Regional Oral History Office University of California

The Bancroft Library Berkeley, California

Wayne F. Miller

AN EYE ON THE WORLD: REVIEWING A LIFETIME IN PHOTOGRAPHY

With an Introduction by

Daniel Dixon

Interviews Conducted by

Suzanne B. Riess

in 2001

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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Chicago background, family, early experiences with a camera, Art Center School; Naval Photographic unit, Edward Steichen, Hiroshima; Guggenheim to document the northern Negro, 1946-1947; work for *Life* and other magazines; move to the West Coast, a house in Orinda; thoughts on "getting the shot," darkrooms, other photographers, museums, the market for photography, teaching; cover photography; discusses assignments, favorite stories, the birth series; creating the *Family of Man* and *The World is Young*; role with American Society of Magazine Photographers, and Magnum agency; moving on to become a forest landowner.

Introduction by Daniel Dixon.

Interviewed 2001 by Suzanne Riess.

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INTRODUCTION by Daniel Dixon

I own a print of the eloquent photograph you see here. Wayne gave it to me for a very compelling reason. I had the guts to ask for it.

We have a valued friendship, Wayne and I. It reaches back over fifty years and entitles both of us to ask the other guy for occasional favors. Whenever I'm in Wayne's neighborhood, I invite myself to dinner and usually expect to be spared the expense of a hotel. In return, I provide Wayne with some editorial yard work that he seems to find helpful. The beauty of his print only partly explains why I get by far the best of the bargain.

The photograph is placed in our living room. It's surrounded by a cluster of portraits by Dorothea Lange, another friend of Wayne's. Nobody ever interpreted the human face with greater understanding and sensitivity than my mother, but our visitors are more insistently drawn to Wayne's study of his troubled daughter Dana than to any of the neighboring Langes. They look, look again, and then begin to ask questions.

Who is this child? they want to know. Why is she weeping? Is it grief? Rage? Humiliation? Loneliness? Injustice? Is this the ending of a tempest? Or is it just the beginning?

Different folks, different strokes. Each viewer has his or her own theory. But on one point almost everybody agrees. They find the photograph strangely unsettling. "It makes me slightly uncomfortable," some people admit, and I think I know why.

I, like others, feel pierced by the purity of Dana's gaze. She looks straight at me, into me, through me. Those eyes seem to perceive my weaknesses, my pretensions, my hypocrisies--my secret self. They reproach me. I can't look at the photograph for more than a minute or so. Then I have to glance away.

Many of Wayne's photographs--the photographs I like best--are also mysterious. They're not declarations or prophecies. They preach no sermons, sound no trumpets, lead no charges. They simply suggest possibilities. The stories they tell are still unfinished, and we can only guess at their endings.

That's not very surprising, because Wayne himself is an enigmatic man. He rarely talks about himself, and then only with restraint. He seldom mentions his dreams and never his nightmares. Not once in all the years we've known each other have I ever heard him curse. Though not distant, he's detached. At this or that event or family gathering, he usually lingers at the edge of the laughter and the conversation, somewhere between the light and the shadows. My wife once asked him why, with half a life still ahead of him, he decided that he no longer wanted to be a photographer. "I was tired of being on the outside, looking in," he answered. "I wanted to join the party."

Well, perhaps. But that was many years ago, and nothing much seems to have changed. With or without a camera, Wayne remains a habitual and instinctive observer. While others whirl in a waltz, he watches and wonders.

Because he's so naturally reticent, I had my doubts when Wayne first told me about the plans for his oral history. I wasn't sure that he could or would reveal his essential feelings. But Suzanne Riess, his interviewer, has adroitly asked the right questions in the right way, touched the most sensitive nerves and memories, and Wayne has opened up.

Nevertheless, there are some things about himself that Wayne hasn't confided or maybe even considered. Here are just a few thoughts that I believe deserve a place on the record.

As you turn these pages, you'll discover that Wayne Miller has been and done many very different things. He's been a photographer, but also an editor, a business executive, a tree farmer and a viniculturist. How, if at all, are these diverse interests and enterprises linked? What do they and Wayne have in common?

I have an answer to that question.

Wayne's father was a surgeon. "Were you close?" I asked him not long ago. "Yes, he answered. "He was a wonderful man. Deeply dedicated. Faithful to his oath. I admired and respected him very much."

From his father I believe that Wayne inherited a certain sense of service. He served (and risked his life) in the navy during World War II. After the war, on a Guggenheim fellowship, he served the cause of understanding in the work he did on Chicago's seething South Side. He served

for two arduous years as Edward Steichen's lieutenant in the shaping and mounting of the historic *Family of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Later, he headed the tumultuous zoo of photographers called Magnum--a sacrificial service if service there ever was. When he eventually gave up photography and became a timberman, he served as an organizer, the president and a Washington lobbyist for an industry association devoted both to the harvesting of trees and the conservation of forests. And throughout the years, whatever else he's done, Wayne has served his family. He may or may not agree with me, but I'm convinced that service has been the quiet but most consistent theme of his life and work.

One thing I know for sure. He's certainly served me long and well as a friend.

It began half a century ago. I was then in desperate trouble--homeless, helpless, hopeless. I don't know how--perhaps through my mother--but he and his wife, the indispensable Joan, rescued me. They took me in, fed me, sheltered me. They gave me comfort, company, encouragement. Never in the weeks that I lived with them did they ever harangue me about what I'd done wrong or should do right. They accepted me as I was, without intrusion or complaint. And they still welcome me the same way today.

I was talking with Wayne on the phone awhile back, and he said something that suddenly made me laugh out loud. His wit, like his wisdom and his affection, is unobtrusive. If you don't pay very close attention, you may miss it. This time I didn't.

My wife was standing there, smiling and shaking her head. "You two are lucky to have each other," she said.

"I know," I answered. "I just hope he feels the same way."

So there it is. Blurred, indistinct, out-of-focus--that's the snapshot of my friend Wayne.

Now it's his turn to say something for and about himself.

Speak, Wayne.

INTERVIEW HISTORY--Wayne F. Miller

Wayne F. Miller's is the latest in a series of oral histories of photographers completed by the Regional Oral History Office. We started in 1961 by interviewing Imogen Cunningham. In 1968 our oral history of Dorothea Lange appeared. In 1978 Ansel Adams's memoir was completed. Three greats in the smallish local photography world. In 1991 an eighth grade student in Orinda, California doing a school report on The Fifties discovered that a "famous photographer [of the fifties]" lived in Orinda, and with some tutelage in oral history that student, Evan Elder, conducted an hour's taped conversation with Wayne Miller and donated it to the Regional Oral History Office. It was obvious to us that the subject deserved a full memoir, and so we hovered around the idea of Wayne for the next ten years, while looking for funding to do his oral history. In 2001 allocation of monies from the Bancroft Library's McFarland Fund enabled us to do that longer memoir.

Wayne Miller is a documentary photographer, and with him those words cover big ground. After admittedly rather cursory training with a camera during college, and a short time at the Art Center School of Design, he joined Edward Steichen's World War II Naval Photographic Unit where he saw and shot plenty of "action" and photographed the aftermath of Hiroshima. In 1946 he was back in his hometown of Chicago, and used two successive Guggenheim Foundation grants to take a close look at Chicago's black population, a project recently re-published as *Chicago's South Side: 1946-1948.* He had a successful run of magazine assignments, picture stories for *Life* that had him covering returning soldiers from the Korean War, aspects of the movie industry, developments in science, religion, politics, in everything that seminal weekly magazine cast its gaze upon. He worked from California, where he had moved in 1949. He was recognized for the emphasis in his photographic stories on the individual very human being.

In 1953 Wayne, and his wife Joan and their four children, moved to New York City at the behest of Edward Steichen--earlier Wayne's chief, ultimately a very close family friend--to join Steichen in conceptualizing and curating the Museum of Modern Art's *Family of Man* exhibition. That groundbreaking project had a long run--after the 1955 opening and publication of the catalogue, it traveled the world more or less continuously until 1964. The Miller family returned to Orinda and Wayne had the support and the time and the place for a successful book project, *The World is Young*, looking at a theme dear to him, childhood and family--and by default, the fifties.

Wayne kept up magazine work through the 1960s and 1970s, but he also began to be much involved with the American Society of Magazine Photographers, and Magnum Photos, Inc. He took leadership roles in both organizations. In 1967 he answered a call from Washington requesting advice about the "visual image of America's parks" and ended up a special assistant to the director of the National Park Service until 1970. In 1971 he was executive director of the Public Broadcasting Environment Center. He was pulling away from photography. Indeed by the mid-1970s he was questioning the meaning, and meaningfulness, of the photographic work that came his way. And by then Wayne and Joan, who owned extensive forestland in northern

California, were viewing tree farming and the issues involved in that stewardship as important and gratifying work, another good use of Wayne's energies and organizational skills.

Now in 2003, as the Joe Munroe frontispiece portrait of our subject indicates, Wayne Miller settles daily at a table and a computer in his studio-plus-office and fields requests for prints of his photographs and invitations to talk about the *South Side* book, and tends to the business related to being a tree farmer. This room is where we met to interview. It is accessed by an outside staircase, diverting the visitor from the house and leading to a comfortable high-ceilinged wood-paneled aerie, with a couch and chairs and tables and bookshelves. A wall of east-facing windows gives onto a view of trees and treetops. On the opposite, inside wall is a compelling display of dry-mounted favorite family photographs, and *objets* both memorial--awards and medals--and sentimental. He puts in a big part of each day up there, and in the past several years has had help in further organizing what is already by necessity the highly organized archive of a professional photographer. In a video I made [deposited in The Bancroft Library], Wayne takes the viewer on a tour of the studio space, the darkroom, the storage areas, explaining where things are kept and how.

Wayne and I met up there in the studio for seven interviews, starting in August 2001. He took his seat in a chair, and I sat on the couch, with papers and notes and the tape-recorder on a handy table. To illustrate a point, or to answer a question, he would frequently rise up to retrieve examples, a picture, notebooks, whatever might be helpful in telling the story. (Many of the retrieved examples are included as illustrations in the oral history.) I despaired at his 84-year-old agility--I rose with difficulty at the end of our two hours.

Wayne is a charming person, and a thoughtful, serious, and also sometimes a little jokey, teasing interviewee. I know he didn't tell me "everything." Later he and Joan and I had several lunches after the morning interview sessions during which I know that I was being interviewed a bit, and being "found out," and it gave me pause to realize how much I both fell in with and resisted that parallel experience. Was this what it was like to be constantly on the receiving end of a process and a person determined to get answers?

In his fond introduction Daniel Dixon speaks of a somewhat enigmatic Wayne Miller, and of course it is my hope that this oral history makes known some of the unknowns. But I did begin to wonder whether this testimony about a life that is elicited in response to an oral historian's questions is a final uncovering, or not. It isn't just immediately clear with a somewhat evasive subject. But the oral historian has the advantage of time, and there is perhaps a subtle grinding down to bottom truths. Thinking of Wayne's heartfelt commitment to individual dignity in telling his photographic stories, I hope the oral history is similarly humane.

Thanks to Wayne, and to Joan, for a great reception and acceptance of the process. Thanks to James R. K. Kantor for his review of the oral history. Thanks to Jack von Euw for insisting it had to be done.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all

interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Richard Cándida Smith, Director, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Suzanne B. Riess
Senior Editor/Interviewer

May, 2003
Berkeley, California

[Interview 1: August 2, 2001]##[1]

Gordon Parks, Challenging Oneself

Miller: Photographers know each other through each other's work, as much as we do by face to face relationships. In fact, talking about this one time with Henri Cartier-Bresson, he said relationships with other photographers are kind of like ships that pass in the night and go "toot-toot" to each other. I remember one time--well, I can give you several stories that may be of interest to you.

I hadn't met the photographer from Prescott, Arizona, Frederick Sommer, but I liked his work, and he had seen some of my work. We met at a photo conference in Aspen, Colorado, and we just embraced. Like I said, we were strangers but we were old friends. Another time I remember being with Harry Callahan in his apartment in Chicago, in his loft in Chicago, when we both were teaching at the Institute of Design there. Harry and Eleanor [wife] were great friends.

He loved to dance. God, he loved to dance. After both of us drinking too much, maybe Joan having a little too much, he would grab a hold of Joan and just waltz back and forth through that big loft. It was just marvelous. He prepared the meal, which was usually half a pound or so of bacon in a big frying pan with a bunch of eggs scrambled into it.

Anyway, I'm getting to the point which is that during one of these parties he showed me what he had been doing recently, an 8 x 10 box holding something like 250 prints. I'd never really seen his photographs in depth. I was going through those. He was dealing with abstract things, and I was dealing with people as a subject matter. That abstract sort of thing puts me off to a degree. I really can't grab it to the degree that so many photographers enjoy doing it. I was going through it, going through it, and I finally came to this picture he had made of the embossed bottoms of two sardine cans.

