

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
BARBARA WILSON BENETTI
OF THE
FEDERAL ART PROJECT

INTERVIEWED BY
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Oral history of Barbara Wilson Benetti of the Michigan Federal Art Project, interviewed by Paul Sporn of Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, on November 3, 1980.

SPORN: Mr. Benetti?

BENETTI: Yes?

SPORN: Can you tell us how you became an artist? At what point did you decide that you were going to be an artist? What kind of training did you get? And then, bring the picture up to date in terms of the Federal Art Project.

BENETTI: Well, I was kind of a delinquent youngster in high school. I didn't get along with my teachers, and I spent most of my time skipping school. And . . .

SPORN: Was this in . . .

BENETTI: Flint.

SPORN: . . . The Detroit . . . Oh, you lived in Flint then?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: So, you went to the Flint Public Schools?

BENETTI: Yeah. And so, finally, it was agreed after I got kicked out of school, second time, that if I could go to art school all afternoon, I would faithfully finish out my senior year. I had about four months to go.

SPORN: Who suggested that?

BENETTI: Well, this was agreed to. They didn't know what to do with me. You know, I was just a pain in the neck to everybody.

SPORN: In high school?

BENETTI: In high school. So, they said, "Well, if you'll come to school every day, and be on time, and come to every class and not skip any classes, and you know, be good, they'll let you get out of school at 1:00, and go to the art school."

SPORN: You weren't just going to art school?

BENETTI: I was going to art school, yeah, in the evenings. But, this was . . . I was allowed to go during the day, and paint.

SPORN: Now, the reason you didn't like school was that you were more interested in painting?

BENETTI: Well, I . . . I read college material at the time I was in high school, and I tried to discuss it with my teachers, and they said I was being snippy, you know, uppity. And so . . . I had one teacher, for instance, who was an English teacher, an old lady, who was rather Victorian in her concepts of things. And she was a great admirer

BENETTI: of . . . (LAUGHTER)

SPORN: Of?

BENETTI: . . . Longfellow. And so, one time on a test, she gave fifty points for the question 'What do you think of Longfellow?' So, I wrote two pages about what I felt of Longfellow, about how he was Eddie Guest of his day. And, you know, was not a poet, and wrote doggerel rather than poetry. And so on. And when I got my test back, I had in red ink, (LAUGHS) written across this thing, "This is not what you're supposed to think." (LAUGHS) So, I failed that test. But, that was my relationship with my teachers. Well, when I got in art school, I found it . . . I'm not a very talented person. And in order to do better than, or do as well as some of the more talented people, I had to work twice as hard. And it was a rabbit just out of reach of this greyhound, you know. And so, I became more and more really intense about wanting to be a painter, wanting to be a good painter. And, I studied with a pretty good painter in Flint, at the Flint Institute of Arts. A guy named Jaroslav Brozik. And I don't know if you're familiar with him or not.

SPORN: The name is familiar. He was, I believe, on that Project, later on.

BENETTI: He may have been in Flint, but he wasn't in the Detroit Project.

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: But, he gave me quite a bit of instruction toward the art spirit, you know? And, to say I went to school for ten years sounds ridiculous, but I did.

SPORN: Art school?

BENETTI: Art school. And I learned about as much as the average art student learns in four years. It's just that, you know, it was . . . Harder getting through my head, because I don't have the talent that some people have. Well, when I moved to Detroit, I was on a Project there. I can't remember the name of it. It was one of the Roosevelt Projects. I think it was FERA. And they had an artist's unit. But, we did things like painting maps, and you know, doing . . . They had a map of Fort Wayne that I worked on.

SPORN: Fort . . .

BENETTI: Fort Wayne.

SPORN: Fort Wayne.

BENETTI: And, this was the big map that was supposed to be an illuminated map

BENETTI; of Michigan. And the guy that did the map couldn't draw figures. It had a group of figures on the map. So, I went out to Fort Wayne, and painted those on. That was in that Project. So, you see, I had some experience working as an artist.

SPORN; You moved down to Detroit with your family?

BENETTI: No, no. I moved by myself.

SPORN: By yourself? Alright.

BENETTI: This was when I was, you know, like twenty years old. (LAUGHS)

SPORN: Twenty years of age?

BENETTI: Time for me to move out.

SPORN: Would you remember if this Project that you worked with was under the FERA -- That was the Federal Emergency Relief Act . . .

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: . . . Administration or under CWA, Civil Works Administration? There were two programs.

BENETTI: I think I worked in . . .

SPORN: In fact, when was this? What year would you say it was?

BENETTI: Gee, I . . .

SPORN: 1934, 1935?

BENETTI: Probably 1934 or 1935.

SPORN: Was it called the Wayne County Artists' Project?

BENETTI: No, it was . . .

SPORN: Who was the head of it?

BENETTI: Sid . . . A signpainter.

SPORN: A signpainter?

BENETTI: Yes.

SPORN: Do you remember the name Anne Palmer? Does that mean anything to you?

BENETTI: No.

SPORN: Okay. She . . . The reason I asked you about Anne Palmer is that she was the head of this Wayne County Art Project.

BENETTI: At the RA or the CWA?

SPORN; I believe that was under CWA;

BENETTI; Well, it may be that this Program was under CWA. I know I worked on CWA, I worked on FERA, and I worked on WPA. But, I . . . When I got out of high school, there was nothing for us kids to do. You know, it was like today. We played tennis all day, and Bridge all evening

BENETTI: you know. We played Bridge for money with people that had money, and we made enough money to pay for our tennis balls, and getting our rackets re-strung, and stuff like that. (LAUGHS)

SPORN: So, you came down to Detroit, on your own . . .

BENETTI: So, I came to Detroit. I got a job at Hudson's, and I came to Detroit. And, the only thing was, I didn't realize the job in Hudson's was to only last a month. So, after I got off the Hudson's job, then, I was out of a job. And I had about forty cents, you know, because I got thirteen dollars a week at Hudson's, and I had to pay my own room and board. Well, then I worked on this, either FERA or CWA Project. It was a pigeon shit sort of Project, where you just did like coloring coloring books, you know. It was filling in colors for guys that wanted something. I did the figures on this map at Fort Wayne. The . . . It was all little stuff like that. Very insignificant. So then, we got involved in this co-operative house. We were all hard up. I think I got . . .

SPORN: Where was this co-operative house? Do you remember what part . . .

BENETTI: It was on, yeah, Fredricks Street.

SPORN: Fredricks Street?

