, you know, to say that to those young students just coming from their final year of high school'. And Bernard Smith said, 'Oh, it doesn't matter. Communism has been swept under the carpet long enough'.

SM: Really?

RF: Yes, that's exactly what he said to me. Anyway, I have lots to sort of thank Bernard Smith for because he gave me a prize in the Hunters Hill for one of my works that I had which was based on a certain photographic technique that I developed. It could be printed in black and white on canvas. They were quite large works. A friend of mine, who was a

photographer, did it in his studio. I got a whole roll of this from Germany. I tried to do it myself first and I couldn't get a good print so I imported a whole roll of this from Germany. And I had a big exhibition at the Bonython Gallery of them and they were printed on sensitised canvas and then I painted over the canvas with automobile spray paints. And they were really very good. A lot of them won prizes. And Bernard Smith –. That was Bonython's.

SM: I saw the catalogue to that here. And Bernard Smith gave a prize.

RF: Yes. He gave me a prize at some other –. I used those works for different things like –.

SM: Was that at the Bonython in 1973?

RF: I would say.

SM: And there's – that's that image of you.

RF: That's right. And there I am spraying through this metallic spray, this pattern you see, and metal. I got that from my husband's engineering workshop.

SM: And so the paintings were –.

RF: They were paintings on black-and-white photographs. I used to reduce the photographs to just be a ghost photograph. Then I would use the spray over these stencil things, and I could make works that were much, much bigger than what I could print. And I did. Anyway, I had a real –.

SM: So it's actually a printing process on canvas.

RF: That's right.

SM: And then worked over it.

RF: Yes.

SM: That's very interesting.

RF: And I remember someone coming along, a couple of young girls together, and they were looking at these works and one of them said – she didn't know it was me that was standing next to her – she said, 'She's done it. She's got these prints on sensitised canvas'. So it was a real sort of first again, for me.

SM: And have you seen any of those around? Have you seen any of those recently? I wonder where they all ended up.

RF: One of them is the one that Bernard Smith gave me the prize for.

SM: So it must be –.

RF: In the Hunters Hill and then he bought it. And when I went in to see about doing this course when Whitlam started all these free courses, you know, for seniors. And I went in and I had to sort of be interviewed. So I said to him, I said, 'Look'. He said, 'Why do you want to do this?' I said, 'Well, in fact, I haven't got any letters or anything after my name. I don't really know if I've got the qualifications to even go to university'. So he said, 'Don't you?' I said, 'Well, you know, I want to because I'm writing reviews now for the *Australian Jewish Times* and I've been doing that for awhile. I have no qualifications'. So he just sort of went

like that, and he showed me where he had this work hung in his office. He said, 'You don't have to worry. That's your qualification'.

SM: That's very nice, isn't it?

RF: That was really nice.

SM: Now what about —. In the last time, we just got to when you moved from Coogee to Castle Cove. How did that happen?

RF: Well, it really just happened because we were going to put a second storey on the little house that we had at Castle Cove.

SM: At Coogee?

RF: At Coogee. That's right. That was just built after the war. And there was a limitation of 11 squares on houses that were built after the war. So we were going to put a second storey on that. My husband had had his business established then in Alexandria. I had the two children who grew up there, and they had a wonderful time crawling around the rocks and everything. But we needed to have more space. I had my studio that I'd fixed up in the back, where I had a vegetable garden and I had the garage, so I had alright. But we went with some really interesting architects of that period, that someone had introduced me to. Anyway, the long and short of it was that, when it went to council, there were complaints from the neighbours because they were going to have their view of the expansive ocean interrupted. So I said, 'I don't feel as if I want to go on living here and having this'. So my husband said to me, 'Well, why don't you see anyway if you can find a place where we can move to while the building is going on if we get these plans through'. So that's when I came across to the North Shore and Headland Road. Castle Cove and that area was just starting to open up. So I found this place then, and the fellow who was the architect, a young architect, he later became head of the architecture school. So I must have some good — I've always had good feeling for architecture and real estate. So I came back and said, 'Look, there's something there that I think, you know, we ought to sort of think about buying, and selling up here'. So that's how we moved over there. And that, of course, brought me into contact then with the Joy Ewart workshop.

SM: Were there other artists living around there at that time?

RF: Yes.

SM: Was there Edmund Harvey or —.

RF: No, no, no. That whole group of them were living over at Lane Cove. My dear old friend he lived forever.

SM: Not Lloyd Rees?

RF: Yes. Lloyd Rees and Guy Warren. And that whole sort of group there. And the Artarmon Galleries. [John] Brackenreg had the Artarmon Galleries, which the son and daughter have now.

SM: Well, Brackenreg was quite important, wasn't he?

RF: He was at that time. Now, today, it is so difficult to park there. But at one time, it was a wonderful place to go. It was a huge place. And people have stayed with them like —.

SM: They've got quite a few of their stable.

RF: That's right. They have, yes. And they do seem to make some sales because I had a show there about four years ago and they even sold some of the digital works that I had.

SM: So there was a good circle of artists there.

RF: That's right.

SM: So that brought you in contact with all those – basically artists living here on the North Shore and working here.

RF: That's right.

SM: Cameron Sparks, he was there.

RF: Cameron Sparks and Tom Thompson, that's who I was thinking of. And they were also linked up, of course, with East Sydney Tech because I went to East Sydney Tech then, after I'd been to Orban, because I thought I might be missing something. And they had part-time classes then. I'm not sure if they have now. But some of the teachers that I had at East Sydney Tech are now amongst the most famous artists. It was quite incredible. I mean, there was Wallace Thornton, and there was –.

SM: [John] Passmore. Was he there then?

RF: No. Passmore wasn't there.

SM: Godfrey Miller?

RF: Godfrey Miller. Now Godfrey Miller was a real sort of character. I went to him for still-life painting. And it was Peter Laverty that told me, you know, that Godfrey Miller would come in and he'd have on – well, I saw him those days too – he had on this white coat like a cotton duck or something, and a Globite case and a panama hat. And that's how he'd come to work at Tech. And Peter Laverty told me – he said, 'Well, that Globite case, I saw him open it once, and it had all these nicely sharpened pencils in it, and it had all these apple cores'. Anyhow, Godfrey Miller would sit in the back of other people's classes sometimes, and he'd do all these drawings, wonderful drawings, all of the figure. I actually bought one and gave it to my daughter. She's got it but it's in a retrospective that they had. I've got a catalogue on that.

SM: At the Art Gallery [of New South Wales] most probably.

RF: No, it wasn't at the Art Gallery. It was at COFA.

SM: That's right. They did have one at COFA. So you moved then to Castle Hill.

RF: That's right. And then to Castle Cove.

SM: Castle Cove, I mean.

RF: And George Berger gave up – I think he had an argument with them at the *Australian Jewish Times*. And they asked me. By then he had written about me in the *Jewish Times* and my sort of involvement in the arts. And they asked me would I like to take over doing the art reviews. So that's how I started to do the art reviews. He dropped out and I came and took over. And that brought me into a lot more contact –.

SM: With all the galleries. You would have had to be going –.

RF: Where the national galleries. I went down to Canberra. And I belonged to the Art Critics Association, and I went to their conventions and that was wonderful. Met all the people from overseas. I was absolutely very well sort of educated by then, probably better than if I'd done an arts course.

SM: Yes, absolutely.

RF: I knew exactly what was going on.

SM: Yes, and you would have been going to all the commercial galleries to see what was on.

RF: That's right. I used to take the car and the dog, and I'd have a portable typewriter, and I'd usually do all the galleries in one day. And then I'd come and sit out – I only had about that much space, perhaps a little bit more. There were photographs and things like that. But I had to sort of find a way to do reviews. And I've got two or three books, scrapbooks down there with all the things that I've cut out, or did you take them?

SM: I took those.

RF: You took those, yes. So I thought, 'How am I going to –?'. I was always good at writing. Actually thought that I was going to be a writer when I was young, but then I didn't know what to write about so I had to be an artist instead. And then I found out that I could write about art. But I thought, 'How am I going to approach this?' Especially, you know, because there's not always any story content in those shows I was looking at. And I thought, 'I'll read the music reviews and find out how they write music, about music', because that's what I thought was the closest. So that's how I sort of developed an attitude to be able to write about abstract art and its relationship to music.

SM: That's interesting.

RF: Yes. I was sort of intelligent enough to know what I didn't know and how I could –.

SM: Could learn it or find something.

RF: But I always considered that writing reviews – I didn't consider myself an art critic so much as an art reviewer. And I thought what I wanted to do was to make a bridge between the artwork and the people that would be reading that sort of magazine, you know.

SM: That's right. So you wouldn't be –.

RF: That's right. I wasn't writing for the academics.

SM: And who else was – James Gleeson most probably was writing at that time.

RF: Absolutely.

SM: And writing criticism as well.

RF: And I'll tell you something else I remember. I was called into a meeting, then we were all introduced to Edmund Capon when he first arrived.

SM: '78.

RF: That's right. And we were sitting there and everybody was making notes, and I was, and asking questions. And someone said to him, 'What do you think about the Archibald [Prize]?' And so he said, 'The what?' So they said, 'Well, you know, about the Archibald, it gets so many people in'. He said, 'It's anachronistic'. But he soon changed his mind when he found out all the money that it had earned.

SM: How funny. And Nancy Borlase would have been –.

RF: Nancy Borlase was actually someone who I admired her work enormously. And she had a lot of influence on those first paintings that I had that John Ogden opened to show. I loved the way that she was so sort of full of rhythm. And I was just going sailing in that period. We had bought a sailing boat and I loved the actual experience of sailing. And this was something that I used.

SM: Wonderful.

RF: But I think George Berger was the only one that bought a painting out of that whole show.

SM: Really? So that's the first show at The Little Gallery?

RF: That's right.

SM: In those early days after Orban, I mean, you didn't do any study with –. Was John Olsen there? Did you have much to do with John Olsen in that time?