I looked at those things, and all of the sudden I realized what Harry was doing. Somehow or other, it all became clear, everything he was doing, those two sardine cans set it off. I sat there with Harry with tears rolling down my face. His abstractions came alive. They opened my eyes to his world and the emotions they could evoke.

Riess: Can you say more what was it that you realized?

1.## This symbol indicates that a tape segment has begun or ended.

Miller: It was something about the organization of those shapes, and the light, the way it fell on it. It came alive. They related to my world of photographing people and people's emotions. Somehow those damn sardine cans set it off. Anyway, going back now to Gordon Parks.

Riess: You said you felt strange about the Gordon Parks exhibition at the Oakland Museum.

Miller: Gordon is such a fantastic human being and a fantastic artist. I say that not advisedly but wholeheartedly. He's probably closer to being a Renaissance man in the arts than anyone I know. He's better in some of his fields than others, but by God, he's somehow just tops in all of them. The respect I have for him, I can't find words to describe it. We've met, never worked together, but we've met at different times in our lives. I'd admired his work in *Life* magazine before I'd really met him.

During the opening of *The Family of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York--this is 1955--we were all there in tuxedos and so forth. It was very formal, a lot of people, and I saw Gordon with his back to me, talking to a group. I walked up behind him and put my arms around him. He rolled his head back and he said, "Wayne Miller." I'm saying this because this is the kind of a guy he is. No matter where he is, he's in control of himself, and he understands that atmosphere, that mix that's around him at that time. He's such a sweet person, a considerate person.

We've met several other times, but it's been first a kind of mutual liking for one another. But also in my case, what he's done has been--. He's dug so deeply into a world that hurts him to dig into. I'm talking about the racial aspects of it. He has not only surmounted prejudice, but he's able to dig into it. He's able to make use of it, as well as to rise above it.

Riess: Have you talked to him about that material? After all, that was material that you got into, too.

Miller: No, I didn't talk about it as such. Our conversations, if I can say again, were above that. We were talking about family, issues about family. I saw him just recently. He came out to Oakland just recently and I spent a couple hours with him in his hotel room. We talked about really very general subject matter. It was interesting—one thing we were discussing was about giving our children money. Is it good or bad? And the mixed feelings about that.

I was doing this book on Chicago, *Chicago Southside*. I felt it would be great if Gordon could participate in this, maybe write a little introduction to it. I hadn't seen him or talked to him for several years, so I picked up the phone and called him. He said, "Sure, I'll be happy to." Time went on and I thought, "Well, he is terribly busy." He was putting a big exhibition together, a retrospective of his life, with all his work. I thought maybe he was just too busy. So I wrote him a letter--I hadn't heard from him and I realized that I was asking a great deal--and said, "If it's too much of a bother just forget about it, don't do it."

About a week later I got a call and he said, "I've got it done, Wayne." We talked further and he said, "I worked on it until five o'clock this morning. If you don't like it, tell me what to do and I'll change it or rewrite it." But here in the midst of this pressured time in his life, he found time to do this. The final product was one that he had really, I'm sure, spent much time thinking about. He shared in this essay his own feelings about his own life, so, so much of himself was in this, rather than just being a workmanlike job of doing an introduction for a friend. He gave something to me there, and I am most appreciative of that.

As far as his work goes, he struggled from one period of his life to another. I remember hearing both from him, as well as from Steichen, about when he came to Steichen and asked Steichen to arrange--Gordon wanted to work for *Vogue*, and he hoped that Steichen might provide an introduction there that would be helpful. I never really got a full story from Steichen about it, but I feel that Steichen did not make a real effort to introduce Gordon to *Vogue*, if he made any effort at all. Why? I don't know. It could be any number of personal reasons. I don't think they ever had any falling out or differences of opinion.

In a way--I was talking to Joan about this the other day--I wondered if maybe Steichen didn't want to recommend someone who might fail in *Vogue's* eyes and maybe reflect upon him. I don't know, this is just wild thinking on my part.

Riess: Steichen was the MOMA director at that time?

Miller: Yes, this is just after World War II, '45 or '47, something like that. I think Gordon in his book--his last book was called *Half Past Autumn*, and in it I believe he touches on this, but he doesn't go into it. I believe, in conversation with Gordon, that he feels that Steichen didn't help him too much, didn't go out of his way.

It was important, Gordon was moving so quickly in the development of his own work that this was a logical step. When he finally did work for *Vogue*, he did some fantastic things for them and they were highly appreciative of it. This was a stage of his life that he wanted to experience and go through. So much of his life has been that way. From different stages in photography and stages in writing. He wrote *The Learning Tree*, as you know, that first book. That's a beautiful book about his early life growing up.

Riess: His big color work was a surprise to me.

Miller: He's continuously experimenting. Evidently he has a studio, I didn't know he had a studio space. He likes light, the play of light, the things that happen, and the movement. The color doesn't do as much for me as the black and white when it's the abstract world. But it's not unrelated to his interest in music, where things flow and where things just happen. You discover things when they happen in the period of experimentation.

Riess: It's interesting that as you're describing him, the steps in his life are very planned, quite deliberate.

Miller: He doesn't hesitate to go beyond where he is. I don't know how deliberate it is or whether he just can't stop from doing it. I think he's of a nature where he has these urges and he has to do them. Like his music, he's written a lot of music, and I think there were performances in Europe of his full-scale orchestrations and some of the symphonies that he had done. Of course, he got involved in the movie business, and he did "Shaft" and a couple of other movies, and then one of his sons got interested in it and started doing some of the same things.

He's just so full of talent that he can't keep it in.

Riess: Why did you say that you felt strange about the Gordon Parks show?

Miller: First, I feel that it's too big a show. I'd like to see it edited and not have been so big. I think a show can suffer by having too much, so much that after a while you can't see it all. It loses

those qualities that come through because of a concentration of ideas. He's had so many great ideas, and they were explored with too many images, so that I couldn't taste that intensity of flavor that could have happened with tighter editing.

Also, this may not be true in Gordon's case, but I know it was true in Steichen's case, after you've achieved a great deal. Steichen always wanted to do something new that he had never done before, and it had to be better than anything he'd done before. He's one of the few people I know who can lift himself up by the bootstraps and move on and go into new territory. I think this is somehow directly related to getting older. You find that time is running short, and you've got to make a mark in some of those areas that you haven't yet explored.

I know that's the case with Steichen because at the end of *The Family of Man*--this was a major peak in his life, and while we were cleaning up after that exhibition, he was planning on doing a bigger show on women. In other words, he was going to top *The Family of Man*. He was going to do other things. I think some of this shows up in Gordon's exhibition. He was trying to push into new areas that he had experimented with and done very good work in, but now he wanted to do a real big thing on some aspects of it. Some of this abstract work, some of the nudes, from my point of view, and maybe I'm totally wrong, I feel this is symptomatic of those drives. When I talked to him about doing this piece for me in my book, *Chicago Southside*, he was in bed with torn Achilles tendons in both legs.

Riess: How did he get that?

Miller: He gets this from running every morning. He runs I forget how many miles, four, five, six miles every day. Here he is, at this time probably eighty-five or eighty-six when he tore these tendons from this strong exercise. He was in bed and he said, "I'm recovering now, this happened about a year ago and I'm still suffering some, I'm still bed-ridden to a degree, but I'm able to get up and move quite well. I think I'll be able to be running now in about another couple of months." This kind of drive, he's a captive of his own energies, you know?

Riess: There's nothing enviable about it, is there?

Miller: It's a drive, he's a driven man in many ways. But, my God, physically he's seemingly in great shape.

Riess: You talk about Parks going from the abstractions to the nudes and Steichen wanting to do the women. Do you feel that these men had something to say about women or nudes or abstraction? Certainly there were important things to say in *The Family of Man*, and in the early Gordon Parks work there was something very important to say.

Miller: That's a tough one, Suzanne. I feel that some of the things I'm talking about here with Steichen and Gordon, I think that inner drives don't have names. It may be one of wanting to get it out before it's too late, before they die, before they can't function. I can certainly understand that. I've talked to you about the photographs I've gathered together here of my life's work. I want to do something with it before it's too late for me to do any more with it. So I'm pushed now to get that done.

I have mixed feelings. It's a mix between ego and one of not being--. I feel as if if I don't do it, I'm leaving a lot of residue and unfinished business for my family to take care of. I don't

like that, I don't like to be that messy. I want to be neater about it. This doesn't relate to Steichen or Gordon, I don't believe. We're talking about another facet here.

Riess: Are you thinking "doing something" as book and exhibition?

Miller: I'm thinking about books, that sort of thing, because that's a form of organization. Exhibitions, per se, that can always be done after the material has been organized in the book. So I'm not too interested in that. I do want to get it done. I'm not trying to pick up my camera and do something I've never done before. I'm not trying to take my past work and try to make something new out of it that didn't exist before. I'm not that kind of a talent, that kind of a producer that these people are. I don't pretend to relate myself to that. These people have a drive down deep and they can't stop. It's like a kettle that steam has built up in, it just has to be released somehow.

Riess: That's very interesting.

Miller: That may just be nothing but ego, I don't know. I just don't know.

Riess: I wonder if some photographers feel that they are partly defined as "people who are not painters," and whether photographers have ever turned into painters.

Miller: That's interesting. I understand that Henri Cartier-Bresson, who gave up active photography some years back, has been painting ever since and has some exhibits at the Louvre. He wants to do more. Well, I don't know why he wants to do that rather than photography, but I do know that photography for me--after awhile one's abilities and feelings are hard to get onto the photographic paper to the degree we could in earlier years.

Maybe frustration is taking place in Henri's case where he wants to still get these things out, so he's going to painting. I don't know. As far as relating the basic drive to painting, I would feel it, Suzanne, as being one of wanting to be able to communicate it, wanting to be able to say it, no matter what vehicle you use. If painting seems to feel good, why gosh, yes.

Photography isn't something special or sacrosanct that it has to be honored or what not. Recently Rene Burri, a Swiss photographer, asked me to autograph the Chicago book, and he had drawn some things in there on the title page, and a space for me to sign in. These are rich people who have talents, they can call on these various talents. I'm envious of these people that can do these sort of things, they're blessed.

Photographing Blacks, "Making" and "Taking" Pictures

Riess: The Gordon Parks exhibition seemed as if it all had been printed at the same time. I don't know whether the images were printed for the show.

Miller: I think it may very well have been a mechanical happenstance, because the negatives are owned, most of them, by *Life* magazine. To have prints for the exhibition, they were supplied by *Life* and probably printed by *Life* for this exhibition. So they were current prints. I can't answer that. Do you mean that they were too slick somehow?

Riess: They seemed very dark, very black. I wondered if that is how they originally had been seen?

Miller: I can't answer that, Suzanne. I wasn't sensitive to that aspect of them. He has that fine ability to create emotional feelings by the way the picture was photographed, as well as the way it was printed.

Riess: To photograph black people, are there technical problems? Lighting? Those were dark interiors.

Miller: I've heard that feeling expressed before, but I've never felt it. I've photographed blacks in Chicago, and many times I used flash that ameliorates some of the problems you're talking about, the shadows and all. Also I was using flash because it was able to capture moments that using natural light wouldn't permit because of the lighting conditions, but even though it was white people, lighter skinned people, it wouldn't have changed my photography, I don't think.

Let me put it this way: as a photographer, I never realized when I was taking pictures that these people were black. They were people, that's what I was trying to capture on my film. How they feel, how they were struggling, how they were trying to express themselves. I wasn't illustrating a concept that I had, it was one of trying to say what I thought they were thinking, trying to think with them.

Riess: You were not a white man in a black situation, you were just a photographer with people.

Miller: Yes, and I think that the majority of people I was photographing during that period might have felt the same way. I didn't have confrontations of that nature when I was working with them.

##

Miller: The Rosicrucians, evidently you develop over your head an amorphous shape of some sort that has a color to it, and maybe a shape that's meaningful to another Rosicruicianist. I feel that maybe during this time that I was photographing blacks that I may have had the right color vapor over my head or something. Anyway, it just worked out that the color, my being white and them being black--any photographer that's really focusing on capturing what he feels is taking place, you don't see those other things. You're just seeing the glint in the eye, the way the body moves, the attitude of the face and so forth. The other is immaterial.

Riess: Well, it's a great state to be in. You're saying there's no self-consciousness.

Miller: No, no. I may be getting this out of order for you, but I was able to move within this black society on the south side of Chicago. I was the only white face around for blocks, outside of delivery people or the boss of a store someplace. I could walk down the streets alone any time of the day or night. I walked down the alleyways, I walked into tenement houses, walked down hallways. If I saw an open door, or hear some voices, I would smile and ask, "Do you mind if I make some photographs." Invariably I would be invited in. "Sure, go ahead."