BENETTI: Right behind the Art Institute, about half way down the block. 283 Fredrick. And there was Henry Bernstein, and Maury Merlin, and Glenn Showerman . . .

SPORN: Showerman?

BENETTI: Showerman. He worked on the Project. Maury Merlin worked on the Project, but he's dead now.

SPORN: Yes.

BENETTI: And Henry Bernstein worked on the Project, and he's dead. And I think Glenn Showerman is locked up in a place for emotionally ill people. They lived in the attic on the third floor, which had beautiful lighting. It had light on all four sides of the attic. Quite a bit of light. And then, downstairs, we had a back bedroom, which was the maids room, and then a kitchen, and then two bedrooms with a connecting bath, and then a dining room and a living room. It was a big place. And we got it for thirty bucks a month. And so, split between six of us, you know, we didn't have to really push very hard to raise the rent. (LAUGHS) But, of course we had to pay the lights

BENETTI: and the gas, and everything else. Well, we found out that we had to be on relief to get on the WPA.

SPORN: Now, this . . . You mentioned earlier the Treasury Department, and Bernstein taking photographs of his . . .

BENETTI: Yeah, well . . . First, we found out that we had to be on relief to get on the WPA Artists' Project. So, we all put in motion the machinery. You know, we went down and applied for relief. And man, I'm telling you, I developed a life-long hatred of social workers from this experience. (LAUGHS) Because I think . . . You know, people talk about Welfare chislers, and women who are getting Aid to Dependent Children, and stuff. And they make them sound as though they are just somebody that's just going, and handing us a check that says give me fifty dollars. But, relief isn't like that at all. At the time that we were getting on relief, it was hard as hell to get on relief. And, you go to the Welfare office at five o'clock in the morning, and you'd stand there, and at twelve o'clock you'd watch everybody go out to lunch, and know that they weren't going to come back till one-thirty. But, if you left your place in line, you lost your place, you know. And so, you just stood there. And one time, I said to one of these social workers "Boy, I never worked so hard for a buck in my whole life, as I did for this check for a dollar ninety-six." you know. So, this man said "You didn't work for this." And I said, "You better believe I worked for it. (LAUGHS) I've been standing in line there since five o'clock this morning." Well, this was my introduction to the hate of social services. And, we must say, that I was not very impressed, and I felt that I had earned every damn penny that I got from Welfare.

(TAPE STOPPED AND RESTARTED)

SPORN: . . . Was telling us about . . . I think the problem is mostly about after you got on. How you would apply for the job. And you and Henry Bernstein are the only two people who got on . . .

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: . . . To the Project. And then, the Sit-Down strikes came. So, start in. Tell us about that again, please.

BENETTI: Okay. Well, we gravitated to a co-operative house. I think I've got that.

SPORN: No. The co-operative house we've already gone over.

BENETTI: Yeah, okay.

SPORN: The thing was that, as you were working on the Treasury Department.

BENETTI: Well, Henry . . . Henry saw this article in Art Digest.

SPORN: I think we, yes, have that. I'm pretty sure we have that. But, go ahead. Tell us about that.

BENETTI: Okay. And he took some snapshots with a \$1.00 Brownie camera, and sent them in, and got a job right away. And so, all the rest of us sent stuff in. And, we had all gotten on relief by this time, and so, I got hired right away. And . . .

SPORN: You and him are the only two people on it?

BENETTI: But . . . We were the only two people, and later on, when I saw the brochure for the exhibition that they had, the national exhibition, there are only two artists from each state, and Henry and I were the representatives of Michigan. (LAUGHS) But, the other people . . .

SPORN: There was a brochure for an exhibition?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Of Treasury Department art work?

BENETTI: Yeah. That was . . .

SPORN: Held where?

BENETTI: I think it was held in New York.

SPORN: And, was your work on exhibition there?

BENETTI: I don't think so, I don't think so. I don't think it was good enough, you know?

SPORN: And Henry's work?

BENETTI: We were . . . We were on a Project with the best painters in America, you know?

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: And, it was just a happenstance that we made it, you know, because we were on Welfare. And so, we got on the Treasury Project. Well, in the meantime, I was working in the Hoffman Building, at the Detroit School of Art, which was a school . . .

SPORN: While you were on the Project?

BENETTI: While I was on the Project, because I didn't get paid at the school, I just got a studio free.

SPORN: This was the Treasury Department?

SPORN: You were also working in this . . .

BENETTI: Yeah, but I didn't get paid at the school. I got my studio . . .

SPORN: Oh. You just . . .

BENETTI: . . . And I taught Saturday morning classes, and I . . .

SPORN: This was the Speck studio?

BENETTI: Yeah. And there was Hunter Griffith and Speck, and there was another man involved in this, to begin with, and he dropped out.

SPORN: Then at that time, you were married to Speck?

BENETTI: Not yet. I got married to him a little bit later. The UAW had an office on the eighth floor and our studio was on the first -- second floor. And so, this was about . . . After Thanksgiving, a couple men from the UAW came down, very meekly, hat in hand, and asked me if I could do a drawing on a leaflet they had. They had a terrific creative idea, but it needed a picture. And they thought that maybe there was some artist down in our studio that could draw a picture. So, I could draw a picture, so I did. And, of course, I was very sympathetic with them. I was very much of a leftist, and much more Left than anybody else around in the studio. So I, I did the drawings, and co-operated with the fellows who had ideas about what they wanted in the picture, you know, in that . . . (LAUGHS) We always wanted some fat capitalist, who was doing some terrible thing to some poor little . . .

SPORN: These are the union people?

BENETTI: . . . Innocent worker.

SPORN: The union people?

BENETTI: Yeah. So, I co-operated, and they thought I was grand. Then, the Flint Strike started. Now, the Flint Strike started between Christmas and New Year's. It was a strike which was promoted by the management of General Motors, in order to give these fellows a chance of two weeks without anybody knowing they're on strike. Because, the week between Christmas and New Year's, everybody was off work. And so, it was, I don't know, the Friday or so before this that they sat down. And then, it was the Monday after that week that anybody found out about it. So, it's something that, naturally, the Flint workers wouldn't have done if they hadn't been pushed into it, you know.

SPORN: Now, this was a very exciting event.