RF: Yes. I had John Olsen. When I came back after I was married, we moved back to Sydney, I went to John Olsen's class first. That was before he opened it, the Bakery [Art School]. And he was there, and I used to go once a week. And I've got a story that's written up there, where we came in one morning, and he would sort of do a sort of talk like Orban would quite often do too, and which I do too with students, to sort of set a different sort of – what could say? Mood. From coming in from outside to set it about creation and art. John Olsen was talking about Passmore. And he said, 'I don't know what I can say to you about Passmore that could do him justice', and his eyes filled with tears, and everybody sort of got a shock. So we all very quietly sort of just picked up our things and went to our easels. But John, I thanked him years later. I said, 'It was marvellous'. I was having a show then at Stadia Graphics and he bought one of my prints. Now he bought it at the opening but I don't think he came in to pay for it and take it away.

SM: He didn't?

RF: No, I don't think so. I think he wanted the show look as if there was a red spot on it. Look, I could be wrong. But anyway he definitely bought it at the opening, but he definitely didn't take it away at the end of the show. But I remember saying to him later, I said, 'John, you were a marvellous teacher. You sent me off into orbit with the things you would talk about', and he said, 'That's because you could fly'.

SM: That's very nice.

RF: That's right. And I have a book of his here, and it's his graphics, and I bought it and I got him to inscribe it, and it says, 'To Ruth whose prints can teach us a great deal', something like that. He was a most generous man.

SM: That's great. So that first show at The Little Gallery, and then '63, that was, wasn't it?

RF: I've got here: Exhibitions, 1964–1978, 15 solo shows.

SM: Now what's this one here, Ruth? The Ben Uri Gallery.

RF: That was important.

SM: That's in '65. *Lithographs and Etchings [by Ruth Faerber]*.

RF: Yes, now that's down in Melbourne. After I had the little show, this was run by a rabbi that was not active as a rabbi in those days: Saul Gore. He moved to Israel later, but he'd opened this little gallery, this gallery, the Ben Uri Gallery in Melbourne. And Ursula Hoff had just come out from England to take up her position with the Victorian Art Gallery [National Gallery of Victoria] in the Graphics Department. She had worked – she'd come from Germany, I think.

SM: She had, and then she was at the Courtauld Institute or something like that, I think.

RF: Yes. She was in England working there.

SM: Yeah.

RF: I thought it was the Victoria and Albert.

SM: Could have been. But then she came and she worked for some women's college, I think, maybe at the university or something like that, before she was taken to the uni.

RF: I see. Well, she was at the gallery when this show was on. And I can remember that he rang up. Saul rang me, the show was still on, and he said, 'Are you sitting down?' I said, 'Yes, why?' He said, 'Because I don't want you to fall over backwards'. I said, 'Why should I?' He said, 'Well, Ursula Hoff's just come in and bought one of your prints for the Victorian Gallery'.

SM: That's interesting.

RF: I think he was the one that would have fallen over.

SM: It's marked here. *Papyrus*. One of your etchings.

RF: That's right. It was a long, narrow one.

SM: That's wonderful. So that's most probably the first work of yours to go into a public collection.

RF: Well, I think it's the second. The first one was from the Art Gallery of New South Wales, [Hal] Missingham. That was the *Figures in the night*.

SM: OK. That was earlier, yes.

RF: And that was just earlier. And on the basis of those two, that's when I saw this advertisement for the scholarship in the Pratt Center in New York, which of course I'd read about, you know, quite a lot because printmaking in the 70s had really taken off, or the 60s had taken off there. There was [Ken Tyler of Tyler Graphics].

SM: That's right.

RF: Did I show a photograph of him? I've got a photograph here.

SM: You might have here it.

RF: No, it's somewhere here. It might be down there then. Anyway, I had —. The Print Council of Australia had opened then, I think.

SM: I think so.

RF: Anyway, I applied. I saw this advertisement in the American Library, which was in George Street. It was where the bank was or is now. And I can remember it was only put up during the war and it was still operative there. And I was looking through the *New York Times* or something in there and I saw this advertisement for scholarships, monitor scholarships. So on the basis of having those two gallery ...

SM: Exhibitions?

RF: Not exhibitions so much, purchases. Then I wrote that up in my biography, and there wasn't much else really, a few other little things. And then I sent away some photographs or artworks, I'm not sure. Anyway, I got the scholarship. I was most surprised. It was a six-month monitor scholarship. I had to get myself over there, and I had to donate a certain amount of my time during the week to run messages or whatever they wanted you to do. But in return for that, I was able to work for the rest of the week there. So by that time, I hadn't said a word to my family, but when I got that scholarship, I sort of said, 'Look what I've got, and I'd like to go, please'. Oh, there were Jewish families —. Do you know anything about Jewish families?

SM: Yes, I do.

RF: 'How can you leave your family?' My sister says, 'You can't go away and leave your children'. I said, 'My daughter's 19 now. I've stuck at my post long enough. I have to go'. And so, in the end, they said, 'Well, alright, but only for three months, not six'. So that's what I did. I went over there, and I had an absolute wonderful time.

SM: So where was it at? In what city?

RF: That was in the Pratt Center for Contemporary Printmaking, was in the actual New York shopping area. It was in the building. But the Pratt Center itself was over in Brooklyn. So I arrived there about ten days too early. They were still on holidays. So I rang up and they said, 'Well, would you like to come over and you can work here in the office and do some things, address some envelopes or something?' I said, 'Oh yes, I'd love to do that'. So I went over to Brooklyn first. And then there was quite well-known people since then, have been teaching over and had their works published in the Pratt Center in Manhattan. It was right in the centre of Manhattan.

SM: Had you been to New York before? You'd been to America before, when you went.

RF: Yes, I had. And I'd been to New York but never on my own. So this time I had the address of an aunt from my husband and she was in Queens, I think it's called. And I went over and stayed with her first. And then I found myself accommodation that was in the vicinity of where the Pratt Center was. There's a university just down at the bottom. Gee, I'd have to look up the address. And I got myself a room there in this building. And I took classes in the new school as well, which was a very famous place from years back. But I

only went there, I think, for the first few weeks, and then I just concentrated on going to all the galleries that were on. And what I saw was absolutely amazing. I mean, there was –. Art & Technology was just being formed then as a group. That [Robert] Rauschenberg. And there were exhibitions where you went and you clapped your hands and pictures came on the wall and it was just things, you know, that I'd never ever thought about was going on. New York was an absolutely vital place. And as far as the teaching was concerned, at the Pratt, that's where I was introduced to using the photographic image. So I did some – quite a lot of work there. And I had a big folder, and I brought it back, and some of that work is down at the National Gallery [of Australia] in Canberra and some is also in the Tasmanian [Museum and Art] Gallery. I was just thinking the other day, when I got on my Kindle, because I saw an ad that Leonard Cohen was going to be coming here in October. I remember seeing him in New York when I was there, doing a performance. He was a poet, if you've ever heard of him.

SM: Yes, I have.

RF: Yes. And I used his face out of the newspaper into one of my prints, which is now down in – I think it's the Hobart – no, it's the Launceston Gallery [Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery], they bought it. But it's also in quite – it's in the National Gallery in Canberra, I think. Now, I'd have thrown most of that stuff in the garbage because, as far as I was concerned, I didn't come to be at all important until I did the cast paperworks. But when I started to donate my works through these people that I met that started out here – art consultants – anyway, they made a list of all my works, took photographs and everything, and we started first with the National Gallery down in Canberra. And they just took 60 of all of those early prints. And I thought, 'How amazing'. I've kept them all these years.

SM: It's great that you've kept them.

RF: It's amazing really. I think I've always been egotistical. No, it's really not so much egotistical; it's like you love your children. But I thought some of them were quite interesting. But I never thought they would be worth a brazoo. But, historically, I was the only person, the only female, that was having one-person shows of prints, lithograph prints. And they were nearly all lithographs, you see. There were some etchings there, but mostly they were lithographs. But they sent back –. This was, what's his name?

SM: James Mollison?

RF: No.

SM: Roger Butler?

RF: Roger Butler was the one that shows them. And then he sent the director of the Burnie [Regional Art] Gallery to me because he told her that he thinks the 'paperworks' belong in Tasmania. So they took 30-odd of them. So they're in Tasmania.

SM: That's good. So there's a good collection.

RF: So the prints are all in some –.

SM: Public collection.

RF: Public collections.

SM: So when you went to the States for this, were your parents still alive then?

RF: Oh yes. They were and they helped a lot, you know. But I mean, the children weren't children anymore.

SM: No, they were grown up.

RF: They were grown up. I mean –.

SM: They were most probably glad to get you out of the house.

RF: Absolutely.

SM: At that age, they don't want their parents around.

RF: That's right. And my husband, I mean, you didn't see –.

SM: I saw the obituary.

RF: That's right. Well, he was a bit like I was, only he was like that, an artist engineer. And he would be away for three months sometimes at a time. And that's another reason why I felt that I had utilised that time to develop my own work, and now I wanted to get the benefit from it. And he didn't mind at all. But then, you see, I left a dog too. Then they had to go away somewhere or something, so he put the dog in a home. He had no compunction about it, sort of doing anything so as long it didn't interfere with his business. Anyway, we had really a very good marriage. When I think about it now, I mean, both of us.

SM: You must have been grumpy about the dog being put into a home.

RF: I was. I thought, 'I've left that dog to be looked after in your care'. And he just put the dog in a home until I came back.

SM: Well, I think we should leave it there because that's a good spot to break.

[End]

Interview on 29 October 2013

SM: Now Ruth, last time we talked quite a bit about your time at the Pratt Institute in New York. And we talked a little bit about Joy Ewart and the Workshop Art Centre, but we really didn't talk much about Joy. What was she like? Because I told you we've got her archive but we don't have many reminiscences of Joy herself.

RF: I met her first at a party at my sister's place in Lane Cove. My sister then was teaching her children's class in the original studio she had at the Chatswood Railway Station, that was where she had an original studio and she had children's classes there. And then they moved over to Willoughby. And then Naomi came up to Willoughby – that's Naomi, my sister – and she put on a party for Joy because Joy had been away on a Fulbright scholarship, and she came to Naomi's place, and a lot of other people that now, you know, were the nucleus of the Workshop Art Centre at Willoughby came. And Joy was going to have all these plans for setting up the Printmaking Centre because that is what she had researched when she was over in America. So I went up to her and I was introduced and I said, 'You know, I've been trying to find somewhere to learn lithography here in Sydney. My parents brought me back a poster, and it had this technique that was like original crayon drawing on rough paper but it wasn't on rough paper. And it was a lithograph and I fell in love with it. I looked everywhere and they don't even teach it at the Sydney Tech'. So I said to someone and they

said, 'Oh, they've got a union where you can learn lithography.' And I looked this up and it was down at the – where down where they've got – Darling Harbour. It was down that area. And this was like a long –. I went up there. I found the address and I went there. It was like a long sort of tin shed with a roof on it.