It's strange and it's related to that old saw that you don't know until you ask. It was lovely. Somehow or other, people accepted me, they didn't feel I was trying to take advantage of them, I wasn't trying to sell them a set of encyclopedias or life insurance. I was serious about trying to take some photographs and I wasn't going to hurt them. I'd like to think that they felt that I could, maybe, tell their story and express the things that were of concern to them. I didn't ask

them to stand there, or put their arm there. I never interfered a bit as to what they were doing. My opening statement would usually be, “Please keep doing what you're doing, it's lovely,” or something of that nature. Strangely enough, people would do it.

Riess: They didn't ask you how it was going to be used?

Miller: No.

Riess: I'm struck by your choice of words--”making” photographs, not “taking” photographs. Two very different words.

Miller: Actually I don't know, I could argue both sides of those two words. I wasn't--no, I was, I was stealing images. But I was sharing, really. But I wasn't “making” the pictures either. That, to me, is illustration, where I'd be moving images around within the frame, the picture frame, to express something that was not there. I wasn't creating props or bringing props into it or something of that nature. Just photographing what is there is tremendously exciting.

Talking about "making" and "taking", Canada had a world's fair in Ottawa or something like that, Expo-something. During that time, there was a discussion group on photography, and I was part of it. It was Karsch of Canada [Ottawa], Gene Smith, somebody else, and myself. Plus a psychiatrist, and that was fascinating, his talking about photography. It got around to the point of “making” and “taking.” “Taking” being a form of theft and “making” being one of using your subject to say something else. I'm talking about illustration. The psychiatrist was the moderator in this discussion, and he brought up that the photographer holds this instrument between himself and his subject. He hides behind it, peeks through it, and then he steals something. So he removes himself from the reality by this camera he has out in front of him. I've never forgotten that, and I wonder how true is it? That's life itself, to be able to see it and then to share it. To make photographs or take photographs, that's what it's all about.

For example, the pictures I did in *Chicago Southside* with blacks, none of them seem to be conscious of what I'm doing. It has been suggested that maybe because I was using this Rolleiflex, which is a reflex camera that I had hung around my neck and that had a waist-level viewpoint, that I was looking down into it rather than looking at them, it's been suggested that this might be a reason for that. Well, it may be, I don't know. I do know that since then, not using a reflex, my subjects don't change, so I question it. But it's a possibility.

Riess: Some of the words associated with photography are unfortunate, if you really parse them, like "getting," I "got" the shot.

Miller: Or I "shot" a picture. It may be that we just need an intelligent photographer to come up with better words.

Family Background

Riess: To go back to the beginning, you were born on September 19, 1918, in Chicago. Tell me about your Chicago and your family.

Miller: My father was a practicing physician and surgeon in gynecology and obstetrics. I think he was in many ways a very simple man. He came from central Illinois, he was born in Casey, Illinois, I believe. He went through medical school in Chicago and then went on to New York. I don't know how he got to New York, but he was doing some internship at Bellevue Hospital in New York. One of the duties they had was to ride the ambulance. During one of those ambulance trips they delivered or picked up somebody or something at the Flower Hospital, also in New York City, and he met this young nurse, who was the supervisor of nurses there, who eventually became my mother.

She was an Irish girl who had been adopted, she doesn't know where she came from. She was Irish, Ellen van Horn Dempsey. She was raised in New Jersey, Somerville, New Jersey I believe. Shortly after he met her, as the story goes--I say shortly, it was within a week--he had learned of a job offer at a Guggenheim gold mine in Ecuador. They were asking for a medical team, so he proposed to my mother, they got married, and they went to Ecuador at the end of that week.

This mine was back inland from the coast; they had to go over to the other side of the Andes. They were there about a year. When my mother became pregnant, she had malaria--she was pregnant with my brother, my only sibling. He was born with malaria, and they decided that they had to get him out of there. They spent a week on mule-back to get to the coast. They also carried with them a small coffin. They didn't expect him to make it. But they did make it, got back to Quito, and took a ship back to the states and returned to my father's hometown, Casey, Illinois. The two of them nursed my brother for that period of time and got him back to health, recovered.

Riess: What's your brother's name?

Miller: Harold. My father's name is Harold Wayne Miller. I don't think he could have stood a third boy, he would have run out of names. [laughter]. This was on my grandfather's farm. My father's father was a farmer. His name was Benton Miller.

Riess: Any relation to the [Thomas Hart] Benton painter?

Miller: No. He was a state legislator for a short time. I say short time, because I don't know how long, but he suffered an injury, I think it was a horse injury, and lost his leg. They had a small farm that he and my grandmother operated. I remember my grandmother, I would visit her when I was very young. It's probably the earliest memory I have. I remember her out there in the field after my grandfather died. My grandfather had died a month before I was born. She was out there alone, walking behind this horse, holding the handles of a plow. She had the straps, the reins of the horse, over her shoulder while she was following the horse. That was probably not uncommon. They didn't have tractors then.

She was quite an individualist, Julia Miller was. Later she got a car. I remember she had a Pontiac. Few of the roads were paved. She would drive this car, and since she was a farmer woman she was concerned with the fields and what was out there. If you were a passenger, she'd be busy talking to you and looking at the farm fields. Several times we ended up in the ditch.

Riess: Were you born out there, too?

Miller: No, my father then eventually went to Chicago. He worked for the Montgomery Ward Company as a doctor. The flu epidemic came along in 1918, and as I understand it he was asked to stay there and be a doctor because they needed him, rather than World War I--it must have been before then. But I was born in 1918, in Chicago, where my father, mother, brother and I were living.

Riess: Did your family talk about the Ecuador time? Was that kind of an exciting narrative as the years went by?

Miller: Not in great detail. I have some early pictures of that time, some glass plates of some of that. I remember one photograph of my father, mother, and some other doctors' aides standing around an operating table on which this amputated leg was laid. Why they wanted to make that picture I don't know, but that's the picture. There's another picture of my father holding the reins of a horse. My father's on foot and the horse, or mule, is tied to a post. My father also has a two by four, or something, and the old story was that you had to first get their attention to break these horses. That was another photograph I remember.

Riess: Distressing images.

Miller: As far as the romance, and things of that nature, from that period of time, I'm sure they talked about them but I don't remember.

Riess: It's a wonderful example of the power of the image, isn't it?

Miller: Yes, it is. Words, I would assume, need context in order to be meaningful. Maybe the photograph has enough of those built into it so you can remember them more than a phrase or a story.

I was raised in Chicago. My father was not a fashionable, wealthy, physician. I remember during the Depression he would often come home with some groceries that people gave him in payment for his work. Other times, he would work for nothing. During the Depression it was not easy, but not hard. As a youngster you don't realize that it's hard, or good, or anything. Everything is fine. I had a very happy childhood.

Chicago Neighborhood and Friends

Riess: What part of the city, and how racially mixed was your upbringing?

Miller: It was the north side of Chicago, near north side, to begin with, and then as my father became more affluent, we moved further north into better neighborhoods. Invariably, we were on the edges of mixed neighborhoods, which in Chicago would be recent immigrants and maybe some blacks, and prostitutes, I remember that. After a while, then we could move out, beyond that, away from the closeness of that line. I mention some of these things because in my grammar school years I would sell newspapers. The *Chicago Daily News*.

Riess: You had a corner?

Miller: Sometimes a corner. I had one corner, I had a newsstand on it. There just happened to be a box there, and that was my newsstand.

Riess: Was this part of your upbringing, that you had to work? Was there some lesson in being a paperboy or did you really need the money?

Miller: I wasn't aware of needing the money, per se. I just don't know why, but it was always very important to me to work. [tape interruption]

[looking at photograph][2] This is the first home that I remember living in, I guess I came there shortly after birth, 4331 Hazel Avenue. It was a six-flat, three flats, side by side. It was a corner right in the neighborhood of Montrose and Broadway and Sheridan in Chicago. Across the street, there was an empty lot which they grew corn in. It's fantastic to think about corn growing in a city. Right now there's a great big building there. It was a community where there was a mixture of ethnic groups. We had some Greeks, some Italians, Germans, Jews, Catholics. Also, just about a block away, we had some blacks.

It was one of those communities which were viable, just moving from one group into another, consolidating some groups. I know we had a stretch of buildings there with prostitutes in it. So it was a real viable community. In fact, I was selling newspapers, you know, where you'd get your newspapers and put them under your arm and go down the streets. We'd come up with all kind of ways of attracting attention to ourselves, and yelling, Extra! Extra!, as though it was some new news breaking and it wasn't at all, it was just a way of calling attention to the fact that we had newspapers. I remember whenever any of the supposed prostitutes would buy a newspaper from me, there was always a tip, which is unlike selling newspapers to other groups.

My brother was four years older than I was and he had a different gang, like a different generation. Four years, that's a big difference when you're young. So I was always being teased or excluded from his group. I remember one time--they would gang up on people, just like they'd gang up on me and my same-age friends, and tell horror stories. We had a basement, a dirt floor in our building, with little cubbyholes for tenants to store their things, and that was a great gathering place for all kinds of stories and experiments of sorts, I suppose. One of them--I don't know if it was true or not, but my brother claimed that they'd hung this kid up by his thumbs down there. It probably is braggadocio rather than fact.

I do know that one time a new family moved into the neighborhood, in this case Jewish, and they were taunting the young boy, and my brother took an egg and slid it down the back of his sweater or shirt or whatever and broke the egg. From then on, he was known as "Eggs". A cruel thing, but so much of our lives were quite direct and forthright. Thinking of today's children and what they do after school, after school we rough-housed and fought, and it was very physical, and very much a measuring stick of position within the groups as to how strong you were. You didn't cry. If you did that was a sign of weakness, and that would attract more attention. And yet I had great experiences there.

We were just about two or three blocks from the edge of Lake Michigan. There was an empty building site, probably big enough for a building, which wasn't there. It was an empty lot, and

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2.Inserted from Interview 7

that lot, because it was so close to the lake, was all sand. You'd dig down a little bit and it was just this beautiful lovely sand. Marvelous for playing in. We would dig into that, and I remember one time we built a shack, a little hut, on top of it. Then underneath it we built this secret hole, to protect us from the bigger boys. Also kind of the secrecy of it was great fun. Then we dug down further, probably four or five feet deep. Then we started digging laterally, over to the edge of the adjacent apartment house and under the cement sidewalk and into the wall of the house. We took the bricks out and made an entranceway into the basement of that apartment house.

This woman, an older woman, it was a two-story apartment house, and she owned it and lived alone there in the first floor apartment. And when she found out we'd done that, oh, it just upset her so much. We did it just playing, experimenting. She took it badly, or she felt that we didn't like her, and it was too sad, because she was awful nice to us. She would frequently ask us to go down and get a bottle of Pluto Water for her. That was a bottle of salt water, a saline solution of some sort, with a little siphon spigot on the top. She'd always give us a tip for doing that, she was always kind to us. It always kind of hurt me, the fact that we'd done something that had upset her.

We had a marvelous time there. George Nickopolus, my closest friend, he lived in the second floor of that apartment house, with his two sisters. I remember Asa and Alexandria. It's funny how you remember things. George and I were in grammar school together. It must be that all Greeks had very thick slices of bread, because his sandwiches always had big thick slices of bread, and I always related that to Greeks. Crazy you know, of course. George and I were always playing around doing things. I remember we decided we were going to run a telephone between his second floor apartment and my second floor apartment. We were separated by a yard at his end of the line, and then an alleyway, and then some garages, then a little yard on my end, plus to my porch. Our telephone consisted of just cord, I think it was, it wasn't wire. We had a Quaker Oats box at his end, and I had one at my end. We were able to get a little sound out of it, but nothing really competitive with a telephone system.

We had such great fun doing those things. Down the street there was another building, adjacent to the empty lot, a three-story building. One time, I think it was a Graf Zeppelin came over Chicago, or another rigid airship. One of the kids, they went up to the roof of this apartment house to look at it and one of the kids fell off and was killed, watching this big airship. Anyway, it was a fascinating period and it flashes back in my mind, things that took place there.

When I started going to junior high school we moved from this apartment house to another one. We always moved into a new neighborhood that was just on the edge of falling apart or disintegrating. It was never into a firm, solid, established community. It was one that was somehow on the way out. I think it was not unrelated to the fact that my father was a struggling young physician and surgeon and doing his best under the conditions that were possible. It was certainly a rich experience.

Gosh, the kids that I knew then! George Nickopolus, and a fellow named George Schein, he lived next door there. Oh, let me tell you about the fellow that lived on the floor above us in our apartment house. It was Al Sutton. He was a pianist, just a few years older than I was, but he was good, one of those fellows who just was good. He was a close friend. I remember one day my father was working--I don't know if he was working with me or he was working on his own--but he had a crystal set. A crystal set is for a radio, it's an old tuning device. It was

called a "cat's whisker," the little wire that rubs against this crystal--somehow it relates to radio.