BENETTI: Very exciting event. And so, about the first week in January, I couldn't stand it any more. I had to go to Flint, and see what was going on, and see if I could help. Because, if they needed leaflets to organize in Detroit, I sure as hell knew they needed leaflets in Flint. And so, I went to Flint, and presented myself to the union office, and everybody thought I was a stool pigeon, because there was a tremendous amount of effort on the part of General Motors to inject provocators and stool pigeons, and so on, into the union. And by the way, in this regard, one of your colleagues, B. J. Widdick, was my passenger in the car. I was assigned to drive him around. He had just come in from Akron, where he worked for the rubber workers, and he had come to help the auto workers get organized, and there was a strike, a bus strike in Flint at the time. And so, all the auto workers had cars assigned to them. And when they were told to go some place, they'd all beat it to the place where their captain was, and all go out and get in their cars. I saw an example of that the night that I was there. I had gone to the union office, just to clean up the work that I had been doing in the afternoon, and Widdick was making a speech. But, before he made the speech, we . . . He had asked me to take him out to the plant. And there was very little activity at the plant, and they were worried. The guys were beginning to get tired of sitting down, and there were only a few of them holding the fort. And so, Widdick mentioned this on the way back that he thought they were going to have to talk some other guys into going in and sitting down, because they were getting forces too few. But, then, he started to make a speech, and I was just listening to him, and all of a sudden a person brought him a note, and he said "Brothers, our brothers in the plant are being attacked, and we have to get out there and help them." So, this hall emptied in about three minutes. I've never seen a hall empty so fast in my life.

SPORN: Which hall was this?

BENETTI: This was the UAW hall in Flint, in the Pengelly Building. These were the days when the UAW was not a big, rich union. (LAUGHS)

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: They really run cheap every place

SPORN: Right. So, they all emptied out, and you went to help?

BENETTI: Yeah. And they went to help, And so, Whiddick says "Well, lend me your car." You know. I said "Nothing doing, I'll drive, and you can come along." So, he said "Well, this isn't any place for a girl," But, I figured, well, if it was a place for a man, it's a place for a girl, you know? A bullet doesn't make any distinction and just hit girls. So, I . . .

SPORN: And this was the Battle of . . .

BENETTI: Bull's Run. What happened was, they came to the plant, knowing that there were very few guys in the plant. These Buick police cars held eight cops, or Buick flyers with like a convertible top, you know, and side curtains. But, they had the side curtains off, and the four guys in the front and back . . . There were two guys in jump seats, or something. Anyway, eight cops to a car. And, they drove down to the doorway in the plant, broke the glass in the door with nightsticks, and fired tear gas into the plant. So, fortunately, the guys that were there were alert, and they sent a team up to the roof, where they had a fire hose mounted, and they just washed these cops down the sidewalk. And, it was so cold that night, that even afterwards when they turned on the fire hoses a little bit, because they turned the water off and just a little bit of water would drip out of them. But, they did it to put down the tear gas. And, even then, if any drop of water hit you, it just froze. I had drip and drops all over my coat, frozen to my coat. And so, they started firing bullets along with tear gas. And the tear gas was terrible. And it does, absolutely, take away your ability to think or do anything rational. You just have to get away from it. So, we, when we got there in the first place . . . When we came back the second time, and I parked the car about two blocks from the plant, and that . . . Started running down the hill, which you couldn't. The hill by the plant was full of people. Ten thousand people had materialized, I don't know how, in about fifteen minutes. We had been there fifteen minutes before, and there was nobody there, and hardly anybody in the plant. Now, there were guys in the plant, and ten thousand people outside the plant, and a sound car out in front of the plant. (LAUGHS) And . . .

SPORN: You mean that was a union sound car?

BENETTI: Yeah, yeah. And a ring of body guards around the sound car that gave it protection. Well, so Widdick ran down and got in the sound car, leaving me outside. And so, I just wandered back into the . . . Among the crowd. I didn't feel like I was bodyguard material. (LAUGHS) So, I got back in with this crowd of people. And then, the sound car kept giving instructions to everybody, you know. So, all of a sudden they said, "Look out on the north, because here comes a bunch of goons with tear gas. So, they came out of the General Motors Building on the other side of the . . . I think it's Chevrolet plant. And they had things that look like double barreled shotguns, except they were tear gas guns.

SPORN: And, so you actually had a first hand view of all this?

BENETTI: Yeah, yeah.

SPORN: That you'd gone up there primarily to do cartoons?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Did this inspire your art in any other way?

BENETTI: Well, I'll tell you, I . . . What happened to me was that I saw all of a sudden, that when you talk about the power of the workers, it's no kidding. Because this was manifest in this, you know. Here come the police with their big flyers, and eight cops in the car. And, they ride into the picket line, and the guys just grab the car and turn it over, stop it, shake it a few times and turn it right over with eight cops in it. And they did other things that were, you know, equally energetic and . . .

SPORN: So, that was a clear demonstration of the battle of the workers?

BENETTI: Yeah. And the thing is, you know, that when they took the plant, I forget it's nine or four, one of them was a sewing machine plant, and one of them was a place where they make all the hinges for General Motors. And they're on the same side of the street, across from this original sit-down site. So, G.M. had a back-to-work movement, right after this Battle of Bull's Run. And so, the union organized a ploy where they had all the Union guys went back to work. And so, in this one plant, the sewing machine plant, they had . . . This was a plant that was on Fort Street in the . . . And they had windows that let right out on the street. And so, the Women's Auxiliary went down there with wrapped up newspapers, and, you know, rolled

BENETTI: up newspapers, and lead pipe in the newspapers. And so, inside the plant, all of a sudden, the union guys started going "Strike! Strike! strike!" And every goon in General Motors went flying into this plant to put down this thing. And the women outside all started beating on the windows with their lead pipes, and busting the windows, and sticking hat pins into the horses asses, you know. (LAUGHS) How they ignored cops. And there was just this terrific commotion. And, in the meantime, the guys in the hinge plant closed it down, welded the door shut, took command of it, and sat down in it. And so, that was when General Motors gave up. They couldn't get along without hinges here. (LAUGHS)

SPORN: Well, now, how did all of this affect change? Did it change the way you paint at all? Were you interested in painting, or . . .

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: It had some effect on you?

BENETTI: I painted the West Side murals, just on the crest that . . .

SPORN: That plant thing inspired you to move on to the West Side murals?

BENETTI: Yes.

SPORN: Which you then proposed to the West Side Local? You proposed these murals to the West Side Local?

BENETTI: Well, I . . . I . . . Walter was in a meeting with me one night, and there were a couple of other artists, and he said, "You know, the workers here don't have much contact with the Arts. And it would be good if we had some art in the . . ." And so, I said sure, sure. He said "Look, we won't talk about paying you, because they wouldn't agree to it without seeing it. But, if you want to put up some murals, we'll see about it -- you getting paid. In the meantime, we'll pay for the materials." So, they . . . They paid for the materials, and I started working. I was really, real intrigued by this idea. I never had a big wall to paint on.