SM: Like a work shed.

RF: Like a workshop. Anyhow, I knocked on the front door, and this man came out and he had his apron, and I said, 'Excuse me, I'm interested in lithography and I was wondering if I could come here and learn lithography'. And he said to me, 'Oh no, you couldn't come here'. I said 'Why not?' He said, 'Because this is only for the unions. They come here'. I said, 'Well, I'll join the union'. And he said, 'No, you can't join the union. Women aren't allowed in the printers union'. But he said, 'As you are here now, I'll show you around'. So I said, 'Oh alright'. I mean, I was probably about 26 or 27 then, and I was pretty good looking, you know, sort of nice waist and hips and everything. Anyhow, I followed behind him, and here were all these apprentices with their eyes nearly popping out of their heads to see a female following him down. My head was screwing from left to right, watching all the presses and everything. And in no time I was at the end of this sort of long sort of contraption of a building, and he opened the door and said, 'Well, goodbye', and I stepped out and that was it. So that was the only time I ever saw anybody sort of making a lithograph. But there was somebody that was attached to the workshop then called Michael West, and he was an architect. And he said to me that he had learnt lithography when he was in England. He was an Englishman. He came from England. And in the Slade – he went to the Slade [School of Fine Art] in London. And he explained to me. Anyway, Joy then set about getting the workshop set up for lithography at Willoughby.

SM: Did it do other printmaking as well or mainly just lithography?

RF: No, no. There was all other printmaking. But lithography was not taught anywhere else, whereas all the others were, you see. Even the silk screen, which was a fairly new addition as far as a printmaking technique was concerned, that was taught at other places. And it was really, you know, the lithography that was more or less – more aesthetic of all the printmaking, if I may say so, because it was so direct. Etching you had to sort of have a whole sort of setup of doing the plate and then putting it in the acid, and with silk screen you had to cut up all the different sort of stencils, but with lithography, all you had to do –.

SM: Straight onto a stone.

RF: You drew onto the stone, and then you just wiped it over to desensitise it, and the mark you make is the mark you printed. So Joy got this –. There was no manufacturer of any presses here, but there was an old press that we heard about through the printer, Rod Shaw. He was also an artist but, Rod and [Richard (Dick)] Edwards, they were the people that did all the catalogues for the Art Gallery of New South Wales then. I'm talking about 1962. And he was a friend of Michael West. And from Michael West he heard that they were going to set up this lithography, but they couldn't get a press from anywhere. And he heard, you know, that there was a press that was going to be thrown into Sydney Harbour. So I don't know what on earth –. You know, they thought they were going to get rid of it just by tossing it in Sydney Harbour. You wouldn't be able to do it these days, but then apparently you take something out in a boat or something and tip it over. Anyway, he made the arrangements, and we got the press down at the workshop. We got it installed, and Joy got a retired printer who was working at the Lands Department to come in and teach us. And we had all these stones that were being used to make a path at the new university.

SM: New South Wales, wasn't it?

RF: Yes, New South Wales. And they didn't know. They thought they'd found some stones somewhere so they used them, and they were the litho drawing stones you see. So Rod Shaw arranged for all those to come back to us. And we had a levigator. That was an instrument with a sort of handle, and you put carbo on top of the stones, and water, and you went like crazy and you took everything off, you know, that was on there, and then you could draw on the stones. And we had the press, and we could start printing. But in any case, there was some maps that were on there, early maps, and we were so keen to do our own drawings, we wiped them off. These days we should have printed them at least. Anyway, away they went. And he showed us, the retired printer, how to make it with the crayons, and to sensitise it with the glue, and then have printed. The only problem was we were all sort of involved in abstract art then, and gestural marks. I think there was finally about four of us altogether, and we went sort of quite mad. Or at least I did anyway; I can't remember exactly about the others. But I went quite mad, you know, with all the gestural marks, and I thought I was expressing myself wonderfully, but as far as this retired printer was concerned, he thought any child could do that and he was wasting his time. So he didn't stay very long; he just gave in his retirement. And then Michael West became the teacher. So Michael was really the person. We got books from the library about lithography, and Michael knew the fundamentals, but we went through all sorts of different things that we were making.

SM: And is this at the same time as the Sydney Printmakers was being founded?

RF: It was very shortly after that because it was a period in graphic arts in Sydney –. Melbourne had already sort of had an impetus that came from Ursula Hoff, who came to the gallery there. She was from Germany. She was a Jewish refugee actually, highly qualified. And it was this emigrant sort of art invasion that made such a difference to printmaking and graphic arts, because they had such a strong tradition behind them.

SM: So, in Sydney, who would have been the emigrant artists that were involved?

RF: Henry Salkauskas.

SM: Of course.

RF: Eva Kubbos. Victor [Vaclovas] Ratas.

SM: That's right. Didn't you have a show with Vytautas Serelis?

RF: Yeah. I think he was a painter though. But Henry Salkauskas and Eva Kubbos were also sort of very strong watercolourists. But Ratas, I'm not sure.

SM: And Maximilian Feuerring?

RF: Feuerring was more a painter than a graphic artist. But he was one of those that came out. They were escaping the Nazis. Actually, there was one big immigration of those people that came out in the late 1930s, just before the war broke out. They managed to escape. Who was that fellow who was from the Bauhaus? He was teaching.

SM: [Ludwig] Hirschfeld-Mack.

RF: That's right. They were all put into Hay, in the concentration camps there.

SM: I was looking at your catalogues and you have an early show, not one of your first, but in the 70s. In '75, a show at the Macquarie Galleries with three other printmakers: Geoffrey Brown, Brian Dunlop and Helen Geier.

RF: Now that was upstairs. They put a certain gallery space available there.

SM: Was that Mary Turner at the gallery then?

RF: That was Mary Turner. Or was it – no, it wasn't Mary Turner. Mary Turner was in the – sorry, you're saying the Macquarie Gallery?

SM: The Macquarie Galleries, yeah.

RF: Yes. I'm sorry. I got mixed up. I was thinking of the Bonython.

SM: Bonython.

RF: Yes, the Macquarie Galleries, that was Mary Turner. And I don't remember then who I showed with.

SM: And then in the following year, you seem to have lots of these shows. Bonython was in the following year, with Louis James.

RF: That's right. This was all big stuff then. I mean, Louis James was an important artist. I wasn't. I was just sort of coming up. But I was the only woman really that had had a solo show of lithographs, because lithographs were physically demanding to do. Especially, you know, before you started using the aluminium plates. You used to carry these heavy stones. Michael West was only a small fellow and he'd get one end of a stone and I'd get the other. We didn't have really the right equipment. We didn't think about our backs or anything in those days. We just heaved these stones around, from the bed with the water and the carborundum and then we put it on the drawing bench and then we put it on the bench, on the press. We did it all, you know, without worrying.

SM: You wouldn't do it these days because they're so heavy.

RF: No, absolutely not. And, of course, I paid for it later. Back got absolutely ruined. And it wasn't only that, I mean there's bending over too.

SM: I was just going over what we –.

RF: Now, that gallery that I was thinking about.

SM: That you had the first show of lithographs.

RF: No, I was thinking about that special gallery, not sure if that was the first one or not, but I don't think. No, The Little Gallery was the first show. I started showing the lithographs and the few etchings I'd done with Betty Rooney, Elizabeth Rooney – she was teaching at the workshop – together with some paintings that I'd been doing. They were a series of works in acrylics – they were the new paints of the time – and they were on masonite boards.

SM: But when did you –? Because I noticed in the 60s, in your shows, you're still having paintings but the exhibitions are tending to become mostly prints, with six or seven paintings.

RF: That's right. Because I didn't sell the paintings very much, but I sold the prints.

SM: OK.

RF: So people then were interested in exhibiting the prints more. And I went to have an early show with Stadia Graphics. They were a specialist print gallery, and there wasn't much in the way of specialist print galleries.

SM: No, they must have been one of the first.

RF: They were. And her brother was in Paris and he used to send out folios of French –.

SM: Yes, he did, and they had lots of modern masters.

RF: They did.

SM: Matisse and Picasso.

RF: But this gallery that was in Bonython's was one upstairs, and it was opened by the wife of Laurie Thomas. Now, whatever her name was. She [Bronwyn Thomas, nee Yeates] ran that gallery at Bonython.

SM: That's right. And her son is working at the Art Gallery of New South Wales now.

RF: Oh no. Isn't that amazing.

SM: It's a small world. So she was Laurie Thomas's –. I think she might be living up in Brisbane now or up on the North Coast.

RF: That's right. He went up there.

SM: That's right. And her son is now working at the Gallery, and he was one of John Olsen's first students at the Bakery or whatever that school that Olsen had.

RF: That's right.

SM: So it's all so interconnected, isn't it?

RF: Well, you see, there wasn't really that many that survived amongst the avant-garde. They might have sort of opened up a gallery but then they sort of –.

SM: Petered out.

RF: Yes, petered out. But there was Orban's. That was the three Os. They became Olsen and Orban and Ogburn. Now someone only told me the other day that there's a show that has been put together, it's finished now, that's called *The Three Os*. And it's of their work, and it's out at some gallery [Harrington Street Gallery] that John Ogburn set up when he was alive. I think that's near Sydney University, out that way.

SM: It's in Chippendale most probably, in that little gallery.

RF: Not The Shed or something like that?

SM: No. The first public housing in Sydney. There's that block – is it called Strickland or Strickfield – 1920s block. And John Ogburn had a little gallery in the corner there. I wonder if it wasn't there?