My father was trying to tune in this one station and he worked and worked and worked on this. I remember this so clearly. He had earphones on. And finally he got the station! And oh, what a great success that was for him. He took his earphones off and gave them to me, and I couldn't hear a thing. What it was is that no radio programs were broadcast on Mondays, and it was Al Sutton upstairs playing the piano that my father heard!

Time-wise, I remember our apartment house faced a street; we were at the end of this street coming down to us from Sheridan. My father had a garage about a block away. My father would park the car in the garage and walk down this street, but you could see him, he was visible that whole distance. I remember it was 1927, and I put the front page up against the window, about Lindy [Lindbergh] landing in Paris, in France, he had made it! It was a great moment. I held the paper up against the glass so that he could see it coming in. I don't think we had car radios then. Anyway, those little recollections, those are some of the things that I had down here.

Riess: You had a good relationship with your father.

Miller: Yes. He tried so hard, and there was such a gap between us as far as--. We didn't do very many things together, but I don't think that was necessary. I remember in the morning he'd come in to wake me up for school and kiss me good-morning. I could smell ether in his lungs. He'd already been to the hospital and done some surgery and come back from the hospital to waken me to go to grammar school. I remember that so clearly. When I smell ether today, immediately I'm thrown back to those moments.

The apartment houses we lived in, they were crammed cheek to jowl, but the back of these apartment houses had wooden back porches and wooden steps going down to the small back yards. The next apartment was separated by a little breezeway or light well, maybe twelve feet across or something like that. I remember one evening our neighbors, never did know who they were, they had a real knock-down-drag-out fight. These porches, we all had a wooden swing hung by chains to sit in, so they had one too. I remember this big yelp, on the part of this man, and he ran out the back porch, and he hid underneath this swing, all crouched up. Not only were they having a fight, but his wife had actually bitten his thumb off! It was really something. I can remember him huddled up there, completely exposed on all four sides, underneath this hanging swing. Poor devil.

Riess: The gangs weren't along ethnic lines?

Miller: No. Ethnicity didn't play a part, at least in our age group, it had nothing to do with it. It was just a case of whether a person was easy to get along with, or wasn't. If they weren't easy to get along with, why they wouldn't be a part of the gang. It wasn't a big deal.

Riess: When you sit here and reminisce, is it like a photograph that you're looking at?

Miller: It's graphic, very much so.[3]

3.End of inserted matter from Interview 7

Our neighborhood--in hindsight, our family was the minority. We had Greeks, Jews, Italians, and some Germans, and the Miller family. These were the kinds of kids I grew up with. My best friends were this group. The grammar school was similar. In grammar school, to give you an idea of it, because I was well fed and not beaten by my parents, I had a little more of a balanced way of life than some of the other children in grammar school did. I was often given some special jobs by the teachers or principal.

In this one case, I was given the job of working out of the office, and I was there when a family was present, a Polish family I believe, a mother, father, and boy. They were having a strong argument with the principal and the principal said, "Every child has to have a bath once a year." Their argument was that, no, they were not going to bathe their boy. It came down to the fact that this boy was prepared for winter, and his underwear had been sewn onto his body. First they would put oil or grease on it, they would sew it up and they were going to take it off next spring. This was a basis for disagreement. I'm using this as an example of the kind of grammar school it was.

I was not necessarily a strong young boy. I was active, but not strong, a very slight build. Very cocky, I had lots of energy, and frequently irritated other students. So I would frequently get involved in fights. I remember one in particular. If you had a fight, you wouldn't fight in school. After school you'd go out in the back yard to this place--it was a space surrounded by concrete where they dumped ashes, or something like that. That's the area we would go to for fights. I remember this one time I was out there, and I had to defend myself. I think this boy's name was Louis, and I didn't do very well. He just cleaned up on me. He was black, and we were very good friends after that.

It was just one of those things you took in stride, it wasn't life and death. You had to do it in order to get through the day. There were other fights I had and what not, but as I recall--my wife says I only remember good things and don't remember bad things. But I recall an awful lot of good things, I had a heck of a good time as a youngster.

Riess: About the fights, were your parents disturbed? They thought maybe it was time to move, or did they take it in stride, too?

Miller: I don't know if they ever knew about it.

More on Parents

Riess: Your surroundings as you grew up, were there particular paintings or books? What kind of cultural trappings did you grow up in?

Miller: I'm smiling, because one of the first things I remember was a scoreboard of the baseball teams. It was put over the front window of this notions store where we got cold drinks. The Cubs were our big baseball team.

To more seriously answer your question, we didn't have much more than that in our home. We had some classic pictures. I can't remember the name. A young woman draped around a column, a setting sun around a pool of water, or something. By a field or a church or

something. That was about the extent of it. My parents were interested in my learning music, an appreciation of music. I spent something like five years, I think, at piano lessons, and played at a few recitals which were not recitals but just appearances in front of people outside of my parents. In fact, I even played one time at the Chicago Symphony Hall, or something like that. But not up in front on the stage, it must have been in a back broom closet, because it was very modest.

Riess: Did you enjoy it?

Miller: No, it was terrible, I didn't like it at all. In fact, I gave it up and became interested in the violin. I studied the violin for about six years, off and on. I was equally ignorant when I quit that. I was just not cut out for it somehow. I don't know if I did it out of obligation to my mother and father, or whether I was bullheaded or what I was. Anyway, I gave that up and today I'm musically illiterate.

Riess: Did your family read a lot?

Miller: No, not really. Conversation was an important part of our lives, and they were well informed politically and socially. My folks had to entertain quite a bit.

Riess: Did they entertain the Greeks and the Polish neighbors, or did they find the other Millers?

Miller: No, they entertained their own ethnic middle-class types. This was during Prohibition, and my father being a good doctor, he had access to the best liquor selection in the city. Doctors could sign prescriptions to get the booze, alcohol, and we had a great collection of bottled alcohol. I do remember one time, my father had this four gallon tin container of alcohol, and at a party he shared this with other people so they could take their containers of it home, as well.

My mother was very concerned with the proper use of language. She took some sort of study courses about grammar.

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Riess: You were a little more fortunate during the Depression, you said?

Miller: During the Depression, on Thanksgiving as well as Christmas, we would make up baskets of food, and we would go from house to house. She knew where they were needed, we'd leave the food at the door with them. She was also active as a club woman, the Illinois Women's Athletic Association. They would have tag days where she would bring home these tags, and I would spend hours at the table putting the strings onto the tags and making up these different kits so they could be given to different people to go out on the street and receive donations. This money was then turned in to take care of crippled children or children of some sort. She was very active in that regard.

She never went back to nursing at all. She claimed that after I was born it triggered something metabolically in her make-up, so she began to put on some weight. She wasn't really overweight, she just was overweight, but not very much. But she didn't have the desire to go back, and my father and she began to have problems. She felt that my father spent his day with women, and he would come home at night exhausted. She felt that he was not being as

good a husband as he might be. She was a very jealous person, and that destroyed her until the end of her days.

When I was in high school she began to drink quite a bit. It got to the point of her hiding the bottles and my father trying to find them. It was a great stress, and stress that tore our family apart to a degree. Not tore apart but created a division in the family. I would be defending my mother, and my brother would be attacking her, and he was defending his father. So we had that kind of a problem going on. She was very good to me at all times. The drinking was never a concern to me because I was in high school and then off to college so I was out of the picture. I didn't suffer the results of it to the degree I might. But it was not good.

Riess: Your brother was--.

Miller: --four years older. That age difference when you're young, he could have been an adult. We never were close. In other words, when I left grammar school to go to high school, he left high school to go to college. We didn't share in things like that. He was jealous of me in many ways. He felt I was given favors by my mother that he never enjoyed. It was foolish because he consciously went out of his way, I think, to cause problems. I could see him walking into problems. Because of him I learned a great deal. I knew how to avoid those things. I would do the same things but just avoid the problems. I learned a great deal from him beside the fact that we were fighting each other all the time.

Riess: What did he become, or do?

Miller: The war came along and he joined the navy, as I did. He became a training officer, a gunnery training officer in the navy, aboard different ships. After that, he became a salesman in Chicago, I think he sold classified advertising for the *Chicago Tribune*. He became very good at it, he was a fantastic salesman. When he was in high school and I was in grammar school, I remember going to the Walgreen drug store. Somehow the two of us were together, that's most unusual. We were having a malted milk. A milk shake cost about a dime, and a malted milk fifteen cents, so malted milk was something special.

Well, before I had more than two sips of this malted milk he'd found some way to tell me how bad this malted milk was, and all the things that were in it, bugs and what not. So he would end up having my malted milk. He was that nature, he could do it. He was a fantastic salesperson. He was very good at selling classified ads, and then he went on to work for, I believe, John Deere International Harvester in the Argentine. He was married at that time, and he and his wife were there. He sold heavy farm equipment, did a good job at it, and he began to drink too much. Whether that was the reason or not, I don't know. No, I think he became ill, so he couldn't function. He came back to the states, Chicago, and found that he had cancer of his brain, I think, it was a rough go. He was a heavy smoker. He died, and then shortly after that his wife also had lung cancer. Evidently this cancer of the brain was related to lung cancer, it traveled through the body.

Riess: That's a very sad bunch of stuff.

Miller: Yes, that was unfortunate.

Riess: Did your parents stick it out together?

Miller: They stuck it out together. My mother had, over the years, developed an abdominal problem, a hernia in the stomach where it would capture food and so it kind of poisoned the system. She suffered that.

After about the mid-'60s my father retired, and they moved to a small town in Missouri, Willow Springs. He wanted a place which wasn't too great a difference in climate from Chicago, as well as he didn't want it to be like Florida, so he found someplace halfway between.

My father was quite successful in Chicago. He became a well-recognized surgeon, and he was a member of the American College of Surgeons. People would come to see him operate. He was very good. He was ambidextrous. Not only with a scalpel, but he also played golf ambidextrously. He tried to get me interested in medicine. I would be in the operating room, overdressed--a little boy, to be properly dressed, had to be wearing a blue serge suit, and that meant that here I am, under the gown, wearing my coat of blue serge and watching my father doing a Caesarian section.

Riess: That's a bloody business.

Miller: I think it's better to let your kids watch TV. I remember the blood starting to run down the side of the table, and then finally down my father's leg, and then finally onto the floor. It's a bloody mess, you know. The next thing I remember, I can still hear my head hit the tile. I passed out a couple of different times, determined to enter the medical world.

Riess: I wondered whether that career had appealed to you. That introduction sounds like it was fatal.

Miller: I don't know if that was it so much. At the dinner table, the conversation was always medical. My mother and father could talk as equals about cases that he brought home and talked about. That could very well have excited another youngster to want to go on, but I didn't--I don't think it was the operating, really.

I adored my father, and he was a very loving man. He taught me fishing, hunting. The last time--Joan and I were driving back to Washington D.C., I was going to work for the National Park Service, and we stopped at Willow Springs, Joan and I and our youngest boy, Peter. My mother had been having a rough go, and the night before we left my mother, who was bedridden, she called me in and said, "I want to speak to you, Wayne." I took Peter with me, and my mother told me what a nice son I was and how she enjoyed me and was very proud of me, and she wasn't going to see me again. The next morning we left, and she was able to get up and use the lavatory and all, so she was mobile. We went on to Washington D.C. and two days later she died.

Riess: And your father had died before?

Miller: No, my father was alive. About three years later he remarried at the age of eighty-two, and he remained living there until he died. He died during deer hunting season in a snow storm while sitting on a tree stump. Evidently he had a heart attack, and he rolled over into the snow.

First Camera, First Photography Job

Miller: We've gotten off of photography a bit.

Riess: No, I wanted that story. Anybody who would want to know about you would want to know about your family, about the definition of family.

Your choice of college was University of Illinois.

Miller: Yes. I graduated from high school, Lakeview High School in Chicago, and went down to Champagne-Urbana, which is south of Chicago about 140 miles. I went down there, and my father drove me down. On the way down, he said, "Wayne, I'd like to give you a gift." He said, "What would you prefer, one of those new electric Schick razors or this $12.50 Argus camera?"

That was my first camera, really. This was the first Argus camera and the first Schick razor that came out. Both of them were really new, I believe, in being introduced to the trade. Obviously, I wasn't very interested in whiskers at that point in time, so it was easy for me to opt for the camera.

Riess: Were there camera classes in high school?

Miller: No, not during the Depression.

Riess: Or high school newspaper photographs or anything like that?

Miller: No. And I was manager of the athletic teams.

Riess: So you had your camera for that?

Miller: I began it as a hobby at that time. I'd made some pictures earlier than that in Lincoln Park in Chicago. I had some kind of a camera there. Before that time, I made a few pictures of squirrels and the zoo, that was about the extent of it. No, I also made some pictures of some friends of mine, we were playing golf in high school. We went to a local golf course.