SPORN: You'd never done . . . You'd never done a mural before?

BENETTI: On a wall.

SPORN: I see.

BENETTI: You know, I'd done murals that . . . The Oxford murals I was doing, but, I was doing them on canvas. They were put up on the wall.

SPORN: By the Oxford murals, you mean Oxford . . .

BENETTI: Michigan.

SPORN: . . . Michigan? Right over here?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Now, those murals were being done for WPA?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: For the Federal Art Project?

BENETTI: Yes.

SPORN: Or for Treasury Department?

BENETTI: No, they were done for the WPA.

SPORN: Federal Art Project?

BENETTI: I got transferred back to the WPA when the Treasury Art Project closed. And I'm not just sure when it closed. But during the . . .

SPORN: You mean when the Treasury Department closed?

BENETTI: Yeah, the Treasury Department Project closed.

SPORN: You got transferred back to the Federal Art Project?

BENETTI: And I got transferred back to the WPA.

SPORN: Alright. Now, so while you're on the WPA, You did this Oxford mural?

BENETTI: Yes.

SPORN: Is it still up? No?

BENETTI: I've got it.

SPORN: You have the entire mural?

BENETTI: Yes.

SPORN: Was it for a Post Office?

BENETTI: No, it was for Oxford High School.

SPORN: For the high school. Now . . .

BENETTI: What happened was that . . .

SPORN: Well, how did you get it?

BENETTI: . . . Oxford is a Republican town. Just a solid, Republican town. So, as soon as these murals had been up the legally required time, they took them and put them in the basement. Rolled them up . . .

SPORN: Oh, you mean it had gone up, though?

BENETTI: Oh, yes.

SPORN: And they took them down . . .

BENETTI: They took them down, rolled them up, and put them in the basement.

SPORN: And, you have those murals here, in this house, right now?

BENETTI: Yes.

SPORN: Oh. Are you going to let me see them?

BENETTI: (LAUGHS) If I can get them out of the attic. They're . . .

SPORN: Now, what year would you say this was, that you were doing the Oxford murals?

BENETTI: Well, I was working on the . . . On the West Side Local murals at the same time . . .

SPORN: I see. So, you were working at the West Side Local murals at the same time.

BENETTI: And shortly after that . . .

SPORN: And those you did right on the wall, in the plaster?

BENETTI: No, I did them on, I did them on secco. I put a secco surface, on a canvas that was applied to the wall with white lead.

SPORN: Okay.

BENETTI: Then glued to the wall. So, the canvas was on the wall, and then got a secco surface, and then I painted the mural on it -- on the canvas.

SPORN: And is secco . . .

BENETTI: And I thought the way you got hold of my name was through this girl that works for the Ladies Garment Workers, I think.

SPORN: Oh, Marion Franks?

BENETTI: Wouldn't be surprised.

SPORN: No, I got your name from, I think Hy Fireman mentioned your name to me.

BENETTI: Oh, yeah. Sure. He was on the Writers' Project.

SPORN: Right.

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Oh, no. He was in the Theatre Project.

BENETTI: Yeah, yeah.

SPORN: Hy Fireman.

BENETTI: Okay.

SPORN: Okay. So. Alright, now. So, you were doing these two murals at the same time. One for the Federal Art Project, the other for . . .

BENETTI: I painted seven days a week for eight months.

SPORN: . . . For the Local 174 UAW? Let's just go back to the Oxford mural for the moment. Now, that mural was finished, and actually

SPORN: went up?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: That wasn't pasted on to the wall though, or was it?

BENETTI: No, no.

SPORN: That was in a frame?

BENETTI: That was a . . . That was a canvas on a stretcher, you know?

SPORN: On a stretcher? Then, that was just sort of . . . But, it was a large thing?

BENETTI: Seven by thirteen.

SPORN: So, that was a mural?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Okay. Now, how long did it hang up in the high school?

BENETTI: I don't know. I came out here . . . I came out here in 1945. I think they may have taken it down.

SPORN: You moved out here? Is that it?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: And, so, what did you do?

BENETTI: So, I didn't know . . . I didn't know what to do. But, I started teaching an adult education classes some years later, you know, and . . .

SPORN: After 1945?

BENETTI: Oh, yes. In 1960, or so. And, all these people in these classes said "What did you paint, what did you paint?" You know. So, I went and said "Well, I was a mural painter. You know, you can't take your paintings off the wall, and show them around, you know." So, I said, 'Gee, I wonder what happened to those Oxford paintings?' And so, I called up, and the guy that was there said, "I know where they are." And I said "Yeah I would . . . You suppose anybody wants them?" And he said "No. They don't know they're here, and they wouldn't want them if they did." A lot of WPA mural, you know. So, I said "Well, can I have them?" And he said "Yeah."

SPORN: Then you have it?

BENETTI: So, I have it.

SPORN: Oh.

BENETTI: Two panels.

SPORN: Okay, now, again we'll go back. You call yourself a mural painter.

SPORN: Did you paint other murals, besides these two you just . . .

BENETTI: Well, I designed a lot of murals. (LAUGHS)

SPORN: You designed, but they were never put into any . . . Put into . . .

BENETTI: Well, some of them were rejected. Some of them the guy who had accepted the mural died, and the next guy didn't want a mural, you know. And you know . . .

SPORN: Would you say, some school, or some . . .

BENETTI: So, I was busy for about three or four years designing murals. Like those for the New Women's Dorm. And, you know why they rejected those? They thought they looked like Lesbians.

SPORN: Now, what . . .

BENETTI: (LAUGHS) Look at those murals.

SPORN: . . . What was the subject matter with the Oxford murals. Would you . . .

BENETTI: What?

SPORN: What was the subject matter of the Oxford murals?

BENETTI: That's the . . . Oxford murals are right there, those Brueghelesque ones. (TAPE STOPPED AND RESTARTED)

SPORN: So, the . . . The Women's Dorm Murals were rejected because somebody there thought the women in it looked like Lesbians?

BENETTI: The man . . . The man who was in charge of the decorations for the New Women's Dorm.

SPORN: And that, too, is a WPA . . .

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Okay. Now, were you doing easel paintings at this time too? For WPA?

BENETTI: No, no. After I got through with the easel paintings for the Treasury Project, I . . . I quit doing any easel painting at all while I was doing these murals because I had a very busy year. You know, designing and carrying out these murals.