RF: I went out there once and I'm sure that's where it is because I'm still in touch with one of the girls. He died a few years ago, but they've kept it going as an artist cooperative. Anyway,

there's this show of the three Os. I was talking to her on the phone just the other day, I haven't spoken to her for ages. And I said, 'I'd love to have seen it' but of course I'm not driving now. Anyway, it's just about finished when I spoke to her. It's going to the Orange Gallery. It's going to the regional gallery.

SM: So out of all those gallery dealers, what were they like to deal with? Because you obviously had – you dealt with Kim Bonython, Lin Bloomfield?

RF: That's right.

SM: Mary Turner.

RF: And the Art of Man Gallery.

SM: The Art of Man.

RF: That was Robert Ypes. I still get telephone calls from him every now and again from Holland.

SM: And what were they like? Were some of them easier to deal with than others? Or did you have a good experience dealing with commercial galleries?

RF: You know, I didn't find myself feeling that I was missing opportunities because I was a woman, but I think probably if it was going on, I didn't bother to give it two minutes thought. I know that I thought it was a bit ridiculous that they had women shows, but I put some work in it, you know, down in Adelaide. And women's shows and things like this –. Because as far as I was concerned, it was whether the work was good or not, not whether it was done by a man or a woman. But there was a sort of feeling amongst the forward-looking women that I knew from that time of doing work that was closely akin to the male work that was being done. Whereas later on it became –. With the Craft Centre [Crafts Councils Centre Gallery] being established down near the Rocks, that was a very big gallery there, and it made a lot of sort of propaganda for women's crafts. And then, you know, there was another sort of segment of art altogether that flourished that didn't flourish earlier, or, if it did, nobody took any notice of it earlier, but they started to take notice of it in the 70s and the 80s and the 90s.

SM: And did that change the way that you worked as well, do you think?

RF: No.

SM: Did that have an impact on your work?

RF: No, it didn't really. But I utilised the possibility that they thought papermaking was a craft.

SM: So it was quite useful for that.

RF: So I used them.

SM: Was it in the early 80s when you started making the pulp works? Was that about that time?

RF: Yeah. That was 1980.

SM: OK. And you had your first show around – at the Art of Man, I think, wasn't it?

RF: Yes. And I had gone to the workshop that I saw advertised because this was in Tasmania and I thought that'd be good.

SM: What were they advertising?

RF: Papermaking. And I thought that would be good. I was doing lithographs and relief prints then. And the imported paper was quite expensive and it wasn't always available. And then, you know, I was limited, you know, by size sometimes or shape. And I thought that'd be good; I could learn to make my own paper to print my lithographs on. But when I went down there to the workshop, it was a Christmas workshop when the school, up on top of the hill at Hobart, the art school there. I don't know what that was called; the Tasmanian Art School, I suppose [Tasmanian School of Art]. I'll tell you who was responsible. Rod, he was the head of the Tasmanian Art School and he was a very important person and I can't remember his last name. Because he –.

SM: Not Rod Milgate or something?

RF: No, no. It wasn't Rod Milgate. Rod Ewing – was there a Rod Ewing? I don't think he ever made a big mark for himself as an artist, but he was the one that set up the Jabberwock Mill there for artists and brought out Tim Payne from America to teach us.

SM: So that mill was mainly for artists to make paper.

RF: That's right.

SM: Didn't make commercial paper?

RF: No. It might have at later times but it was associated with the art school. And I saw that advertisement for a workshop, and I thought, 'I'll go there and then I don't have to buy paper. I can make my own'. And I could still do my lithographs and my relief prints, as I used to do on a relief press. Anyhow, when I got down there, and it was about a week-long workshop or something like that, I had, by chance really it was – yes, it really was a mistake – I made a sheet of paper learning to lay it down, but as I laid it down, I didn't get it flat so it made a shape, and for some reason or other I left it to dry in that shape. And when I saw it, I thought, 'How interesting', and that's when I got the idea that, in fact, I could make artworks not on paper but in paper. And that's when I came back, you know, and I made an arrangement then to hire out the mill, and to go down, and I did that whole exhibition for the Art of Man Gallery. I told him what I was interested in doing, and he sounded, you know, interested. I got them to send back some of the work that I'd done down there, and I carried some back myself. But they had two juniors working with me, and I was doing huge works then because they had big troughs and everything and drying things. So I could do a major thing there. And I also made some small ones at home that I could manage in my studio, and I had this big exhibition, which is really a landmark because nobody had seen stuff like that.

SM: So that first show, when you were making those works, were you just –? Because later, you kind of poured the paper pulp into moulds, didn't you?

RF: Yeah.

SM: Did you use moulds for that first show?

RF: No. I used sheets of paper. And then I made sheets of paper that had cut-out foam in between and pressed the two sheets of paper together. That was the next stage. And so I had a relief that came out. Then I thought to myself, 'Oh, you don't have to leave the foam in

there. All you've got to do is put the foam together on a backing and make a bas-relief and put the paper over it'. So I went step by step by step over the years, and each one I came out. First of all, I always got the off-cuts from my framer. So they were going to throw it in the rubbish bin anyway. And the off-cuts were of the acid-free mount board. So I was able to make my pulp from all the off-cuts. It didn't cost me anything at all. And they were happy to give it to me. And so, it was white or cream, and I always made the works then in white when I pressed it and dried it. And I came in one day, and there was light coming through the window, and it cast a shadow from where the relief was. And I thought, 'That's interesting. It would be good if I could make a shadow there and it would never go away. It would be a shadow'. And then I decided: I don't want to paint it with a brush because that would disturb it, so I'll spray it on. So after some experimentation, I used car enamel spray because I used it instead of using something that I mixed up and put into a spray gun and mixed it with each one. All I had to do was to buy all these car enamels. So I had a whole sort of palette of these mostly earth colours. And I could control that very well. I had to have a little bit of experimentation to do it from the side. And I found that I could cast everything in white, but I could make the colour in whatever colour I liked. And I could spray from different angles and I could get it darker or lighter, but I got this sort of very soft transition of tone with the spray that I never could have got with a brush. And what I saw there, when I used the earth tones, was something that looked like stone. And I'd always been absolutely involved with stone and excavations and archaeology and [Carl] Jung and the whole thing about the sense of symbolism through sort of people like the Aborigines that carved into stone. Did they carve into stone?

SM: They did, yes.

RF: And then they drew on rocks. And so I stayed with this for ages then.

SM: Because you called some of those works 'archetypal images'.

RF: That's right. I started to do more and more research, and I found that there was a really sort of interesting thing insofar as there was symbolisms that were used in different parts of the world where the people had never had any contact with each other. So there was a Jungian sort of basic response to form. And I loved all that, so I read all about that. That served me very well for about ten years until my back gave out. And that's when I sort of couldn't do it. In the meantime, I got a lot of response to those works. I won a lot of prizes. I got sort of into a lot of important collections, and they went overseas and I went overseas and I went to —. I was also writing for the *Australian Jewish Times* doing art reviews then. So I had a lot of travelling and that took me to different places too. But I sometimes just went to places like the —. *Pompeii* came out of going to Pompeii. And that would sort of give me enough material. I'd sketch. I'd go to the different museums and I'd see all very ancient stuff. And that is what you've got in the —.

SM: In the reviews there.

RF: Yes. And the book, the scrapbook.

SM: That's right. But in terms of when you were talking about colouring them, did you add colour actually into the pulp at any time as well? Or you always kept the pulp either that white or cream colour?

RF: No. I was interested when I saw the English artist — 'pool' series by David Hockney. So I saw about those and they were great. But he had a whole bevy of people working for him, and they made all sorts of sort of metal containment areas, and he poured the pulp in. And I thought, 'Well, I couldn't sort of see myself organising it'. You know, employing people like that. But, from a woman's point of view, I could make it work if I got foam, and I cut the foam

so I had walls, and I took pieces out like a pattern, making a pattern for dressmaking. So that's when I did that whole series. I went down to Tasmania, and I got them to sort of work with me down there. By that time, they had closed the mill, I think, and it was down at the waterfront. And there was somebody – I've forgotten her name. She was in charge of that papermaking there. And, of course, this was very encouraged because Tasmania is about paper. So I went down there and I stayed again and I did all that paper series of paper-pulp paintings, which are different again because they were pressed then flat so it's just a sheet of paper.

SM: So, even then, I mean when we talking about the difference of being a woman printmaker, and you joked that the revival of craft benefited you because you could –.

RF: That's right.

SM: But there must have been –. You were just talking about approaching it as kind of a dressmaker or making patterns. These things must have informed your work and your processes.

RF: They did. Because the way I used to work with the press: I got, instead of a bench, I got an ironing board. For the metal, you see. I'd take the cover off and everything. And then when I'd sort of squeeze the press down, and the water would come out, I could run it down into a bucket underneath.

SM: That's quite a practical solution.

RF: So that was another thing. Of course, being in a house, you look around and you see the things that can become your tool.

SM: Absolutely. Probably the best use of an ironing board.

RF: There's a couple of things written about that. Artist uses ironing board.

SM: The paperscapes that you showed at Bloomfield, they pre-dated the more moulded paper?

RF: No, no. The moulded paper came first. The cast paper and relief. And they were made –. I took a few classes in sculpture, not very many. Didn't know much about sculpture, although I'd seen Esther's, because she got her diploma in sculpture at East Sydney. I'd done a few sort of pieces of sculpture around the place, but generally I haven't got an eye for making things in the round.

SM: In terms of bas-relief you can though.

RF: Yes, that's right. And I can remember somebody, a relative, looking at my hands once and saying, 'Sculpture, you must do sculpture'. He was a dress designer, and he was in England, and I remember him saying, 'Sculpture, you must do sculpture'. Anyway, I've always had big hands and good hands, but they were good for carving and everything, but it was in the head. It wasn't really something that was making things in the round, as real sort of top-flight sculpture is.

SM: So those paperscapes, were they based on landscapes and things like that?

RF: They were all based on a journey that my sister and I made by car. And we went down the coast here and along the Great Ocean Road and right out to the very end, and then we went back home to Sydney via Wagga and through that. So we did a whole thing. And I was

influenced in them, technically, by David Hockney. But aesthetically, I was more able to think, 'How I would do this by looking at the American landscape artists?' M – he's a modern one in the 60s. Moons? He's done sort of a lot of patterned, flat patterned things. Milton Moon. Is it Milton Moon?