Riess: Where would the film be developed?

Miller: The local drugstore.

So I did make some pictures before the Argus camera came along. Anyway, in college it was a hobby, fooling around with it, and I had no great desire to make photographs.

Riess: Did you do your own developing then? Was it possible to do so?

Miller: When I was a sophomore in college I became aware that the photographer who did the daily newspaper, the university newspaper, and the yearbook, he was leaving, graduating. So I went down and applied for the job. I didn't know a thing about it. Funny! They said, "You know how to use a Speed Graphic?" "Of course, I know how to use a Speed Graphic." "Flash?"

Sure, knew how to do that. So they said, "Come back in September, we'll expect you back, and you can get to work."

So I came back in September and he pointed at this closet, and I opened it up and God, there was an awful lot of stuff in there! [laughter] I took it all back to my fraternity house, and they said, "Tonight we're having a freshman welcome," in the auditorium or arena or whatever it was, where they introduce freshmen to the things that are taking place in the university. "We'd like to have some pictures for the yearbook."

I was under a little pressure there, so I got this stuff out and laid it on my desk. I looked at this Speed Graphic, which is one that folds up, the classic 4”x5” Speed Graphic news camera. I couldn't figure out how to unfold it, couldn't figure out how to open it up. I looked at it and looked at it.

Well, it was set up that this University of Illinois newspaper had an arrangement with a photo finisher who had a shop next door to this building that the newspaper was in for developing this material and all. I took the camera down, I put it on the counter and said, "Show me how to operate this thing. First thing, show me how to open it." It was covered in a black leather skin, and you pressed through the skin to hit this hidden button, and then the front drops down. Then he showed me how to pull it out, and how to do all these things. I had a fast hour, hour-and-a-half lesson.

That was my beginning as a professional photographer. I got paid $200 a year, school year. I went to the freshmen welcome, made a lot of pictures. I don't remember if any one of them came out.

Riess: What kind of film?

Miller: Holders, side holders.

Riess: Film pack?

Miller: May have been a film pack, but I also think it might have been cut film holders.

Riess: It's hard to take a lot of pictures fast doing that, isn't it?

Miller: You don't have to work very fast, but you do it very carefully. [laughter] It didn't make any difference, I don't think, that night. I don't know if any of them ever came out or not. That was my beginning for the yearbook work, and I continued doing that for two years. I was the official photographer. I learned fast, on that sort of thing.

Equipment Details

Miller: I built a darkroom in the basement of my fraternity house without them knowing about it. In the basement was the entrance to our chapter room, considered to be very secret. The door opened up, and you walked into the chapter room after you picked up your robe. Behind that door there was some space, and there was very poor illumination down there, so nobody ever

knew what was behind that door. On my own, during the Christmas holiday period, I built a darkroom behind that door.

Riess: And you were able to buy an enlarger?

Miller: Yes, the works.

Riess: Did you buy it on your own or did the school pay for it?

Miller: No, the school did not provide that. I bought the enlarger from stamps. I used to be a stamp collector as a youngster. I had these stamps, and I sold some of the stamps and bought a used enlarger.

Riess: From a distributor, or a shop?

Miller: I don't know where.

Riess: What was it? Do you know?

Miller: An Elwood Enlarger.

Riess: Was this a wet dark room?

Miller: Well, I carried a bucket of water in, yes. [laughter] Also then I began to not only make pictures for the yearbook and daily newspaper, but I began to take pictures of other events. Like I would go into a sorority house and photograph groups, and every face wanted a print, so I sold that. I had a going business. By the time I left, I was making good money. Not good money, you know, it was probably $50 a month. That was a lot of money then.

Riess: It was by word of mouth?

Miller: Or I'd go around, I'd huckster. I spent more time on photography. I would spend probably one or two nights a week all night long working in the darkroom, plus going to school. As a result, I was less than an adequate student. I was no good at all.

I was in the School of Commerce. My father felt that it would be good if I was in a profession, something of "stature." This meant being a doctor, a lawyer, or a banker, or something of that nature. I didn't know what I wanted to do in college. I didn't want to go to engineering school. Chemistry and that sort of thing was a little beyond my ken. So I opted to go to Commerce. I should have been in Liberal Arts; it is where I should have been in hindsight. My last years in school I suffered because of my photography and energy level. I got through all right but--.

Riess: What do you mean you suffered?

Miller: My grades suffered.

Riess: I'm interested in how you set up your darkroom.

Miller: All you need running water for is washing the stuff. Once you mix your chemicals you don't need anything else. In fact, Harry Callahan who I described earlier, in '47, '48, '49, someplace

in there, he didn't have a wet darkroom. He carried his water into his darkroom, which was an area curtained off the end of his loft. Only when you need to wash the chemicals out of the paper or the film do you need running water.

Riess: How about drying prints flat?

Miller: You have blotters you can use, or you just don't dry them flat. Put them down, let them curl up, and then you just straighten them out after they're dry.

Riess: How about the kinds of papers that were available?

Miller: Oh, fine papers were available. In fact, many of us today feel that the papers were better then than anything we have now, for some reason or other, I don't know why. I'm sure Ansel Adams could tell us why. We had fine papers then, no strain.

Riess: Was it an expensive hobby then? Was it an expensive vocation?

Miller: No, I don't think so. I was never aware of that. It's a lot more expensive today, I think. Proportionally, I think it's more expensive today than it was then.

Riess: Wayne, if you were thinking of yourself as a photographer, did you start looking around at art or other photography? For instance, when did you first go to the Chicago Art Institute?

Miller: That's a good question, it may have been last year. [laughter] I visited it during my high school years, but that's about it. I had never attended it or spent time studying it.

Riess: I'm interested in your background in the visual, in seeing how other people see things.

Miller: I looked at photographic books, but I was not interested in design. I was interested in pictures, how well they captured emotions. I didn't consciously think of that then, I don't think, but those were the pictures I was attracted to. Photographically, I didn't spend much time thinking about design or composition. I ignored that.

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Miller: I remember during World War II, we had us a fine cartoonist attached to Steichen's USN unit, Bob Osborn. He was doing cartoons to make navy flight students aware of the need for safety precautions. After the war I talked to Bob about what I should do to learn more about photography and composition. He said, "Don't pay attention to anybody. Just do your own thing and follow your personal drives." That didn't change me too much because I would have done that anyway, but it gave me confidence that may be a way to go. So, I just put it out of my mind from then on.

I don't know about this composition thing, somehow it was innate, I think, it just worked. In order for a picture to be as meaningful as I wanted it to be it had to be well composed. It's not unrelated to housekeeping. You know when the things look right. If they look right then it's well composed.

Art Center School of Photography

Riess: When would you say you were identifying yourself as a photographer?

Miller: I began to see that this was--well, my senior year, in 1940, just before my University of Illinois graduation, I got interested in photography more directly through the photographer who was working full-time for the Urbana, Illinois newspaper. We struck up a relationship, and he wanted to go to the Art Center School in Los Angeles for a year to learn something more there and I got interested in that as well. The two of us decided to go together. His name was Keith Swanson.

I told my father about this, it damn near broke his heart. He said, "Wayne, do you mean to say that you want to be a photographer? Do you mean that you'll be sitting there, outside the door, waiting to do a portrait, or a wedding photograph? Is that the kind of life you want to lead?" I said, "I don't know. I'd just like to go to this photography school for a year and learn more than I know now."

Riess: His thought you'd have a shop and photograph brides.

Miller: Yes, that was his concept. He didn't have any other references. *Life* magazine had just barely come out. So that wasn't around.

Riess: How about the Farm Security photographs? They were there, somewhere.

Miller: They were around, and I was certainly impressed by those. But I didn't see them during those years.

Riess: Would you have seen Walker Evans' work?

Miller: I saw those when I got to the Art Center School, I think. That was 1940. In fact, while I was there I remember a fellow named Weston came by. He was on a swing, he was working on a Guggenheim, doing pictures of the desert.

Riess: So you had to get out of Chicago, you had to get to California, almost, to get photography.

Miller: Yes.

As I hear my words, I sound like a real primitive, of some sort. I was impressed, like we all are, with a fine photograph. I think I wanted to achieve, rather than create good photographs. I wanted to achieve being a comfortable, professional photographer. I wasn't thinking about great photographs. I guess I was thinking about it like a world to explore. Also, it was a lot of fun. God, it was a lot of fun! I just enjoyed it so much. To take an unexposed sheet of film and go out and put something on it that had never been seen before, that to me was a real challenge--real magic.

For example--I guess it is probably my personality hang-ups, I'm sure--when I was there at the Art Center School we were given assignments. First, to learn how to develop film and how to understand what the film is capable of, as far as gradations and what not. Then we had

assignments to go out and make photographs. Portraits, landscapes, and other things. Finally we had an assignment to do a two-headed portrait, one with two people in it.

We would develop and print these assignments, and mount the 8”x10” on the face of a 14"x17" card. We had a form that was pasted on the back that said what film we used, how we developed it, how we printed the print. We'd go to the lecture room and leave our offerings, two or three, however many submissions we wanted to offer for criticism, for a critique. We'd pile them on a table up in front and then we'd sit down in the audience, and helpers would take our prints and put them on racks for critiquing.

This particular assignment, the two-headed portrait, a fellow student, Glenn Miller, he and I palled around together. Here we were with our cameras, poking around. We ended up at the train station in Los Angeles where they had one of these booths, these self-portrait booths where you put in a dime or a quarter. We felt pretty gay, so we got into this booth nose to nose, face to face, a two-headed profile. We take the picture, and out it comes with a little silver metal frame on it. I took this double-headed portrait and I mounted it on my 14”x17” assignment card.

I should tell you that the man who was critiquing this assignment was a very gentle nice man, a teacher, an established photographer, who was very proud of his portrait work. He would submit work to different judgings all over the country. Every time they would judge him best of show or something. Actually, in some of these cases, the back of the mount was more important than the front. Anyway, that’s an aside. He was the one who was going to be judging.

So for this assignment I had mounted this double-headed portrait on the 14”x17” card and on the back I put a Chinese laundry ticket, a beer label, a bus token, the whole enchilada. In fact, I think I still may have it.

The time comes, I put mine in early, nobody was around, and I move on back to sit in the back of the room.

Riess: Unsigned?

Miller: No, they're all signed. We were required to put our name on the back on the label detailing the camera, film, development and print paper. But I don't think I left a signature on this one.

Anyway, the Art Center School was created by a man by the name of Adams who had been in the advertising business. He felt that there was a need for professionally trained photographers, designers, artists, and all, to give a degree of excellence to the advertising field. He was a well- known guy, and well respected. Tink Adams.

The helpers start putting our mounts up, and all of a sudden they come to this one. They called some others over to look at it. [laughter] Then there was a little bit of quiet and somebody leaves the room. No more pictures being put up. Eventually in comes Tink Adams, the boss. He looks at it, and he says, "Whose submission is this?" Everything was very quiet. Of course the kids in the lab knew, they had been watching me put this thing together, and they all turned and looked at me.

I became very honest, and I put my hand up. Then he talked to his assistant beside him, and that person left. God, ten or fifteen minutes went by. Finally this person comes back and hands a paper to him, and Tink Adams asks me to come up, and he awarded me this certificate of demerit! [laughter]

Riess: With some humor?

Miller: Not too much.

He called me in his office later and said he didn't feel I had the right spirit for this school. Because when I came to this school, one of the requirements was that you had to have a view camera in order to do these different exercises. This was a nine month course, a regular two semester deal, because they had all the adjustments. Well, I couldn't afford that, I still had my Speed Graphic. Not the one from school, I had another one. I was using the Speed Graphic. Well, that was symptomatic. I wasn't really joining the spirit of the school. He suggested that I drop out, because he didn't feel I could make it as a photographer. I think he was right. I could not have made it in his world.

Riess: In the advertising world that he was training people for.

Miller: Yes.

Anyway, that's my Art Center School story.

Riess: Would there have been any places closer to home for a good education in photography?

Miller: Not that I knew of, this was the outstanding one in the country, the one that people referred to.

Riess: How did you like Los Angeles?

Miller: I loved it, loved it.

Riess: What did you look at while you there?

Miller: Let me tell you what I looked at. This is not directly related, but it's related to the human interest aspect. I would see these beautiful young women, girls, driving in convertible automobiles as passengers, with the old men as drivers, with the top down. I thought to myself, what the hell do these young women have in mind driving around with men that were probably thirty, thirty-five years old, you know? I'm joking here about that.

In Los Angeles, what did I enjoy? You're doing your best to get me back into the museums and something of measurable quality, and I can't help you on that.

Riess: I wasn't, actually. The smell of it, the look of it, the feel of the freedom. It must have been different.