SPORN: Right. Okay, now, the mural that you did for the Oxford, do you have any examples or . . . Other than these panels you have upstairs?

BENETTI: Well, these are Oxford murals, the pictures. Here.

SPORN: Those outdoor scenes?

BENETTI: Yeah. These go like this. And there was a panel in between, inside the house.

SPORN: I see.

BENETTI: That one right there.

SPORN: I see. So, were these, in any way, inspired by the Flint sit-down?

BENETTI: No.

SPORN: They were not? But, the Local 174 murals were?

BENETTI: Yes.

SPORN: Okay. And . . . Okay. So, you mentioned that Walter Reuther was not too happy with the signs that you had in . . .

BENETTI: No.

SPORN: . . . Or the flags that you had there. And that he did not know that you were a Communist?

BENETTI: Well, I guess he got straight in his mind before I had been there very long. (LAUGHS) It was funny, you know, Mae just hated me.

SPORN: Mae?

BENETTI: And she was . . . Mae Reuther, Walter's wife. George Edwards and I used to go out to lunch every day, you know, the judge? And, sometimes Walter and Mae would join us. And Mae would never say one peep to me. Not one peep. And I never could figure it out. What really bugged her about me, except that a lot of the people that came in the Locals stood around and admired the mural, you know. (LAUGHS) Coming in, and my scaffold was a . . .

SPORN: Oh, admired it while you were painting?

BENETTI: Yeah. And so, Mae used to walk in, come down the block, turn into the entrance to the Local, and when she'd get to the bottom steps -- they came up to the entry way -- open the door, and run past the scaffold. (LAUGHS) As though I might drop something on her, you know. (LAUGHING)

SPORN: What kind of comments did the men make when they were watching you?

BENETTI: Oh, they were crazy about the murals. They were really crazy about . . .

SPORN: But, did they say anything? What did they say?

BENETTI: Well, one time, somebody threatened to come and bust up the murals. You know, a rival Local, and so they sent a guard to watch the murals all night.

SPORN: But, did they talk to you about them while you were painting?

BENETTI: Oh, yes. Sure.

SPORN: What'd they say?

BENETTI: Well, you know, people are so overwhelmed by somebody that paints, you know, they always say admiring things, you know. Nothing that . . .

SPORN: They never tried to tell you how to do it better?

BENETTI: No.

SPORN: Did you try to explain to them what you were trying to do?

BENETTI: Well, I think the message of the murals was self-evident. You know, there's farmers on one side, and workers on the other side, and hands grasping in between. So, it was sort of, farmer-labor unity, you know?

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: And in the background of those murals, are all the struggles of the farmers in the dustbowl, and the sharecroppers, and the Farm Holiday Association, and stuff like that. And in the background of the workers march is Tom Mooney and . . .

SPORN: Right.

BENETTI: You know, all the struggles of the workers.

SPORN: How much of that mural is still there?

BENETTI: This girl, that's her name?

SPORN: Franks?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: From the Textile Workers?

BENETTI: Yes. She went to look to see, because I . . . She said that the Local had moved out of the Grand building. So, I said, "Well, they wouldn't take those murals off the walls, because it would be too hard to get too." You know. And so, she went to their Local, and she said one of the panels they had saved.

SPORN: Oh, really?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Where is that other building? Medberry . . . What did you say?

BENETTI: Medberry Grand.

SPORN: Is that 'Grand' meaning on Grand River?

BENETTI: Now, wait a minute. It's something Grand. Not Medberry. Medberry's up near Fredrick. But, this is out . . . I don't know if it's out Grand River or Michigan. It's Mayberry Grand.

SPORN: Well, I can find out what the old building was that they were in, just by asking the present Local,

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BENETTI: And, if they painted over the murals, they'll bleed through. (LAUGHS)
That's all. The only ways that get rid of them is to hack them out.

SPORN: Yeah. You mean, they'll show through?

BENETTI: Yes.

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: They'll bleed through.

SPORN: Yeah. Well, okay. So now, you and Henry Bernstein were the only ones on the Treasury Department?

BENETTI: Treasury Department.

SPORN: But, when you went into the WPA . . .

BENETTI: Then, during this terrific unionization of Detroit . . . The icemen unionized, and the rubber workers, and the, Christ, the gas station operators, and the . . . (LAUGHS) Everybody got a union. And so did the artists. And the artists were really the most fucked-up, crazy union you could possibly imagine, you know. (LAUGHS) They wanted to paint, you know, and they wanted to have more time to paint. Well, when we said, well, what the guys in New York are getting -- a higher rate per hour than we are. We're getting a dollar ninety-six an hour, and they're getting two twenty-five an hour. So, don't you think we should talk to, negotiate with, Sylvester about this deal. Well, they said, what would that mean? Well, you can't get more than twenty-one dollars a week, you know, so it would only mean that we'd work less hours. They said, but we don't want to work less hours, we want to work more hours. (LAUGHS) So, they wouldn't go for that idea at all. And . . .

SPORN: So, you mean Sylvester, the one who . . . Sylvester Jerry?

BENETTI: No, the artist we know.

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: The only artists who would go for it were the guys who were working as helpers. You know, the guys that were carrying in the water, and . . .

SPORN: The artists themselves were not interested?

BENETTI: Yeah. The artists themselves didn't want anything of that.

SPORN: How many artists were there on the Project?

BENETTI: A hundred and sixty-five, or so. But, they, they . . . The American Index of Design took care of all . . .

(END OF TAPE SIDE A. BEGINNING OF TAPE SIDE B),

SPORN: Do you remember any of the people on the Federal Theatre Project, like Edith Segal? Do you remember her?

BENETTI: Oh, sure. She was a real good friend of mine. She was a Leftist, you know, too.

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: I hope she's not dead.

SPORN: No. She's alive and lives in Brooklyn, and I've interviewed her. She's in her . . . She still writes poetry. And her husband -- She's married to someone named Samuel Kamen, who's a water colorist.

BENETTI: K-a-m-e-n?

SPORN: K-a-m-e-n. No, she's not dead, and I'll tell her about you, in fact, and maybe you can communicate with each other. Hy Fireman I mentioned.

BENETTI: She won't remember me by Benetti. My name was Barbara Wilson.

SPORN: Yeah, I see. The name I have here is Barbara Wilson Benetti.

BENETTI: Yes.

SPORN: That's the three names here. But, who else can you tell about . . . Now, did the people who ran the Federal Art Project, in any way, at any time, ever get upset by any of the content of the things that you were putting into your work?