SM: Milton Avery, isn't it?

RF: Milton Avery. That's right. Where did I get Milton Moon from?

SM: There is a Milton Moon maybe, I think, as well.

RF: Well, it sounds as if it ought to be. Yes, it was Milton Avery. And I thought, 'If it's good enough for him, it's good enough for me'. You see, I could see this thing then, the way to do it. Because it would all be like patterns out of a dress pattern and then cut out. And the sheets of foam were about that high, just enough to give me a wall. And I'd take each piece out, and then I'd take another one, and when it was all put down, then it went under the big press and it became one sheet of paper. And there's quite a few of those – two or three of them are bought by the art people that lend out the –.

SM: Art Bank?

RF: Art Bank. Yes, that's right.

SM: And they're holding together alright?

RF: Yes.

SM: They haven't, like, popped out and –.

RF: No, no.

SM: Because that's always a question with all these experimental techniques.

RF: I know. No. It was absolutely perfect. And, not only that, but they were done with the coloured dyes and they were fast too. So instead of it being white pulp that I was working with, I started with that. But I had buckets and buckets of different colours and poured that in. And everything that I've ever had done really has never fallen to pieces.

SM: So was this all working at home, at Castle Crag?

RF: Yes. That was mostly working –. I went through the broom cupboard to get there. There was no entrance from inside. The only entrance was from outside. So that's why I really loved Hans, because he had good ideas. It was on a sloping block of land, and we'd excavated and made the studio underneath, and there was bush around there. And I often worked at night and, especially when he'd be away, you see, it was a bit scary going down outside the house and going down. So he took the floor out of the broom cupboard, and he put a ste- ladder down. So I used to say, 'Bye-bye' and walk into the broom cupboard. Because that's the way I worked mostly, you see, under artificial light. Because I had a house to look after, I had kids to look after, and I did it all. I had to catch up on my sleep a bit. And I worked at night, and nobody disturbed me. Kept me off the streets.

SM: Were you showing with one gallery more particularly than the others? If there was one that you would say, 'That was my gallery', was there one that you had a bond with?

RF: Yes. And each time that I would say, 'This is my gallery', they would collapse. Then I'd have to get another one. But they were all good galleries. Of them all, Bonython was by far the best. And then he got some sort of heart attack or something, the one in Paddington, and he went to another one that was lower down, and I followed him to that part, and then he closed it in Sydney.

SM: He went back to Adelaide or something?

RF: Yes. That's right. I never was a money-maker so much. I never worried too much about it. I didn't like not to sell anything, but I didn't make a big fuss about it. And I was as happy as Larry, you know, that most of my work was taken by the galleries, the national or regional galleries.

SM: I've noticed there is a pressure if you do a body of work that is quite successful. There must be a pressure on artists to keep on doing that.

RF: That's right.

SM: Which must be a hard thing.

RF: Yeah.

SM: So then if you want to go onto something completely different that you mightn't know, might not be as well received as this particular body of work. That's quite a risky thing.

RF: I know. You see, by comparison, one of my best friends is Bettina McMahon, and she made a lot of money out of doing drawings of horses. But I mean nobody knows very much about her now, although she was a good etcher and she's won a few prizes and she's got her work in some galleries. But I think I was fascinated by process. I was a born printmaker. Because I did painting, I did drawing. I could draw. I had a talent for drawing. I was drawing when I was about four. They used to keep me quiet by giving me scissors and paper to cut things up out of the newspaper. So I had some talent for image-making. But what really grabbed me when I went to the workshop at Willoughby and did this with the lithograph, it was the process. It was so exciting. And printmaking, you never knew exactly if you were going to get what you thought you were going to get until you pulled the paper off.

SM: It's got that element of surprise.

RF: And even using now the digital. I mean, I just don't sort of use it to make photographs. I start with a photograph and then I change it all to make it graphic. And it's still a wonderful surprise sometimes.

[End]

Interview on 25 March 2014

SM: I'm with Ruth, and it's March 25, 2014. And we were just looking through the scrapbook. We were just looking at this work by Ruth, for which she won the Lismore Art Prize in 1972. called *Sudden in a shaft of light*, and I was just asking about the technique because it looks very interesting.

RF: Yes, well, it was very interesting. I was withered to doing art, doing prints – lithographs mainly. But then I got the idea, you know, that I could do a printed painting. And what I started from was a drawing or a painting that I would photograph and have it printed in black

and white on canvas. I did some small ones, which I could manage – just doing my own sort of development in the bath. But I had a friend who was a photographer, and he had his own printing studio, and I imported this roll of canvas, sensitised canvas from Germany. And I made really big works. And I then got it printed in black and white and I – let me think – I spray-painted that with white and made it ghostly.

SM: Yes, you can see that a little bit.

RF: And then I put the canvas up against the window so I got the light coming in, and I took pencil and I started to work on the canvas – it was ghosted – and I drew some of the outlines or the edges of different forms, and then I put the canvas down on the floor and I spray-painted with – using edges of newspaper or something to block out. So what I was really doing was I was utilising the technique of silkscreen printing by making a block out. But I using this spray paint and I started first, you know, just with a little can that I mixed up, but I soon found that I was too impatient to be refilling this little container all the time so I started to use car enamel spray paints. And it was like I got myself a whole collection of all these fabulous sort of colours. And you could control the tone fantastically with it. If you came in close with the spray, you could make it heavy. But if you stepped back, then the dots were soft. So you had this wonderful transition of tone. So this is what I did these big works on canvas with. How I prepared it with the black-and-white photograph first, and then blanketed it out, and then spray-painted. I had a colour scheme then that was rather greyish and blue, that I wanted to keep a sense of mystery about all these works, as if they were sort of coming out of space.

SM: It certainly does. It has a kind of slightly surreal quality, doesn't it?

RF: That's right.

SM: It has real depth as well.

RF: Oh yes, it has amazing depth. It was implied, you see, with the tone. And you had to learn – I had to learn how to use that spray paint so I could make it like a palette. I'd have all these cans there and, of course, sometimes if you got locked up or something, it would spit out and that'd be no good. So you had to make a little sort of go. Try it and then quickly do it. And the shape of the newspaper cut-outs, I just kept that nice and firm on the canvas, just with some fishing weights – you know those things that you go fishing.

SM: The little fishing weights.

RF: And that kept it nice and –.

SM: You can see the edges in this one.

RF: That's right.

SM: So the original image looks like something that you have arranged yourself.

RF: That's right.

SM: Because there's a pair of scales, there's the newspaper.

RF: This was in my studio.

SM: Right.

RF: And somebody, a friend of mine, took a photograph of it. I could have done but he was a much better photographer. And it was in black and white.

SM: OK. Were you a smoker in those days?

RF: Oh was I ever.

SM: It's got heaps of cigarette marks.

RF: That's right. I put all the cigarette butts but my husband cleaned up. I put it back and I said, 'Don't touch anything in my studio'. And it was very important, you see. And this was a set of scales.

SM: This looks like a type of printing press or —.

RF: That's right. So this was the studio. But the magic of it all was this glow of light that came through using the spray.

SM: It's very interesting. So was that —? That's Jimmy Gleeson, I think.

RF: No, it's not. It's somebody.

SM: It looked like him.

RF: Yes, it does look like him. I think it was someone from the council.

SM: So who awarded the prize, I wonder? Somebody would have judged it.

RF: Yes, where did we come back on that. I had something back there. Grafton, was it?

SM: Lismore.

RF: Lismore, that's right.

SM: But I wonder if it said who the judge —. That's earlier. That's your show in New Zealand.

RF: Right.

SM: Let's see.

RF: Actually, Jimmy Gleeson did give me a prize for one of those called *The rehearsal*, yeah. [James Gleeson judged the 1976 Sulman Prize in which Faerber was a finalist with a work titled *Rehearsal*; however, it didn't win that prize.]

SM: Let's see.

RF: Who was the judge up there?

SM: So that exhibition — jumping back — that was at the New Vision Gallery in Auckland, wasn't it?

RF: What was?

SM: The one that you had in New Zealand.

RF: That's right. Kees Hos, he was a Dutchman. And there was very few works from Australia.

SM: It was quite a nice space.

RF: So that was something, you see, that I did at the same time as I was doing prints. Now, after I came up with this, or about at the same time, I started to use paper plates for doing my lithographic drawings on, which was a big sort of new thing.

SM: So what's that? What's involved with the paper plates?

RF: Well, the lithographic is done on very heavy limestone, and we started –. Joy Ewart charged me for the set up at the workshop by finding out – well, from someone – that they were using some limestones to put a path down when they were building the university.

SM: You said that was from the University of New South Wales.

RF: That's right.

SM: It had old maps and things like that.

RF: That's right. And so we got a lot of those back. But, at that stage, it was mostly stones with a few of the ground aluminium plates that were just starting to come in. But mostly it was –.

SM: Big stones.

RF: Big stuff. Now I was down in a Xerox place getting something done one day. I saw someone printing from a paper plate in the Xerox machine, so I thought, 'That's interesting. How are they doing that?' So I found that they were imported plates from America. And it was just no problem, you know, to do whatever you wanted to do. So I got some of those plates sent out to me. I've got the letter somewhere where I wrote over, found out who made the plates and wrote over to them and said, 'I'm interested in using them for my art'. So they sent me some over and, at that stage, I was starting to teach lithography with COFA, who had their printmaking department just behind the Harbour Bridge at the entrance in the city then, not where they are now. So I went in there with these paper plates that I had evolved, that you could draw on. They said you had to have to special oil pastel to draw on it, and then you had to sensitise it with water over there, and then you printed it just the same way as you'd print a stone plate. But there was a bit of a problem that you had to get this paper and be able to glue it down on your bed, because it would slip around all over the place. Anyway –.

SM: And were they in the big sizes as you could get with the stone or –?

RF: Yes. But they were about as big as that over there, that print over there. Or let's say about half that, about half that, yes. But what I came back with that was quite new was instead of drawing just with the oil pastel or the oil stick, I utilised – I did experiments with the black paint spray. And I made prints that way, by blocking out things and spraying the image on the paper, and that gave a totally different quality.

SM: Did you have to sensitise it as well?