Miller: Yes, it was. I lived in a rooming house which was a block diagonal from the school. To get there I had to go through a park, West Lake Park. On the benches were some retirees and drifters. I had to walk through there, and it was beautiful. A little water, geese floating around, and ducks and trees, I just loved it. It was a nice place, then.

I remember showing up to school one morning and telling these fellows that I had stopped in the park and talked to this awfully nice guy. He was so nice that he suggested that we take a trip and go to Mexico, he'd pay all the expenses. I had no idea about homosexuality. It just cracked up the group, they thought how naive I was. Well, I was terribly naive about these things. I still am.

We enjoyed going to the ocean. I learned to body surf and to enjoy so much. God, we had a marvelous time. Some fine photographers were in this class. I'm trying to remember some of their names. I could dig them up, I guess.

Riess: You said that Weston came through?

Miller: Weston came through and gave a talk to the group and he impressed all of us. Will Connell, a top professional, was one of the teachers there, an awful nice man. I kept in touch with him after the war, as well. I remember a fellow named Tom Binford was a student there and he did beautiful work, and he went on to become a very successful photographer. Toward the end of the war he became attached to the Steichen group as a photographer.

At this point in time, towards the end of the spring of 1941, we all knew the war was coming on. People were beginning to shuffle around to figure out how they could relate to, or avoid, this war. I went back to Chicago, kind of treading water, waiting for war to be declared.

Riess: When you look back at the Art Center School, what did you learn?

Miller: I learned some discipline. I'm talking about the limitations of the technical aspects of photography and the opportunities there. I'm indebted to them for knowing how to make a good print, and there must be something else, I'm sure. I learned that the opportunities and capabilities of photography are, practically speaking, unlimited, as to what you can do with it. That was exciting to know, that there's more out there than just a film pack, or cut film, or a roll of film. There's lighting, there's composition, there's other things that I hadn't really focused on. In hindsight I was a fool. I didn’t take advantage of what I could have learned. I was naïve and arrogant.

Riess: Were they doing any color work at the Art Center School?

Miller: Not in this beginning year. They were doing some in advanced courses. At that time I think they had two or three year courses. It was quite young, I think the school started in about '36 or '37; it hadn't gotten its feet and facilities developed to be able to take on color photography.

Riess: You said that when you think back you really would have been better off with a liberal arts education. Do you feel that along the way you've gotten one? Did you get a little art history, a little this and that?

Miller: Oh, I bought some books and read them. I tried to "improve" myself. I learned a lot from that, I think, because I realized that historically we've all been struggling after the same kinds of elusive targets all these times, trying to express ourselves in our own ways. Also, I became aware that much of these expressions were repetitive, redundant, and opportunistic. It took a lot of effort to break away from the tried and true approaches to things.

A photographer has to be a gambler, because you can't go back with your brush afterwards and retouch something, or go back and redo that paragraph. Not only a gambler, you have to be a plunger, you have to jump in and take advantage of that moment. It's a little different kind of a personality, I think, at least in the kind of photography I was interested in. It's not like being in the studio where you can go back and reshoot or something, or take the time before you make this exposure that everything is right. Much of my work has been grab shooting. When it happens, I have to be there. Like during the war, if I was facing the wrong direction I missed the picture.

Riess: You have to train yourself to <u>be</u> there.

Miller: That's right. You spend an awful lot of time just being there, waiting and waiting. Maybe something happens, maybe it doesn't. It opened my eyes to the possibilities, it showed me the pantry, here are the ingredients and you can make your own cake.

Riess: The Cartier-Bresson expression, the "decisive moment," would that be something you would have thought about?

Miller: Oh, his book didn't exist then [*The Decisive Moment*, Simon and Schuster, 1952]. In fact, my understanding is that after he had put his book together somebody came up with the idea of "the decisive moment" and he reluctantly agreed to it. I don't know if that's true or not. But yes, you have to be ready for it. Some scientists say that a scientist has to be trained so that when something inadvertent happens he's able to discover it. These things work together.

Henri's really heavy on composition. I remember being at more than one meeting with him at Magnum Photos, and he'd be there with his fingers making little triangles, trying to compose, looking at various pictures. It was terribly important to him; that composition and that particular picture I think was in his mind, so that when it happened, he was able to photograph it. I wouldn't have been capable of making that structure to have done that, I don't think. Maybe I would have. His pictures are exceptionally well composed.

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[Interview 2: August 8, 2001]##

The War and the Naval Photographic Unit

Miller: The Art Center School group, we knew that war was ahead of us. Much of the conversation at that time was about how to get out of the war. I remember one of the students wanting to get married and get his wife pregnant so that would get him a deferment. That was his thought about getting out of the war.

Riess: What was your stand on the war?

Miller: I didn't question it. I accepted the fact that we had to go to war to protect our values. There wasn't any question in my mind about going into the war. But I didn't want to go in as an enlisted man and just be handled willy-nilly in the service. I wanted to control my future to the degree I could, so I applied for a commission in the navy.

I used some political pull. My father had a contact in Chicago who had a contact, and so forth, the way these things work. So I applied for a commission and found that I couldn't pass the physical. They found that I had a damaged right eye, evidently some tissue was damaged early on in my life and it had to be corrected. I had to struggle to find ways to overcome that. The first thing I did was start eating carrots and everything else I could do to improve the quality of that eye, but it wasn't improvable. I worried about that a great deal, about how I could possibly pass the eye test. I finally found that I couldn't do anything about it, so I applied for a waiver for the eye. Finally that was approved, and it enabled me to receive a commission.

Riess: Had you been wearing glasses?

Miller: Oh, yes, ever since I was fifteen years old, I think. The eye hasn't appreciably changed much since then.

Riess: You were an ensign in the Bureau of Aeronautics in December 1941. And then you joined the navy in January of 1942?

Miller: This is a paper thing. These dates are confusing because the military said I entered in active service on January 31, 1942. I have another document that states that my commission dates as of mid-December in '41. I don't know what date to use. Time of active service is, I suppose, a more realistic one, January '42.

Riess: Then you move eventually to the photo unit, in fact very soon.

Miller: This is the Bureau of Aeronautics, U.S. Navy. The Bureau of Aeronautics had a training division. That's where Steichen was placed; his unit was placed in the training division. I think that was probably a political move to make it possible, to provide an excuse for his being there, rather than being in propaganda, or public relations, or something of than nature. The training division consisted of two branches. One was writers, and the other was our unit, photography. The writers was a large unit, maybe thirty or forty or so men, all top writers. I remember one fellow, Bob Lewis, he was a writer for *The New Yorker*. And other people were top people from different publications of that time. A marvelous group of people right next door to us.

Then there was our group, a much smaller office. There was Steichen, and a yeoman, and that's about it. Also Bob Osborn, a cartoonist who did training posters for the young pilots in training. Steichen reported in about May of that year. I saw him in February of that year. Between February and May when he showed up, I was sitting there alone, treading water until he got down there.

Actually, I took it upon myself to build a camera case, which I think is kind of funny. This was for a 4"x5" Speed Graphic, and when all the accessories were put in it was too heavy to carry. I hadn't realized maybe we'd be using cameras other than that. The navy provided us with Speed Graphics, but they didn't provide us with anything other than that. Later on, most all of us were using Rolleiflexes. Only towards the end of the war were some of us using 35mm.

Riess: You already knew that you would be doing photographic work? If you were assigned to Steichen's unit, you knew?

Miller: No, I was assigned to administration, the Bureau of Aeronautics. I was already in the navy, and then I learned of Steichen coming in May and I got transferred out of that. In fact, I was in charge of the Bureau of Aeronautic Secrets, a fascinating experience. I was given a desk in this office, which had a very large safe in it. The safe had its door open, and papers were strewn all around. You could see that they hadn't been organized. There wasn't any room in the safe for them. I was told to organize those papers and distribute them to people who they should be seen by. [laughter]

I knew nothing about aeronautics, I knew nothing about navy secrets. In fact, I didn't go through any training. Usually you go ninety days, you have some sort of basic training, but I didn't have any of that. So I gathered these things up and I started circulating them, Number 1, Number 2, Number 3, etc. I distributed those for about that month or so, in fact probably longer, waiting for Steichen to show up. It was fascinating. I got to know a lot of the people in the navy. At that time the navy--there seemed to be little organization, much activity but the structure hadn't yet gelled to be a smooth running machine. So it was very informal, and it was fascinating.

Riess: Was there an undercurrent of competitiveness with the army?

Miller: What we were involved with--in hindsight, we were in competition with the Army Air Force. They had an Army Air Force; that was the name of their aviation unit. We were competing for personnel. Not only pilots but crewmen to be flying on these planes. We did big posters. In fact in 1943 I remember the figure that something like 80 percent of all the material released by navy public relations was produced by the five of us in Steichen's unit.

Riess: Including Osborn?

Miller: No, I'm just talking about photographers. That's no reflection on the other photographers in the navy, because by regulation they were restricted to doing their specific jobs. They weren't involved in producing materials that could be used for public relations.

Our assignment was to photograph the navy at war. Steichen told us to focus on the enlisted man, as he would be the one that would win the war. We were allowed to photograph anything in the navy, as we saw fit. In fact, the only directions we received were to be sure when you come back you have some pictures that will please the navy brass. Other than that, we had no constraints. Our orders said, "Proceed where you deem necessary and upon completion, return." These kind of orders were unheard of.

We also had air priority in there, and also the orders were written by the Chief of Naval Operations, the top dog in the navy department. Our material would be returned to the Chief of Naval Operations and not be censored at any place down the line. We could photograph anything and remain on an assignment as long as we felt it was productive. At the end of that time, we were to either self-determine another assignment or come back to Washington.

Riess: That's remarkable.

Miller: It was remarkable.

Riess: Did Steichen look at everything first before it went to the Chief of Naval Operations?

Miller: I have no knowledge of that. It went through him, and it came back to Steichen. He would ship it over to our lab. We had built a lab in Washington D.C., not too far down the street from a lab that--oh my goodness, who was the Farm Security Administration photographer?

Riess: Roy Stryker?

Miller: Yes. Stryker had his lab a little way down the street. In fact we looked at his lab with a possibility of taking that over. Steichen and I went and visited that lab early on, and for some reason or other we decided against that. We found a space and built a lab from scratch.

Riess: The photographers were involved in that phase of building the lab and all that?

Miller: That's right, and Steichen had the top people running that lab. A fellow from Condé Nast, a top color man, he was the one that took care of our color department. Another fellow who became quite prominent in the field of photography, Marty Forscher, a camera repairman, he took care of our camera supplies, and camera repair.

Fascinating story about Marty. He was approached to do this, and he let people believe that he knew everything about it. Later, as he told me, he said, "I decided that I really had to know what this is all about, I didn't know anything about it." So he took two Rolleiflexes apart, laid the materials out, and I think he told me that he even mixed the materials up. Then he blindfolded himself and reassembled the cameras. He worked on that until he could do that. He was a whiz at it.

Riess: Was there censorship? That's not the word. But the selection of all this material that came back, who did it and what happened to the rest of it?

Miller: I believe that Steichen did the editing. He liked that aspect of the unit's work. It was sent to the lab and they made the prints, 8"x10" prints, glossies, mounted them on a card with the caption material, and it went into our major files together with extra prints. I don't know, they must have gone to public relations as well.

In fact, I think I mentioned that I got a telegram from Gene Smith talking about some photographs I had made in Naples of children there. I was waiting for the invasion of southern France. While I was there I went ashore to Naples--I was on a carrier--I went ashore, and while I was there I made some photographs of these children. Evidently that material was sent back to Washington, and I got this telegram from Gene saying, "They are great photographs and I knew you had made them. Congratulations."

Any photographs released by the navy only said, "U.S. Navy photograph," no names on them, so that was pretty exciting for me, that he picked up that they were mine. Also, the point is that they got to *Life* magazine, and that must have been a regular system, that certain photographs the navy would ship out for public use.

Riess: That's interesting, how these things got edited and distributed.

Miller: I think they were edited by Steichen. He would periodically go through the lab and check the quality of the prints. He was a stickler for perfection in the making of prints. Looking at my prints that I've taken out of the files that I hadn't seen until later after the war, I'm amazed at the fine quality of them. They are all consistent, and they're beautifully done.

Riess: You've said elsewhere, as you were implying earlier, that the mission was to create photographs that would appeal to younger men, that would publicize naval aviation activities to compete with the U.S. Army Air Force. You had to compete with them for good talent for the navy. Are you competing in an indirect way or were they used in recruitment offices or what?

Miller: I don't know how they were used. I think they were meant to create the background music, so that a hard sell would be heard. Posters of all kinds were made.

First Meeting Steichen

Riess: Tell me about meeting Steichen the first time.