BENETTI: No, because on the Project, we didn't . . . We were having enough trouble organizing the union, and trying to keep that going, you know, without getting fired. Because, as I say, the artists were a very backwards bunch about what they wanted as far as their union was concerned. And I was Chairman of the Grievance Committee. And so, I had to do a great deal of negotiating with Sylvester Jerry. And he didn't like me very well. He swallowed his dislike because, you know, the union was an idea, whose time had come right then. And nobody was going to tell anybody they couldn't belong to a union. And so, the artists struggled along in their union, you know. Piss poor organization that it was. (LAUGHS) But, it was still their union. And so it . . . What I think about it now, I think about mostly with amusement, although at the time, it just nearly drove you nuts, you know. These artists are so crazy about what they didn't want.

SPORN: So, you say . . . In other words, you're saying that the content of

SPORN: the art wasn't all that . . .

BENETTI: No. I don't think anybody really made an effort to . . . Frank Cassara did some very heroic murals. In fact, I saw him on television. This little wizened up old guy . . . So, the guy kept calling him Frank, and then, all of a sudden, I see this mural he had painted on the WPA. And, it was really a pretty good mural. But, in the heroic thing. And I thought "For Christ's sake, that's Frank Cassara. You know, my old pal." (LAUGHS) And, I couldn't believe it, you know, because he was so, kind of holy and respectable.

SPORN: He wasn't respectable in those other days?

BENETTI: Well, he . . . He was very self-conscious about being Italian. And it gave him a . . . An inferiority complex. Gus Nuchims was another artist that was on the Project. And he . . .

SPORN: What's the name?

BENETTI: Gus Nuchims.

SPORN: Nuchims?

BENETTI: He's in that picture.

SPORN: Who did you think was the best of the group? As an artist?

BENETTI: Well, Dave Fredenthal was not on the Project. He was in the art school, for a while. He died -- Committed suicide.

SPORN; Of the people on the Project? You had Sam Cashman. He was a sculpturer?

BENETTI: Yeah, I knew him. He . . . Well, maybe I'm prejudiced. I didn't ever think he was a very good sculptor. But . . .

SPORN: Charles Pollock?

BENETTI: I don't remember Charles Pollock. Is he a little, short guy with kind of reddish hair?

SPORN: Well, when I say him . . .

BENETTI: Was from Flint?

SPORN: No, he worked in Detroit. He was head of the Graphics Division. But, he did a mural.

BENETTI: Yeah, I . . . I think I know who he is.

SPORN: Maury Merlin?

BENETTI: Yeah, "Moishe".

SPORN: "Moishe". He's dead, isn't he?

BENETTI: He lived with us.

SPORN: I met his wife about a year ago in California. And . . .

BENETTI: Minnie?

SPORN: Minnie Gossman, yes.

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Well, who did you think did the best of all those people, in terms of their art? Or among the best?

BENETTI: Well, Henry Bernstein was good. I just can't remember the name of this guy. He just drove us all nuts. He was . . . He was scared of tomorrow. He had this great big canvas, and it was up on a stand. And he had a table on the stand too, and all kinds of paraphernalia. And, he spent three weeks mixing colors from . . . Red out of the tube, to a little bit white, a little bit more white, little bit more white, a little bit more white, little bit more white, till it was pale pink and then white. Then, he took a greyed red, a red with black in it. Same red but a little black in it. And, he made that go from red greys up to white. He had a table about as big as this, with colors all mixed up, under water to keep wet. And then, when he started to paint, he'd take two colors and mix them together. (LAUGHS) So . . . He whistled all the time, and there were a bunch of us working on murals in this great, big, loft room. And he just drove the rest of us absolutely insane. So, one day, after he had been working on this, mixing his paint forever, Speck got up on his stand before he came in, and drew a fly with pencil on the canvas. (LAUGHS) And, it was a pretty realistic fly, so . . . (LAUGHS) I can't think of his name. (Marvin Beerbohm. BWB.) But, anyway, he's gotten to be a fairly well-known mural painter.

SPORN: He's still around?

BENETTI: I don't know if he is or not. You'd be surprised how many of these guys have had something happen to them.

SPORN: Now, do you remember any of the Federal Theatre Project people? Besides Edith Segal? There was a woman by the name of Peggy Fenn. Kimon Friar?

BENETTI: I knew him. The Theatre Project people met in a different place than the artists and writers. We had an office together. You know, the offices were side by side on a hall, in a building on the corner of

BENETTI: Forest and Woodward. I think the entrance is a little down from Forest. On the east side of the street. And, it was a big, old rookery of an office building. It had been abandoned by anybody, you know, that had any pretensions to be successful, like doctors, or lawyers, or anybody like that. Who wanted to, you know, show off their offices. So, we got this office real cheap. And that was the office that I went to work in. The, the next office, was . . . The next studio was down at the foot of Woodward, past Vernors, where the Cobo Hall is now. That was a big old loft building that . . .

SPORN: An art studio?

BENETTI: Well, it was like a six, eight story building.

SPORN: Yeah, but I mean, you had an art studio in that loft?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Oh, I see.

BENETTI: And Gus went crazy.

SPORN: Who went crazy?

BENETTI: Gus Nuchims. I don't . . . I came out of the . . .

SPORN; You mean literally?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Yeah? Do you remember Robert Hayden? The black man on the Federal Writers' Project?

BENETTI: His name rings a bell, but I can't put a face to it.

SPORN: Well, now, another question which I sort of asked you before, and you may have answered it, but let me ask again. You were sympathetic to the Left, you say?

BENETTI: Yes.

SPORN: In fact, you said at one point, you were a member of the Communist Party?

BENETTI: Young Communist League.

SPORN: Did that, in any way . . . Did you, or anybody else, well, that your art should reflect your politics?

BENETTI: Well . . .

SPORN: Was that anything that ever came up for discussion?

BENETTI: Now really. Not really. That . . . The artists . . . You know John Carrol had a tremendous influence on artists of Detroit. He was, for a long time, the resident artist at the Society of Arts and

BENETTI: Crafts. You know his work, "Cowboy's Dream"?