RF: No, the paper – they already came sensitised. But you had to wipe it down with a sensitising solution afterwards.

SM: Right, to get the image off.

RF: To get the image out of this and embedded. And it was only OK for a small number of runs because it was, I suppose, just not that functional. But, as a printmaker, I never did big numbers anyway. But what I did was, I got something like that spray quality as a print, that I'd done on the canvas. I got it on these plates, and then I could sensitise it and work it up and have my roller, and when it was all wet, then I would put the roller across it. But I had to figure out a different way to make it stable, otherwise it would slip all over the place. But I did all that with glue on the back and things like this.

SM: And I suppose not getting away from the stones, which are so heavy.

RF: Of course. That's right.

SM: It makes the process so much less cumbersome.

RF: That's right. And I introduced that then when I started teaching with the College of Fine Arts.

SM: How did that happen? How did you get teaching at COFA? Who asked you there? Did you know somebody?

RF: Yes. Who was the head of the COFA in those days?

SM: Alan Oldfield, or somebody like that was it?

RF: No. It was somebody that I exhibited in Bonython's with.

SM: Earle Backen?

RF: No. It was someone that was not a printmaker. He was head of the —. And he was showing his paintings and I was showing my prints at the Bonython. They had a room upstairs which was the print room. Somewhere there, there's a —.

SM: And I saw a Bonython catalogue somewhere here.

RF: That's right. And it had three people exhibiting. And he came to me and they wanted to start up a lithography department because they didn't have a lithographic printing teacher. And so he said, 'Would you like to do it?' I said, 'Oh well, look, I haven't got my diploma or anything. My teaching diploma'. He said, 'Don't worry about that, just get it going'. So he said, 'You might have to take another sort of class as well', which I did. I took class in relief printing and lino printing. So I really launched their lithography department with COFA in those early days. And I introduced the paper plates there. Well, they didn't take off. People didn't have the patience that I had about gluing them down and being sort of so clever about the way, you know, you could stop them sliding around. So they didn't last for too long. The Xerox people went on using them for a long time. And then all these Xerox printing places just evaporated.

SM: Closed, yes, that's right.

RF: But I always sort of believed that fine art could look at commercial printing or whatever and could adapt it technically to make images, you know, which were not commercial images. That's it.

SM: Using that. That's just got Ian Percival and Joel Elenberg. And that work, going back that we saw, *In camera* –.

RF: That was very large. That was at least about as big as this.

SM: And what technique was that with?

RF: *In camera*, that was the one on canvas.

SM: OK. That won the Drummoyne Art Prize.

RF: That's right. But, whereas they were all one-offs', I could do something on the paper and make a plate out of it and have an edition, which was never more than about half a dozen or ten works, something like that.

SM: Did you manipulate them after they were printed, Ruth? You know, collages etc. Did you do that after you printed them and then that was it?

RF: No.

SM: Print was the final one, was it?

RF: I made the plate sometimes by collaging things on the plates.

SM: You manipulated before you printed?

RF: That's right. I had bought this press then. Because they didn't make presses very much here either; they were all imported. And this was at an auction, and it was a converted mangle.

SM: Really?

RF: And I had that set up in my studio. And after a great number of years, I said to my husband, Hans, you know, 'What about we mechanise this?' This is the –. It was a proper one. It wasn't the table model. It had cast-iron legs and everything, like a mangle. And the rollers had been replaced with steel rollers. And everything was calculated so it was even and everything. And it had a great big wheel and you turned that, you see. And someone had been using it making small etchings on it, and somewhere I have that work that he printed on it. And I bought it at an auction. I think maybe I paid £300 for it. I later on, about 20 or 30 years later, sold it for \$2000. But it was mechanised by then. And my husband is an engineer. He was a bit cautious.

SM: So he was clever.

RF: He said, 'Alright, well, we can do this. But, look, mind your fingers'. And I said, 'OK, I'll mind my fingers'. But that was the sort of thing about art that I was more interested in than actually learning to make a realistic picture. I loved process.

SM: Well, it goes back to your early days as well and, I suppose, all those interests in the commercial process, because you had experience working in a commercial studio.

RF: That's right. You see, that was like a stroke of destiny, that I got that junior commercial artist job in the Market Printery. And there we were making photogravure, which The Sun newspaper was doing, and we were sending out all these things to the troops and 'I surrender' pamphlets that were dropped over Japan. It was working in a restricted industry in

those days. They didn't call you up in –. You did printing. But that was when I was alerted then, first, to the whole process of things being printed from a plate, because the photogravure was a copper plate. And I learnt something too about working in a dark room, because you could take a photograph and you could put it on the copper with the lights, you know, that you switched on. They even had one of the old cameras, you know, that you used to pull the thing over there, and it had an expanding belly. So while I never really studied printmaking on that level, you know, that maybe an etcher would from the Etching Society in the old days, I saw something that was so close to this, that I learnt on a commercial way how to work.

SM: Absolutely. And here we've got *Spirit of the land, Tasmania* at the Hunters Hill Prize. Can you remember that work? You got a commendation for that work, *Spirit of the land*.

RF: Didn't the art gallery – maybe the Hunters Hill [Art] Gallery –? Was it an acquisitive?

SM: I think it's acquisitive. So it's most probably still in their collection.

RF: That's what I must have remembered something about it. So they took it for their collection then.

SM: And lots of awards, Ruth. Here's one: Wyong, the Shire Festival, sponsored by Transfield. That's all very topical.

RF: Yes. Well, you know, my work really wasn't sort of enormously popular with people for their sort of putting over their mantelpiece.

SM: This is interesting, because this is the judge who judged the Wyong Shire Festival, who became the senior curator of international art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

RF: Who was that?

SM: Tony Bond.

RF: That's right. He wasn't a photographer, no.

SM: No. And so he was the judge of that prize in 1983. And it's a work called *Excavation 1*, the work of yours, and he said, 'This is work of highly developed consummate skill. It has an unusual quality of directness of mass, and expressive intensity, and a developed relationship of artistic means of landscape painting'.

RF: I don't even remember it.

SM: That's nice that they've given you his actual card with his judgement.

RF: Well, that's where a lot of my works went, because they're interesting people because they were different. But a lot of other people, you know, who wanted something to match their carpet or their curtains, or something that would make them smile or something that would make them happy, they weren't all that keen on my work. But I didn't mind because I was quite happy, you know, if the galleries –. As far as I was concerned, Hans paid the bills, and I made enough out of what I did get in the awards and things to continue to pour it back into frames and things like that.

SM: So a self-portrait by you is in the Manly Art Gallery. That's got a little note as well.

RF: Yes. And that's one of those on canvas.

SM: Really?

RF: Yes.

SM: OK. From 1971.

RF: That's right. That's when I was doing them.

SM: It would be interesting to see that.

RF: Yes.

SM: And then this is what you were referring to, Ruth, the exhibition at the Art of Man Gallery.

RF: Yeah.

SM: One of these exhibitions. This is in '78, after a visit to China.

RF: That's right. It was 1973, I thought that was, that I went to China, and came back. And I did a lot of prints that were shown in the upstairs gallery. I did them on aluminium foil because –.

SM: You printed on the foil?

RF: Well, I did a lamination of the foil paper, you know, the sandwich paper and things like that, onto white paper. And then I printed on that. I put that on the plate, and I put it through the press, and it came out the other way, of course.

SM: So did it come out like a kind of raised or was it a flat image that came out?

RF: There was only –.

SM: Like embossed a bit?

RF: No, no. It was perfectly flat. And it was from the spray plates. And the image was perfectly flat. But the thing itself was slightly sort of raised, only to the thickness of the aluminium, that I got through there. Actually, I'm telling you a whole lot of lies, because now I remember what I did. I printed on the aluminium and I took the image – and why I chose to do that was because it gave luminosity like a fish's scales – all the colours – the blues and the reds and everything, came through with spray that let the silvery quality come through it. It was quite magical. And then, I put those onto the white paper and put it through the press as laminated – as a second thing, after I'd printed them. That's right.

SM: Because it's got a bit here in one of the reviews of the exhibition. It talks a bit about process. And it says: 'She mixes aluminium foil, bits of photographs, Chinese ideograms, leaves, feathers and rice paper, combines collage with litho and relief printing, opposed the shimmer of metallic background to flat surfaces, of coloured inks and fragility of torn rice paper edges. The result is nothing short of poetic.'

RF: Well, it's very interesting. Who wrote that?

SM: Anna Cohen.

RF: Ah, well, she was a friend of mine too. The guy that has given me a whole lot of support over the years, Sasha Grishin, the reviewer in Canberra. Out of all the exhibitions that he has written about, that's the only one he didn't like.

SM: Oh really? How interesting.

RF: He thought, you know, it was too lolly maybe, or something, with all the silvery things.

SM: Too pretty.

RF: Yes. Maybe that's right.

SM: That's interesting, isn't it?

RF: Anyhow, I haven't got any things here, but I know where those works are. They're in somebody's house that bought some of those, yes.

SM: Do you think there's an example of all these different works at the National Gallery in Canberra? Would there be an example of work from this show?

RF: Yes, there might be some.

SM: Because that would be great if there was some central place. Because, as you say, so many different processes.

RF: The gallery in Canberra took 60 of my early prints and didn't take any of the paper works, which surprised me, because I would have thought, 'Oh, the early stuff, maybe put that in the garbage bin'. What's his name?

SM: Roger Butler.

RF: Roger Butler. He thought as a historical period in printmaking here, because I just wasn't unusual in what I was doing. But there weren't very many women printmakers doing lithography because it was a very heavy rather laborious technique. But he was the one that got in touch with Burnie Gallery and said they should take the paper works because of having done some of them. So she came and she took about 30.

SM: Well, that's good.

RF: And they had a big exhibition of my paper works there a few years ago.

SM: There's a letter from [then Art Gallery of New South Wales director] Edmund Capon, congratulating you on winning the Pring Prize [1980, exhibited 28 February – 22 March 1981].

RF: Yeah, that's right.

SM: 1981, for *Timeless land*. I didn't realise all these prizes.

RF: Well, that's about all I ever sort of expected to get, prizes.

SM: That's great.

RF: I didn't expect to sell very much because people don't always go for things. People that give you prizes are looking for something different.