Miller: I was in the navy. I was circulating aeronautic secrets, and I had been talking with a woman there who had been a yeomanette in World War I named Joy B. Hancock, a charming, pretty woman. I had gotten to know her and shown her some of my photographs from the Art Center School. I had taken them into the office one day and she said, "Do you mind if I show these to Captain Radford, he might be interested in seeing them." So I said, "No, that would be fine." She went upstairs to Captain Radford's office, and within minutes the phone rang and she said, "Captain Radford would like to speak to you."

I went upstairs, met him, and he said that a man by the name of "Stooben" or "Stabben" or something of that nature was coming in to set up a special photographic unit, "and he might have use or need for a person like you." He said, "If you happen to be going to New York in the near future, you might drop in and see him. He's now working on an exhibit for the Museum of Modern Art, and so that's why he's in New York." I said, "I just happen to be going up there this weekend for a wedding," which was an out and out lie, because I didn't know anybody in New York, let alone somebody having a wedding.

I went up to New York on a Monday, something like that, and met Steichen in Tom Maloney's office. Tom Maloney was a publisher of *U.S. Camera Magazine* and *Annual*. Steichen was helping Tom put out his annual, making picture selections for his annual. He had developed a very close relationship with Tom and considered him part of his family, a close member of his family. Tom, incidentally, had gone to the Naval Academy, and I think it was in his senior year that he had to leave because it was discovered that he was married. That was unfortunate, but Tom remained a strong supporter of the navy. Anyway, I met with Steichen and Tom, this was the first time I'd met either of them, and I showed them my photographs. I was very proud to show them my photographs, and pleased. Steichen, after a while, said, "Fine, why don't you make whatever efforts are necessary to be transferred over to my unit?"

I said, "Fine," because I knew when he said that that it would be easy, because I knew how the operation in Washington went, that it would be a slam dunk in a manner of speaking. That's how that worked. I returned to Washington and in effect had to tread water until he showed up. I continued with my aeronautic secrets for a while longer, until it became better organized. They put a whole crew in there to take care of that. [laughter]

Riess: Was Steichen's name familiar to you? Did you know about Photo Secession Gallery?

Miller: I knew nothing about that. I knew the name Steichen, and when Radford mentioned that, why chills went up and down my back because I knew who he was referring to when he said "Stooben" or "Stabben." It was very exciting. But I didn't know the history of photography except casually. I had met some of those people at the Art Center School like Weston, and Will Connell, and others of that nature. I'd learned about the *Look* magazine people. I knew them, I knew the photojournalism aspect. But the history of photography and the foundations of it, I was ignorant of, really.

Riess: Did Steichen have a German accent?

Miller: No, he didn't. He was born in Luxembourg, and I think he left when he was three months or three years old, so he didn't have a chance to get much of an accent. No, absolutely not. If anything, he probably had a Midwest accent, because he was raised in Wisconsin. I guess it was in and around Madison.

Riess: You referred to Gene Smith getting in touch with you about the Naples photographs. Did you know Gene Smith?

Miller: I knew his work, and I had high respect for him. Gene and I were about the same age, had the same number of children--well, we eventually had the same number of children. But we had struggled through the same paths, he just struggled harder and had a lot more talent.

I don't know if I mentioned that while I was in Washington during those early days, Gene and I had lunch. A fine restaurant on Connecticut Avenue. La Salle Dubois I think it was. We were having lunch, and he was anxiously waiting, by the minute, to hear from New York City as to whether or not he was going to get an assignment from *Flying* magazine to photograph World War II. He kept going back and forth to the phone, and finally he came back and said, "I got it." Of course, he spent the rest of the afternoon there, having more drinks, and it was quite a nice celebration. I don't know when he began working for *Life*, but I think many of his fine war photographs were done on his *Flying* magazine assignment.

Riess: I was reading that after some time with *Life* he joined the staff of Ziff Davis Publishing Company--

Miller: That's *Flying* magazine.

Riess: --assigned to aircraft carriers and so on and he rejoined *Life* in about 1944, 1945.

Miller: So you see he had a long period with Ziff Davis. Much of his war things were Ziff Davis, not *Life*.

Riess: He was invited to apply for Steichen's unit but was disqualified several times on the physical. He had impaired hearing, and also insufficient college education. Is that news to you that he was turned down for Steichen's group?

Miller: I learned about that late in the war. But the idea of a college education might very well have been a navy aspect. To have been an officer, you had to have more formal education. That might have been how that cropped up. It had nothing to do with Steichen's evaluation or appreciation of Gene. He certainly appreciated and wanted Gene.

Particulars, Cameras, Captioning

Riess: You said a little bit about what the navy was offering you in the way of photographic equipment. Did you have a preference for the larger or smaller camera?

Miller: I had never used that small a camera. They only offered us 4"x5" Speed Graphics. The people coming in, like Horace Bristol and Fenno Jacobs [former plumber and photographer for *National Geographic*], they had been using Rolleiflexes.[4] I think they probably influenced the early decision to go to Rolleiflexes, because Charlie Kerlee, who was a commercial photographer from Seattle, used larger cameras. So he wouldn't have been pushing necessarily for the Rollei. In fact I know he used a 4"x5" Graphlex quite a bit. He liked larger film.

Riess: What did you end up using mostly, though?

4.I should mention Paul Dorsey and Nils Jorgenson among the guys who were the navy combat photography unit.

Miller: Rolleiflex. One of our problems was supporting our Rolleiflexes, which meant smaller film, roll film. The navy didn't have that on its list of available materials. They had the cut film, and the film pack. Early on, we would take the navy issued 4”x5” Kodachrome, large quantities of it, take it down to the local camera shops, and trade it off for cameras and 120 film for our Rolleiflexes, which I'm sure wouldn't be accepted as a good way of doing business.

Riess: Did you keep notes on your exposures? Were you trained to do that?

Miller: No, that sort of thing, under those conditions, wasn't practical. In order to be meaningful you had to be able to see the results of that information that you wrote down. I didn't see the results after I gave the film to somebody to ship back--usually wrapped in an aerological balloon, to keep it protected from moisture. And if I was in a humid climate, which I was most often, I'd first send the film up in an airplane and reduce the humidity: the higher elevation would tend to dehydrate the film. Then I would wrap it in an aerological balloon and ship it back to the office. Actually, some of it went back in condoms before I found out that aerological balloons were available.

In Corsica, waiting for the invasion of southern France, I’d send up a case of beer with the bombers and in the morning it would come back cold--just in time for breakfast!

Riess: So note-taking on exposure and so on would have been meaningless. But you gave them data on where you were?

Miller: Caption material, yes, as to what the operation was, names, when I could do it to identify it, so they had something for caption material.

Riess: Did you need to get releases?

Miller: No, we were all working for the same boss. No, that sort of thing didn't show up. On one trip, on one carrier, I made an effort to photograph as many individuals as I could, and I had a poop sheet that had critical information on it that people could fill out. The idea was that could then be used to send back to the local hometown newspaper. That was the only time I was ever involved in anything that was a direct P.R. effort, as such. My caption material and all was scanty. I can show you what I did, because I know where it happens to be, of going into Hiroshima, what I did there.

Riess: Steichen wanted his photographers “to capture the human thread.” How did you know when you had just gotten one of these “human threads?”

Miller: Those theories that Steichen had and the ways he had of expressing it were certainly important for me to hear, but I think it may have been more directed to other members of the team.

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Miller: I say that because it may--this is pure supposition on my part--it may have encouraged them to focus on the individual and not on the inanimate pictures, it might be one of design, or something other than human interest. Steichen was concerned with human interest, because he believed in the individual and the strength of the individual. Also he knew that would be of

the most interest to the general public. I think it was certainly a knowing point of view on his part.

Riess: He knew he didn't have to tell you because that's what you do?

Miller: He told me, I heard that. I think it was a blanket statement that he threw out, he didn't dwell on that too much with me. Maybe he did, I don't remember it. I do remember receiving a letter from him one time when I was complaining of having difficulties in this area. I must have mentioned Lisette Model's work. He wrote me a note back that says, "Don't worry about Lisette's work, you're doing things more important than that," or something like that. We'll take the letter out and look at that.

Riess: Did you write letters home about that whole experience?

Miller: No, I don't think so. I'm not aware of it. Joan has lots of letters that I wrote home, but I imagine that most of the letters were concerned with my missing her and wanting to be with her, rather than some running diary of what was happening.

Riess: There are photographers who kept their running diaries, from the daybooks of Weston to Gene Smith, who seems to have been a great commentator on what he was feeling. You've never felt the urge?

Miller: The navy discouraged that in letters. In fact, letters were always censored before they left the area of operations. Things that referred to specifics were deleted and edited out, you know, from a security point of view. Whether it was necessary or not is something else. The idea of keeping materials that were--I didn't do it, let's put it that way.

Battle Stations

Riess: What about your feelings of fear and personal safety? Did you have the young man's obliviousness to that?

Miller: No. We knew we were above dying. That's a poor way of putting it. We just felt that we weren't going to be hit, we weren't going to suffer that. As far as being afraid, yes. But it was just momentary. Anytime that I was frightened, it was because of thinking of something in the future, not at the moment. At the moment I had to be busy taking pictures. So, it would be counterproductive for me to be afraid of those conditions.

I was never afraid under battle conditions. A funny thing happened. On board a carrier, one of the two most dangerous periods of time are just before dawn and just before sunset, where your ship can be silhouetted against the remaining light. In the shadows, there might be a submarine waiting to torpedo you. At all times, the radar plot or the people who were electronically monitoring the presence of other foreign ships and planes--they were always working on that, around the clock--when they spotted something that the captain felt was harmful, he'd sound general quarters.

General quarters was the sounding of the claxons and the bells and all, alerting everybody to go to their battle stations, to close the hatches so that they wouldn't be flooded in case they were torpedoed. Of course, I was prepared for this. I always had my things ready. I had my camera handy, my cameras handy. I had an army web belt with two pockets in it. Normally you would put canteens in them. I had these pockets, I had some aerological balloons so that if I took exposed film I could put them in the balloons. If I had to go over the side, they would be protected. I had my helmet and life jacket and all.

I remember this one general quarters in the middle of the night. I didn't have any battle station to go to, but I wanted to get up on deck to see what was going to happen, if anything. So, I grabbed everything and got up there. I'll never forget what it was like. Here I am standing there, camera around my neck. No, I didn't have the camera around my neck, I had about half a ream of paper in my hand, no trousers, and no camera. [laughter] My subconscious must have really hit the panic button, you know. But there I was in my "battle station," completely unprepared. I remember that as an example of how your mind can not work the way you want it to work. That was such a vivid demonstration of that.

Riess: Did you learn good habits as a photographer from that period? For instance, the idea that you would go to bed with your camera loaded.

Miller: Yes, everything was ready.

Riess: Are there some other things that stood you in good stead? For instance, photographing fear. You said you weren't afraid, but on the other hand, how about these men who are at the battle stations. Photographing raw emotion.

Miller: That's an interesting thing. I made a point of trying to capture that. We were in the Pacific, and I was on a gunboat. A gunboat is a small craft. We were to protect the underwater demolition swimmers as they were going into the beach. We would fire over the tops of their heads to protect them from the enemy from firing on them.

On the way up to this operation, we were attacked. There were seven of these gunboats, World War I minesweepers that had been converted to this other work. Being a minesweeper meant that they had wooden hulls, which would not attract the mines. These were pretty early boats. They were maybe a hundred feet long. We had a single-barreled 40mm and a bunch of 50's to protect us. Three of us had radar bubbles on a mast sticking above us--that was a mast sticking up maybe thirty feet, on top of which was a white bubble containing radar equipment. It was maybe two feet across.

One evening, which is the ideal time for a kamikaze attack--what happens is the kamikazes put the sun behind them and ride that in so that it makes it difficult for gunners to see them--they came in, and they took out four of the seven of us. We were all in a line, going up to Linguyan Gulf in the Philippines.

Riess: Four of the seven boats?

Miller: Four of the seven boats. They hit them and blew them out of the water. We figured out afterwards that [our not being hit] was because of our radar bubble. It gave them a false sense of target, it was sticking up a little too high. Because they would drop around us, the planes would drop around us and miss us.

During this time, hell, I can't do anything to make a picture like this. I can't photograph the damn thing. So I decided I'd photograph the faces of these gunners. It's one of those times where you're directly face to face with the enemy. He's there, coming toward you, you're doing your best to shoot him. I made these faces, I thought that this will say something. Later I saw those pictures, and the faces showed nothing. Their faces were absolutely normal, if you want to call it that. So, under pressure you're too busy doing your job.

Riess: Were you armed?

Miller: No. Well, that's not true. On the gunboat, no. When I flew in planes, yes. Because if we had to bail out in the jungle or something like that and had to support ourselves one way or the other, yes, I carried a .38 revolver.

Riess: Were you trained to use it?

Miller: No.