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: Floating around with a horse. Well, he, himself, had a kind of a lyrical turn of mind, you know? A romantic turn of mind. But, his students . . . Now, Sarkis was one of his students. And they adopted his manner of painting, but they didn't have his kind of inner spark of Romanticism. And so, the result was, he painted in a kind of muddy way. You know, it was . . . He depended very heavily on greys and pale pinks, and stuff like that against grey. And, at the time that we were on the Project, Sarkis was trying very hard to get that fluidity of paint that Carrol had. But, achieving mainly the mud. You know, the grey . . . And, an awful lot of other people, who were influenced by Carrol, got that. I got to the place where I thought Carrol was a terrible influence on everybody. It was a . . . He was an eclectic sort of painter, and anybody that followed him was going no place. There was a kid named Francis Danovich, that worked on the Project. He died. He was a very talented kid, and he studied at Cranbrook, but as a . . . Tell me the name . . . Cranbrook in the thirties.

SPORN: Thirties?

BENETTI: Forties. Dave Fredenthal studied with him, too.

SPORN: Did he try . . . Did this young fellow try to imitate Carrol?

BENETTI: No, no. Francis Danovich imitated this guy from Cranbrook.

SPORN: Oh, I see.

BENETTI: But, his style was much more brittle and sophisticated.

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: But, there was not . . . I think I was the only painter, really, that was interested in painting something. You know, an idea. A political idea, or . . . And, believe me, that's not easy to do, you know. You can't . . . It isn't like doing a still life.

(LAUGHS)

SPORN: Yeah. So, in other words, the others were not so interested in . . .

BENETTI: No, no.

SPORN: . . . Getting ideas, or political ideas into their art.

BENETTI: No, they're . . . They're connection with the union was that they saw that the union could help them in their daily aggreations on the Project.

SPORN: But, not as far as the art was concerned?

BENETTI: No.

SPORN: Okay. Now, but, you as a political person, did you have any idea that you were trying to say, discuss with them, using art in a more political way?

BENETTI: Well, I think my connections with them was trying to raise the level of their knowledge of the world, you know? They were very innocent as far as what was going on is concerned. And we were just coming into World War II.

SPORN: So, if I understand you correctly then, it wasn't so much that you were trying to discuss with them how art would be effective . . .

BENETTI: No. (LAUGHING)

SPORN : . . . You were interested in discussing with them the politics of the . . .

BENETTI: You know, the guy who is passionate about painting trees, you don't try to . . . (LAUGHING)

SPORN: You don't.

BENETTI: . . . Try to make him political. He's still going to be passionate about painting trees. But, you can get him to think in terms that . . . Well, here's one of the things we did.

SPORN: 'We' meaning . . .

BENETTI: The people on the Project. The people in the union, the people that were influenced by me. We had an anti-war mural. And we got permission because the chief of police, or the guy who was the charge of the traffic, or something, was a good friend of my Uncle Guy's. My Uncle Guy was a major general, and a crooked politician, that had a bunch of people recall . . . He had a recall vote. He ran for Secretary of State, and he had a recall vote. And all the guys that recounted the ballots went to jail. (LAUGHING) They marked them up, and tore them up, and did everything. My Uncle, the only penalty that he got was he didn't get elected, you know. (LAUGHING) He didn't get arrested, but . . .

SPORN: He went scot-free, but he didn't get elected?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: So . . .

BENETTI: So, he was a good friend of the traffic cop, who could give us permissions to paint this mural. So . . .

SPORN: And, this was a Project mural?

BENETTI: No, this was a private . . . Leo, you know, that was . . .

SPORN: Some of the people on the Project were doing this?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: This was during the phony war, during the time . . .

SPORN: Oh, this is in the early forties?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: Yeah. Were you still on the Project then?

BENETTI: I think I must have been.

SPORN: Where is it?

BENETTI: I guess . . .

SPORN: Is that mural hung anywhere?

BENETTI: Oh, no. We threw it away when we got . . . (LAUGHING)

SPORN: Oh, you threw it away?

BENETTI: Well, the thing is, it was talked over. We had a general plan for what we were going to do. We didn't have any sketch to go on, or anything. And, we had six guys start at a four by eight panel, and just start painting, you know? (LAUGHING) And, it came out to be a pretty dazelling piece. (LAUGHING)

SPORN: So, why did you throw it away?

BENETTI: Well, it didn't have much art content, you know.

SPORN: Oh. Oh, I see.

BENETTI: So . . . But, it was a spectacular piece of propaganda.

SPORN: Oh, I see.

BENETTI: But, as long as we painted on the thing, we had crowds. We had hundreds of people standing around watching us, you know?

SPORN: Where did these people come from? Were you painting it outdoors, or . . .

BENETTI: We were painting in Campus Marshus. That's where the Detroit Director of Traffic comes in. He gave us permission.

SPORN: Oh, I see.

BENETTI: That's why we had to get the permission from the traffic department.

SPORN: Oh, I see. Okay. And they . . .

BENETTI: So, here we are, right downtown, you know, painting on this mural.

SPORN: Who were the people that painted on it?

BENETTI: Well, let's see. There was Henry Bernstein, and Milton Henry, I

BENETTI: think his name is. Milton something. And Gus Nuchims and a guy named Art something, Joe Spencer, who's now dead. (PAUSE) The photographer was late, and so he came around, and he said "Well, where's all the crowds?" You know. And I said, "Well, we got through with the mural, and they all disappeared, you know. They're not interested in just looking at a picture." So, he said, "Well, start painting again." Well, we had the paints all put away. So, we all picked up just dry brushes that had been washed out, and started making scratches on the mural. And immediately got a crowd of a hundred people again.

SPORN: Now, so, that was sort of . . . That's one of your examples of an attempt to do some political work in art?

BENETTI: Yeah. Well, it wasn't very . . .

SPORN: Doesn't make any difference.

BENETTI: . . . Inspiring. But, you know, we did that kind of stuff.

SPORN: So, is there anything else, that you would . . . What did you think of the Federal Arts Project as a Project?

BENETTI: Oh, now we can start really talking.

SPORN: Well.

BENETTI: I became a painter on the Federal Art Project, because getting a chance to paint every day, you know. And doing it eight hours a day, and being forced to go to some goal, and not just fiddle around, you know, and try stuff, is the way you get to be a painter. And, this was like the studios for the old masters. You know, the Renaissance Italian painters. They had guys that painted the skys, and guys that painted the satin after they got good enough. And guys that painted the hands after they got good enough. And then, when they got to the place where they could touch up the faces and stuff, well, then, they moved out and started a studio of their own. Well, these . . . These people in the Federal Arts Project, I saw sign painters come . . . Have you seen any of the American Index of Design pictures?

SPORN: Some.