SM: That's right. They're looking for a really interesting work, as you say. People want something more decorative.

RF: Oh yes, I know. It would have been so easy just to have done what I saw other people doing, because I could do it all but it was boring too for me.

SM: Can I ask you about China?

RF: Yes.

SM: How did you come to go there, and how did it influence what you did when you got back? Did you learn any different processes or —.

RF: No. I found it pretty —. Just before I answer you, I think there's a photograph here. It's here somewhere. It's a photograph of Edmund Capon giving me the prize.

SM: Really? OK, I'm sure we'll come across that. So yeah, China. How did you get to go there? Was that your own initiative?

RF: No. Now you might as well just have a look at these photographs too, if you want. That's one I've got of Warren. And Anna Eglitis, whose a printmaker friend of mine. And that's another good one of Guy Warren. This is from this friend of mine who died just about six weeks ago, and we went to Sydney Girls High School together. And she was one of our top models, and she was the mother of Linda Slutzkin.

SM: That's the one we were just talking about.

RF: She was the Dyomee girl. And there she is there as she was at the end. And where I made her birthday cake in her place. And this is the card she sent me, and you'd have to be a good friend to somebody to send her a card like that. Anyway, I put it aside there because of the fact that a lot of her photographic assignments that she did for swimming costumes and things, they are in a collection at the Manly Gallery. There's a big collection of them.

SM: So she just died recently.

RF: She just died recently. I lost contact with her after we left school and then picked up again later, and then she was living up here at Cammeray and so the last 30 years we've had very good contact.

SM: That's fascinating.

RF: And that's what I —. I did a talk for her at her funeral. Well, they had a thing at home. She donated her body to the university or something so they didn't have a burial. Well, I can't find that other one that I was looking for.

SM: Can we go back to China, Ruth?

RF: Yes. That the Print Council of Australia was organising. I went with the Print Council.

SM: Because whose —. There's one, the old president of the Print Council, that's very interested in China. What's her name again? The president of the Print Council. Ruth Burgess.

RF: She's not the president of the Print Council.

SM: Didn't she used to be in the old days or no?

RF: No. She's always been in Sydney.

SM: That's right. Sydney Printmakers, that's right.

RF: Print Council of Australia was formed in the 60s and it came about because of the appointment of Ursula Hoff, who came from the Victoria and Albert Museum, to take over the print curatorship here. She was a refugee from Germany. And she went from Germany and got this position with the Albert Museum in London, and then she came out here. And, up to that point, they had quite a few etchings but they didn't have a tremendously sort of advanced print consciousness for their gallery. She brought something with her for the first time. So she became the curator of prints, and she actually bought one of my etchings for the collection about that time too. Now, she was always in Melbourne. Ruth Burgess was always a member of the Sydney Printmakers.

SM: You're right. That's right. Completely separate.

RF: But there was somebody from the Print Council of Australia who is dead now. He was a printmaker, and he was very left wing, and he organised this trip to go to China. And he also organised one to go to Cuba. I had his name a minute ago but it went. Anyhow, I went on that trip, and it was really great. There was about a dozen of us, I would think. I was the only one that went from New South Wales – most of the others went – there might have been somebody else. Anyway, when we got over there, they didn't even understand that we were artist printmakers, and they had organised a tour for us to go to the factories where they did printing, and they had the oldest of equipment you could imagine. This was just after the fall of the Gang of Four. And as far as the art was concerned there, it was all under control of the government. And they used to have these big walls in the towns and everything, and they put the notices. And if you wanted to have an exhibition, you had to apply to like the council body of the town or something to get permission to show your work. But it has a lot of emphasis placed on social realism still. So although they had the tradition of the wonderful prints there, that we were so excited we were going to see, and we did see some of them – Hokusai – and it wasn't a modern sort of thing then anymore. And now, of course, China has become the sort of big centre for capitalist exploitation, you would say, of the art market. But what I responded to was a quality of life that I found there which set me off, you know, thinking about using this silver background to print on. Because it was like their music; it was high key. And the string instruments. And, somehow, this sort of colouring was sweet like their – sickly sweet in a way, like their things were. And I combined that with some of the images and then also some little photographs that I took of some of the peasants that were still there in the different places where we went – these farms and things.

SM: And did you go to Cuba as well? Did you go on that trip?

RF: No. I didn't go to Cuba, no. That fellow's name, he's dead now.

SM: It'll come back to you, I'm sure.

RF: It'll come back to me. Too many names I have known in my life.

SM: So what's this Archibald in 1972 and Sir Bernard Heinze?

RF: Yes, I had a painting there [in the Archibald Prize 1972 exhibition], in this technique, of Sir Bernard Heinze.

SM: OK. Did you meet him? Did you know him?

RF: Oh yes, his wife actually came to a class, a painting class, that I ran then at my sister's school that she had down at Vacluse – the Vacluse Art School. And she also had John Olsen's son that he brought him up there

SM: Oh, Tim.

RF: Tim. And that's how far back it was. But I did this taking photographs of the rehearsal that I went into for Bernard Heinze when he was doing a rehearsal, and I did a sort of photographic sheet of all of those – that was one painting. But then I did another quite big one that was a portrait, just of Bernard Heinze. I think he was a bit shocked when he saw it, because I was using this spray technique, and I was using this photographic image and things. Anyway, I donated that to the [Sydney] Conservatorium [of Music] and they were happy to have it.

SM: That's great. So that's presumably still there.

RF: I don't know if they put it in the garbage bin since or not. But that was in the Archibald.

SM: That's great. Now here was the judge. We were wondering who was the judge of *Sudden in a shaft of light* at Lismore. It was Walter Placing.

RF: Right, I never knew him.

SM: No, I didn't know him.

RF: But I remember the name. And I think he was something to do with the Education Department. I'm not sure.

SM: Most probably, yes.

RF: Well, this is something that I didn't think we'd be talking about, but here we are. And going through this, you see.

SM: It's interesting going back through all the material.

RF: You can see how yellowed all the newspaper is.

SM: And that's another work from that same series.

RF: That's right.

SM: *An ear turned to remote stars*.

RF: And I had actually made a print on the paper plate of using the paper plates. And see I've got the image; it has the paper plate behind it.

SM: And it's the image of – is it the parks?

RF: Yes, that's right. I remember I was interviewed about that. This girl came along to get something to write in the newspaper and I said, 'Well, it's like, you know, you're standing there but you're sort of making contact with the ethereal through this'. She didn't have a clue what I was talking about. She thought I was off my rocker. I could see it in her face.

SM: So when you were experimenting with all these techniques and doing shows in the early 70s, is this about the same time that you wrote that article in *Leonardo*? You know about instant lithography for the artist printmaker?

RF: I'm just wondering if it – yes, of course. And why I wrote it was that ... He was a printmaker and a painter. Hinder, Frank Hinder. Frank Hinder had his own press at home, and he was one of the few people that was doing lithography then. And when I told him about this and showed him, you know, what I had experimented with, that's when he said to me, 'You ought to get this published. Send it to *Leonardo*'. So I did.

SM: So that's how it came about.

RF: And I've got the *Leonardo* book there, with that in it.

SM: With the article in it.

RF: That's right. But it was Frank Hinder.

SM: That kind of suggested it to you.

RF: Yeah. And Frank Hinder himself, of course, had been in America, and he came back with the dynamic symmetry thing with Margel, who was the sculptress wife.

SM: That's right.

RF: And then he continued right until the end of his life, and he did all this kinetic sculpture in a way, with all this colour that was moving in front of each other, in the Art Gallery of New South Wales. They took one, I think, to keep there. I don't know if they've still got.

SM: They've still got. The National Gallery have a few as well.

RF: That's right. And I've got a book of his here with all his drawings.

SM: He was a wonderful man.

RF: He was.

SM: So who is this Bonython under – oh, that's Joel Elenberg.

RF: So that's also the – which one's that?

SM: That's the Lismore works – *Sudden in a shaft of light*.

RF: That's Lismore.

SM: And what's *The last rehearsal*? Is that another one? So that's the Sulman Prize.

RF: Look, I remember the name.

SM: You must have been doing all these musical subjects.

RF: Oh no. *The last rehearsal*, was it? I think that was the one I was telling you about that I did that was long, with the –.

SM: Multiple portraits of Bernard Heinze?

RF: Yes, with the orchestra. It was taken from about the fourth row back or something. Now somebody bought that one. She was from the workshop.

SM: So that was in the Sulman. 75 – the Sulman Prize for 75.

RF: And that was one of the works that was hanging in my place. And that was also one of those that was – it was about ethereal things, you know, illusions. And that was a beautiful photograph that was taken by –.

SM: Robert McFarlane, was it?

RF: Robert, yes, who I'm back in contact with again now. Down in Adelaide. I don't know how he is.

SM: So these are letters to you. Pat Rowley

RF: Rowley, right.

SM: He's Bonython – Louis James.

RF: Louis James. It was Louis James. He was head of COFA then. Yes.

SM: That's interesting.

RF: So I showed –.

SM: Vytas Serelis, you never see that name anymore.

RF: No. I don't even remember what his work was like.

SM: No. If you think of Australia at that time, a name like Vytas Serelis, everybody would have just gone: 'What?'

RF: That's right.

SM: That's right. And we weren't very multicultural then, were we?

RF: No. And they looked so peculiar. Although it was a bit earlier that they looked more peculiar. In the 30s, the late 30s, they came in with walrus moustaches, and their coats were down to their knees, and they had briefcases. Nobody came with briefcases before that.

SM: See this is interesting. This is Nancy Borlase, who is reviewing that show, when you showed with Louis James and Vytas Serelis, and she says this is 'a mixed exhibition. But the most experimental of these three artists is Ruth Faerber in her use of the enlarged, reduced, overlapping or sequential photographic image on sensitised canvas. A technique of endless possibilities for a painter anxious to catch and pin down snapshot views. Often blurred and out-of-focus ones of contemporary genre scenes. It is a technique which she handles with increasing confidence and effectiveness'.

RF: Yeah. Well, I mean, she's made a big effort to describe it. Yes. Dear old Nancy.

SM: She was lovely, Nancy.

RF: Oh yes. She used to come down and walk along the waterfront here.