BENETTI: Well, those are all done by the crummiest artists on the Project. When anybody . . . When Sylvester Jerry really wanted to threaten somebody, he'd say "I'm going to transfer you to the American Index of Design." You know. Because, the only guys that worked on the

BENETTI: American Index of Design were former sign painters, people like that. They couldn't paint. And they were given a thing and told make a duplicate of this, so that when we take a picture of this against a white background, and your painting is against a white background, your rendering will be indistinguishable from . . .
(LAUGHING)

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: And, anybody can learn that much, you know, about painting. And sometimes, it would take them four months to do a . . . A rendering.

SPORN: So, the sign painters would learn how to paint?

BENETTI: They learned how to paint. And, I think that, in general, if you were to take most of the paintings that were done on the WPA, they're better than a bare wall, you know? They may not be the greatest paintings that the world has ever seen, but there are a lot of them that are very, very, credible paintings.

SPORN: Even here in the State of Michigan?

BENETTI: Yeah.

SPORN: So, then, it was a good training ground, you feel, for you? In other words . . .

BENETTI: A good training ground? No. What if the Project had gone on? You see, the thing that happened was that the Congress got very uptight about the WPA. And they said anybody that's been on the WPA eighteen months has to go through Welfare over again. Can't have this . . . Welfare cheats on WPA. So, okay. I went through the Welfare twice. The second time to get back on. But, when the next eighteen months came up, then I, I figured, just too damn much trouble. And the WPA's going to close anyway. I better find myself a job. And so, I . . . I got a job. But, the . . . The thing is, had the WPA gone on, there are a lot of people who would've come out very good painters. I probably would've been one of them.

SPORN: You continued painting afterward?

BENETTI: Well, I got married, a second time. I wasn't married to Speck very long, because two artists in one family are one too many. (LAUGHS) And so, I got divorced and I married Johnny. And Johnny and I have three children. And during . . . My youngest child is twenty-one years old, buy my oldest child is thirty-eight. So, the period . . .

BENETTI: Oil paintings and small children are a very bad combination. Very bad. And if you're going to give your time to painting . . . Well, in the first place, I'm the kind of person that has to work really hard at painting. To do a good painting. And, I'm very envious of these guys that just knock it off. You know. But, I can't do that.

SPORN: So, you didn't continue painting?

BENETTI: So, I didn't continue painting until the last ten years I've gone back to it. I was in this rehabilitation center thirty days, and I was doing chalk portraits. Plus going to nine hours a day of lectures, and group therapy, and what not.

SPORN: So, you're very active now? I mean painting.

BENETTI: No, no, not really active. I . . . I have a lot of other things that interfere with painting. I'm a farmer among other things. So, I don't try to paint in the summertime. But, in the wintertime I try to paint.

SPORN: So, it taught you how to be a painter, but you really never went on?

BENETTI: No, but I would've, if I had had a way of earning a living and still painting.

SPORN: In other words, if the Federal Arts Project had continued, and you could've stayed with it, you would've continued painting?

BENETTI: I would've been a good painter. And a lot of good painters would've been produced out of that.

SPORN: Now, do you think that, in any way, the Project reached a larger audience with art than would have been exposed to art without the Project?

BENETTI: It's possible. Of course, since television, they have coverage of a lot of art shows, you know, on television.

SPORN: Yeah.

BENETTI: And, it's a whole different set of circumstances now. But, in the days of the Federal Art Project, I'm sure that there were a lot of people that were introduced to painting. That had never seen any before.

SPORN: Yes. It was the purpose, at least on the national level, for all of the Projects, including the Art Project, to paint subjects, for example, of common life. The lives of ordinary people. To paint the history of the United States, or historical events, and so on, and so forth.

BENETTI: Yes.

SPORN: Did you have any notion that that's what the Project was trying to do?

BENETTI: Oh, yes. Sure. The only thing is, we were . . . We were kind of circumscribed by the people who requested paintings. You know, we had a lot of requests from school principals, who wanted paintings for their schools. And they all wanted Alice in Wonderland.

SPORN: Alice in Wonderland?

BENETTI: Yeah. That was the . . .

SPORN: Oh, I see.

BENETTI: And you know, you could sell them on the idea of doing something different. Or, you could try to sell them on the idea of doing something different. (LAUGHS) But, it was not all that easy, you know. They were absolutely stuck with Alice in Wonderland, but, you couldn't.

SPORN: Who would be the person responsible for trying to sell them on a different idea?

BENETTI: Sylvester Jerry.

SPORN: He would be the one? Now, what about Post Office murals? Were you responsible for doing that, too? I mean the Project. And did you have any problems there?

BENETTI: I think Frank Cassara did one in a Post Office. And Marvin Beer-bohm . . . After you've left, his name will pop into my mind. (LAUGHS) I can't think of it now. He wasn't really a mural painter. He was a . . . He painted little canvases like this, that size, with the edge of a pallet knife. Like a pointalist, except it was glowing color. But, in little lines of color. And he was not a bad painter, but I . . . I think he started trying to paint a mural in this same style, and it was . . . It didn't work out very well.

SPORN: So, over all, you think the Project was a worthwhile Project?

BENETTI: Oh, yes.

SPORN: Yes?

BENETTI: Yes. When I see the kids today . . . You know, there were a lot of kids in this rehabilitation program that I was in. And they were there because they didn't have a job. They didn't have anything to do. And, of course we got by playing Bridge and tennis, but, you

BENETTI: know, that's a . . .

SPORN: In the old days.

BENETTI: Yeah. But, I don't know if . . . In the first place, you've got to be a damn good Bridge player to make money at it. (LAUGHS)

SPORN: (LAUGHTER)

BENETTI: And whether or not . . . See, if they, if they started a bunch of Projects today, and gave some of these unemployed kids something to do, there wouldn't be as much crime in the streets, and as much purse snatching and stuff like that.

SPORN: Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to say?

BENETTI: I'll probably think of a lot of things after you've gone, but I . . . I really can't think of anything very much right now. (LAUGHS)

SPORN: Well, if you do, jot it down, and send me a little note. I'm . . .

BENETTI: Okay.

SPORN: I'm there at the Department of English, and I'm sure we would be glad to get anything that pops in your mind that may be of use.

BENETTI: You know, it's . . . It's great for me to hear about all of these people that were former pals of mine.

SPORN: Well, yes. Some of them like Lou Falstein, whom you've mentioned. As I say, I've interviewed him, and perhaps you would like to get in touch with him. I don't know. But, I have all their addresses and telephone numbers. At any rate. Well, thank you very much. It is very helpful, and very useful, and it was nice speaking to you.

BENETTI: Well, it was great talking to you.

SPORN: Okay.

(END OF TAPE, SIDE B. END OF INTERVIEW)