SM: Because she lived up at Mosman with Laurie [Short], didn't she?

RF: That's right. And then she fell, and she did something with her elbow, and they put her into a home. And apparently they weren't going to take her back home again, and shortly after that she just died. And then her husband rang up one Christmas and he said, 'Merry Christmas', and I think he was in a home and someone was looking after him. And so I don't know where the daughter is now.

SM: No, I'm not sure where she is now. Because they had their apartment up in Mosman, didn't they?

RF: I never went up there. No.

SM: So we're going through the 60s. *Out of the Void*. That's one of the Print Council exhibitions.

RF: I must have spent a lot of time putting all this together. Sticking it all down.

SM: It's great. Macquarie Gallery. So beside showing with the Australian Print Council, you showed with the Sydney Printmakers as well, didn't you?

RF: Oh yes, well, Sydney Printmakers were formed just a little bit before the Print Council of Australia, I think, or the other way around. But the Print Council of Australia incorporated all the states, and Sydney Printmakers was really –. What was his name? He was at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Daniel Thomas.

SM: Daniel Thomas, right.

RF: And, of course, Joy Ewart had just come back from a Fulbright Scholarship, and she was a lithographer, and she was very anxious then to start it. And that's when they got the workshop over at Willoughby before they had a children's class, and some adults, but not very many, behind the railway station in Chatswood. And my sister taught children's classes there, because she lived in Lane Cove then. And then Joy Ewart got this Fulbright Scholarship because she was a great person, you know, for prints. And she travelled all over the [United] States [of America] and went to where everything was happening. And then she came back and they got this – I think it was a laundry or something that was there at Willoughby, I'm not sure. But everybody sort of put a bit of money in. It was only very simply done. And most people sort of came and did work in the office for nothing in those days. But it was all pretty simple. You didn't have computers and you didn't have all this colour. There used to be a roneo sheet that went out with all the news on it.

SM: I'm looking at the names in this Sydney Printmakers exhibition of '76.

RF: Yes. What date is it?

SM: '76.

RF: That's why I thought it would be interesting.

SM: Graham Kuo. I still see him. He lives near me in Darlington.

RF: Does he? Well, give him my regards.

SM: And Ursula Laverty, of course. Her husband just died.

RF: Of course I see Ursula. Her husband's died now.

SM: Peter.

RF: But they were both members of the Sydney Printmakers too. I don't think he actually did much in the way of prints, but she was a very good silkscreen printmaker. And, later on, she gave up doing prints and she went very religious. And she did a lot of bigger canvases, and she's had shows with the Catholic University, but she's never regained the position of recognition with those that she did as a printmaker. That's the one.

SM: There you go. That's The last rehearsal.

RF: That's right.

SM: And you can even see the number of the camera –.

RF: That's right, I kept that in there.

SM: Of the roll.

RF: That's right. I kept the whole thing there.

SM: So that one. A prize as well. You put it in the Sulman but it actually won the Warringah Art Prize, according to that.

RF: Right. Yes, that's right. It did too. So there was two versions of that. There was a small one and there was the one that went into the Warringah. I'd forgotten about that. The large one won the prize, and that was James Gleeson that gave that prize.

SM: OK. So that was James Gleeson. And here's –. We were talking about Joy Ewart. Here's an exhibition at the Workshop Art Centre in 1977, which you had with Elizabeth Rooney and Michael West.

RF: Yes. Was that at the workshop?

SM: Yes, it was at the workshop.

RF: Can I just – because there's another one somewhere. Yes, it is. There's another one with James and Joy – Joan Sharp. And that's at a gallery that doesn't exist now. But that was the – I think it's in here. I'll come across it. That was a print show. OK.

SM: It's interesting.

RF: While I think of it, I'd better get this address if I can.

SM: Solander Gallery – who was there?

RF: The Solander Gallery?

SM: That was in Canberra, wasn't it?

RF: Canberra. Joyce. Warren. Same name. Joy Warren, her name was.

SM: And here's Orban awarding you a prize.

RF: Yes.

SM: At Mosman. The Mosman Art Prize.

RF: That's right. He did. By that time he called me his golden girl because when I was in his class. He said, 'I don't know which I dislike the most – the form or the colour'. As far as he was concerned, that's all there was. And he made people cry. They left his class in tears, but not me.

SM: I think you were pretty direct as a teacher too, yes?

RF: That's right. They dropped off at the end of the stick. If they didn't like, they could go.

SM: Well, I'm glad I didn't get given the stick.

RF: Oh no, you were just fantastic.

SM: You were great too. I remember you just came up to me and said, 'What are you doing?'

RF: In horror.

SM: In horror. It was absolutely –. I went: 'Oh OK'. I couldn't believe it was that bad.

RF: Well, I've written some notes here about Peter Dodd. What I'm looking for is the address.

SM: For the Art of Man?

RF: For the Art of Man, for Robert Ypes.

SM: Yeah, well, that's a great pile there. And that's certainly raised lots of new questions, didn't it?

RF: Yes. I don't want to get that mixed up here because that belongs to the ones that I'm doing now. The digital work.

SM: Reorganise that pile, I think.

RF: See that's what I would do. I'd get a photograph in black and white, and then I would sort of work on it, and then I would get the black-and-white photograph put on the canvas but I would sort of blanket out certain parts and paint or spray the rest.

SM: So you've always been experimental.

RF: Look at that see. That was the original one. So that must have been another painting that I photographed. I'm damned if I remember now.

SM: Is that you in that photograph?

RF: This one is the one that's down at Manly.

SM: OK. The self-portrait.

RF: Yeah.

SM: This is you, isn't it?

RF: That's right. That's taken in the mirror. That's right. I took that photograph in a ladies' toilet in this restaurant

SM: What are the men doing in the ladies' toilet?

RF: What men? No, that's me. See that was the mirror.

SM: I get you.

RF: And I was there putting some lipstick on, and I suddenly saw this was all being mirrored and I thought, 'Wow, what a picture'. So I took a photograph of that, but then I worked out, you know, little cover things.

SM: Backs of people in a restaurant or something.

RF: No, no. It was the back of this. Yeah.

SM: And this work that's in Manly, you must have taken that – that must have been at Mascot Airport

RF: Yes. I didn't take that. This fellow Douglas took that. It was a reflection in a big window.

SM: Yes, you can see it.

RF: And I saw that and I said, 'Can you get me a photograph of that?' So I stood there and made the reflection, and then he took the photograph.

SM: It's good.

RF: See that's that long one.

SM: Yes, *The rehearsal*.

RF: And this is the —.

SM: So that's been done at the Town Hall?

RF: That's right. And that's the one of Bernard Heinze.

SM: Right. So that's the original portrait that you used?

RF: Yes. See that's a work that I actually did from a print that I sprayed through a piece of perforated metal sheeting.

SM: OK. You can see that.

RF: People used to me —. You know, as a scrounger I'd go around and collect all sorts of things, and after awhile friends would bring me things and say, 'I found this. Do you think you can use this?' So they all had a sort of little hand sometimes in finding things.

SM: In works.

RF: Yes. They got excited too about the things.

SM: Tell me, Ruth, were you very excited when you won these prizes? There's quite a lot of prizes.

RF: Yes. I was pretty excited mostly. I know, you know, that sometimes I'd be going to the opening of an exhibition and I'd be driving myself there and I'd practically turnaround and go home.

[Discussion regarding various photographs]

RF: There's the first British International Print Biennale.

SM: Right.

RF: That might be interesting.

SM: *Blind Venetian tomato box*.

RF: Yes, that's what they called me, called my work.

SM: Pardon?

RF: *Venetian blind*. That was one of the cast paper works. And this is [Albert] Namatjira and me in 1956. And his granddaughter. I went out to Central Australia with a friend of my sister-in-law actually. He was an American. He wrote stuff for travel magazines. So he was going out to Central Australia. So I tagged along. And we got in this car that we hired, and we drove around, and we went into the bush, and we saw the remains of smoking campfire. We thought, you know, that might mean that somebody was around there. It was what's-a-name's gap. It's a very famous gap that we'd been out to. Anyway it turned out to be Albert Namatjira, and he was in this great big sort of lorry, and on the side was painted 'Albert Namatjira painter'. Anyhow, we followed that car until it stopped, and then we got out and came talked to him. And he did a drawing of me and I did a drawing of him. And that was –.

SM: Have you still got it? That drawing he did of you?

RF: No. I don't know what happened to the drawing of him. I don't know. No.

SM: What was he like?

RF: He was just a friendly fellow, that's all. That was his granddaughter that was there. Yes.

SM: Pretty amazing photograph there, Ruth.

RF: It is.

SM: It is amazing. So '56 that was?

RF: That's right. David was born in '48? '49? '52. So David was four then.

SM: About the same age as his granddaughter most probably.

RF: Yes. [Long pause] I won a prize there. 1970 Print Exhibition – Drummoyne Council. And that was Donald Friend, judge.

SM: That's the work you won the prize with at Drummoyne?

RF: That's right.

SM: And here it is here, Ruth. That's the winning painting.

RF: And did Donald Friend judge that?

SM: He must have.

RF: Goodness me. And that is Downtown – I did that in New York. And that's in the collection at Launceston Art Gallery in Tasmania, that work.

SM: And that's the finished self-portrait that's now in Manly.

RF: Is it really?

SM: Yeah. And that's the exhibition that it was purchased from. The Sebert Art Gallery.

RF: And the Sebert Gallery at Argyle Place.

SM: Who had that, I wonder?

RF: Ebert. His name was [Lance] Ebert, and I don't know what's happened to him. But that's quite so. And that was in that exhibition. Here we are. So I must have got a print of that.

SM: Yeah, that's good to have.

RF: And none of it around, showing how it was done in a way.

SM: That would be the 70s with the coir matting and the exposed beams in the building.

RF: And that was the Mittagong workshop that I went up –. I was teaching printmaking there. No, no. I took a workshop there to learn a little bit about sculpture, that's right.

SM: Up at the Sturt workshops or whatever they were called?

RF: That's right. Yes. 1986/87. Yeah. Gee, I was a pretty hefty woman. Well, so far not getting anywhere.

SM: They're good. They're all very good.

[End]