Let me tell you another thing about fear. I think this was also on a gunboat. I'm having trouble remembering the specifics, but somehow or other we were being attacked. I don't think it was by kamikazes, it was by actual shells. I ducked behind an apron on the deck to dodge these bullets. When I got there, I found somebody who got there before me, but that was all right. After the moment had passed, both this man and I realized what had happened. What we had dived behind was a little canvas windshield. [laughter] Absolutely no protection whatsoever. Anyway, it was strange. Funny things like that happened.

The Children of Naples

Riess: Tell me about photographing those children in Naples, that poverty.

Miller: I went ashore with a bag of my equipment. I had two bags, shoulder bags, one of them had shaving equipment, things like that in it. I spent maybe three or four days there. I photographed these kids. All kids are just marvelous, the Second Coming ought to look like those kids, they were just marvelous, their spirit.

They were running through the streets. They were dirty, they were less than ill-clad, they were in bad shape in many ways. But their spirit was beautiful. That's what I tried to photograph. I just roamed the streets and photographed them as I saw them, and sometimes their mothers, parents. It was a lovely experience to be that free and to share, in a manner of speaking, their world. Because it was a dog-eat-dog thing, where they would fight over a little bit of food, you know. Not much, they would usually share it, rather than fight too much.

Riess: Was that the first time you had been so focused on children?

Miller: I think, probably, I guess so. I found out after the war that what I photographed was normal for Naples whether there was a war on or not. These kids are on the streets, they're just drifting as a part of the "normal" life in Naples. So I wasn't photographing something--it wasn't war, war had some effect on it, but it didn't cause it.

Riess: And that was picked up by *Life*?

Miller: I don't know if *Life* used it or not. It was seen by *Life*, we saw it in the office. I don't know if it was used by them.

Riess: Have you seen the work of Sebastian Salgado?

Miller: Yes, fantastic work. I just think it's brilliant. He's an exceptional talent and evidently developed when he was an adult, not as a young man. He had been trained, I don't know, educated as an engineer or something of that nature, or architect? Anyway, he has a charming wife, and she also is well educated and has helped him a great deal in kind of a joint effort, there. They had an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art here in San Francisco, beautiful exhibit there years ago.

Riess: Do you think that he sees something that's different from what you see?

Miller: I think he does, yes. He's able to see a bigger picture and deal with it. I don't know, I can't describe it, I know that I wish that I could do that sort of thing. I'm sure I've been exposed to similar opportunities, but I haven't begun to do what he's done. He's able to pick up a core idea and develop it. Not using just a family, but using a whole community, a whole culture. I find it just fabulously good, fabulously good.

Riess: How much do you think it's the formal elements of his composition?

Miller: I don't know, it's just in his bones somehow to be able to do that. Making photographs like he does, like many others of us do, you have to do it very quickly. You can't redo it, you can't move this around or that around. You'd be interrupting the moment, you'd be interrupting the happening. It's just a talent, for lack of a better word, that is unique to the individual. I don't know how you can. Maybe it can be taught, I don't know.

Riess: You referred to color work during World War II. Were you doing color work?

Miller: No, we were using the Rolleiflex, which had a 120 film which is two and a quarter square. Color film wasn't available in that format at that time. Early on it wasn't. In fact, we had some color film especially rerolled for us. It was not Kodachrome, I believe it was Anscochrome or something of that nature. It was kind of experimental on our part. The 4”x5” was a Kodachrome; Eastman Kodak had Kodachrome which was useful, and that was used by some of the members of the group, but rarely.

War Photographers, Conditioned to “Shoot”

Riess: Referring to Gene Smith and Ziff Davis and *Flying* magazine, *Life* magazine also sent its own photographers out?

Miller: Oh, my yes. Carl Mydans I remember, I ran across Carl several times in the Philippines.

Riess: Cornell Capa, who was he working for?

Miller: Cornell was working with *Life*, I think he was in the Atlantic theater operations, the European theater operations. I was primarily in the Pacific.

Let me tell you a funny story. At the end of the war, a group of us were sitting in this hotel, a group of correspondents, we were all kind of exhausted hanging around in this area and sitting on these couches. All of the sudden, somebody comes in and says, "Tojo's been shot." This is the sort of thing that's not for me to photograph. That's kind of spot news which would be--if I got it, he's already been shot, so all I would have there was something after the fact.

But I remember, and Carl's corrected me on this since, that Carl came over and he said, "I don't have my equipment here, can I use yours?" Picked up my camera bag and went out. I've talked much of this to Carl since, and he says, "No, I didn't do that." So, I don't know who it was. I remember one time, on the invasion of Luzon, the flotilla was there, the navy fleet, battleships, and cruisers, and destroyers, and all. Going back to this gunboat, I'd previously been on there to protect the underwater demolition swimmers. This was only about a hundred yards or less off the shore. The battleships would be firing their guns in to kind of help out on this as well. Every once in a while, one of theirs would run a little short and drop down beside us, you know, and explode. That's not really part of my story, really.

But I remember one evening, dark had come in and kamikazes started coming in. I have photographs of the sky just filled with firing and bullets going off from other ships in this same group. During this one evening, one of these kamikazes hit this battleship and killed the man who had planned to go up and establish the *Time-Life* office there in the Philippines when they got ashore. He was killed. Carl, who at that point hadn't yet made his pictures of MacArthur coming ashore, he was given the job of taking over this man's position as running the *Time-Life* operation there when he got ashore.

When MacArthur came ashore he was riding in a little LST, kind of a little landing craft. On the landing craft, the motor is covered with a shroud of sorts, so there's a little platform there over the motor's power plant. On that, MacArthur was seated in his chair. It was certainly like the emperor entering the conquered city. He was coming by not too far from our gunboat. We were pretty well anchored there now, waiting to be told to pull out. In fact, he came by, and a fellow said, "Here he comes."

I got up and looked at it, and then went down and laid down on the deck again. Because I knew I couldn't photograph him, it was too far away for my Rolleiflex. But that was MacArthur returning to the Philippines, and I'm sure that it was the same thing that Carl must have been on the same landing craft to have gotten out and photographed MacArthur returning.

Riess: So the big picture is that you were one of many navy and army photographers, and other photographers that were not in your unit maybe, and also hanging out with war correspondents.

Miller: Well, I didn't hang out with any other military journalists. I did hang out with correspondents. They had a better pipeline of what was going on. In fact, when we talk about Hiroshima we can bring that up.

Riess: I was wondering about the issue of photographers swarming over a scene. It's something that we're used to now, photographers snapping and flashing.

Miller: That didn't exist then. I may have been the only photographer around in the areas where I was. If it had happened, I think someone in the crowd would have said, "Take it easy, buddy, it's a long war."

Riess: When we talk about it, do you really picture it? Do you picture the water, and the shells, and the whole thing?

Miller: Yes, sure.

Riess: Did you come home with nightmares?

Miller: No, no. I do remember one time, I think coming back from the Pacific. I don't know exactly where it was. I was in Honolulu and a strange thing happened, somebody kicked over one of those wooden folding chairs, and it hit the floor with a big crack. Next thing I knew, I was lying on the floor. It was a reflex of some sort, I didn't realize that I had it in me. But there I was. Outside that, I haven't had any. Maybe that was my way of getting rid of my nightmares, I don't know.

We were conditioned--highly strung, very highly strung. There was a subconscious that wound us up, I guess. Because there's nothing you can do, you're upset, you're concerned, but there's nothing you can do about it so you sublimate it. You've got to go on. The interesting thing I became aware of is I had to be continuously alert to make the photographs. If I didn't, they would come and go and it would be too late, if I wanted that kind of a photograph.

I should not have expended that kind of energy, I should have spent more time looking for the human interest kinds of things, which took place day by day, rather than waiting to try to photograph the kamikaze that hit its target. So what if you have that? God, I remember one time, a beautiful, sunny day, the kind of day where you take your kids to the park. Here we were in this carrier, quiet water, and all of the sudden a kamikaze came out of nowhere coming towards the carrier. He missed the top of the carrier and landed in the water probably a couple hundred feet away from the ship.[5]

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The Bomb, Hiroshima

Riess: Hiroshima. Do you have your images from that? At the end were you able to get prints of the pictures you took?

Miller: After the war I went back and rifled the print files so that I could have copies of images that I've made, but I didn't begin to do anything exhaustive in that regard because I wasn't there that long. I never saw a set of contact prints of what I'd shot. The picture prints I have were those that were edited out by somebody else, probably by Steichen.

5.See further on this story in Interview 5.

Riess: How did you decide which ones you wanted to keep?

Miller: My time was so short, I didn't even make a decision on that. I just found files where there was a bunch of stuff there, and went in and took what I could get hold of in a hurry. Like grabbing stuff before the house burns down.

Riess: [looking at notes] What are these notes?

Miller: This went with the film to Washington. This is the raw material.

Riess: "September 12, 1945, to the attention of Lieutenant Commander John Drennan," with a note to forward it to Captain Steichen, and then the roll numbers and the numbers of the films.

Miller: Roll numbers, exposure numbers.

Riess: Tokyo, Yokohama, Hiroshima.

How it is that you were there? Where were you right before the bomb was dropped?

Miller: Well, let's back off a little bit. I think I was in Washington, D.C. Let me double check something. [gets up and brings back documents]

Riess: You had been in Washington for Roosevelt's funeral.

Miller: Well, I happened to be there. We would drop back periodically for a little rest, and also to recoup equipment and what not. That was our base, our home base.

Riess: You were married by this time.

Miller: 1942, yes, Joan was there. She worked in Admiral Perry's office. She was secretary to him.

Riess: And when you went out to Honolulu, did you feel the war was winding down?

Miller: Yes, we knew the war was winding down once the European war was turned off. We were moving all our forces out there to the Pacific. We knew it was just a matter of time. We were so big and so ponderous, we could just fall over and crush the Japanese. So, there was no question, it was an unequal contest. It was just inevitable.

I just show this so you get an idea of the variety. These are orders that I had, some documentation that shows where I was.

Riess: [looking at documentation, two pages covering from 1942 to 1945] You were back and forth and back and forth. Ceylon, India, Cairo, I don't know your pictures from that.

Miller: I don't think I made any.

Riess: Did you have any inkling of the creation of the bomb?

Miller: None. Let's get into that. I guess, according to this, I was in Washington. I thought I was in Europe, but as I mentioned to you earlier, our orders gave us a great deal of freedom so we

could come and go at will. One day a navy captain that I knew said, "Wayne"--see, in our orders, nobody told us where to go--so when this navy captain said, "Wayne, I think you ought to go to Guam," I think it was, "and see so and so," that really set off bells ringing in my head. This was most unusual, the first time during the war that it happened.

So, without thinking twice, I went out. I flew to San Francisco, I flew to Pearl, and on out to Guam. I located this man, told him that Captain So-and-So had suggested I see him. He said, "Well, I suggest that you report to this troop ship and get on that." No one said anything about why. I went to this troop ship, which I think was the U.S.S. Braxton, and it was filled with marines. I got a ride on this troop ship, and we were at sea for several days, I don't know exactly how many. And then we heard, by radio, that a bomb had dropped in Japan and our job was to secure the Tokyo harbor.

Nobody described what the bomb was, except it was a big bomb. On this ship were other correspondents as well. One was Jay Eyerman, who was a photographer for *Life* magazine. Jay and I, I don't know if we had met before then or not, I don't really remember. But we went ashore, and at the mouth of the harbor, Tokyo harbor, spiked the guns or made sure they were okay so that ships coming behind us could move in without being fired upon.

Riess: The term is "spiked the gun?"

Miller: I guess that's a form of running a piece of metal into the firing pins of the cannons. I don't know, maybe it's a Civil War name. Anyway, to disable the cannons.

So then we went to Tokyo, where Jay Eyerman picked up an interpreter, a hot trumpet player for Radio Tokyo, an awful nice fellow. He was a graduate of the College of the Pacific from Stockton and he was over visiting his parents in Tokyo when the war came along, and he was stuck. He was a Nisei, so he was more American than a lot of Americans. Jay got hold of him, or somehow or other it was worked out that he'd be an interpreter for Jay. I hitchhiked with Jay to go to Hiroshima. We took the electric train and we went ashore at Yokasuka.

Riess: Yokasuka is the name of the town?

Miller: Yes, it's a naval base. That's it, up at the top. [looking at contact print] Jay Eyerman down there in frames ten and twelve, I got him swimming in the pool.

Riess: "Jay Eyerman, of *Life* magazine, photographer, is swimming in pool in newly occupied naval yard. We walked up and saw a group of marines staring at the pool in a most undecided fashion. Without saying a word, Jay had stripped off his clothes and jumped in. The water was fine."

In the next roll you've got the whole marine corps in swimming, it looks like. This is all on August 30th.

The bomb had been dropped on August 5th, but you still didn't really have any idea of what you were going to see?

Miller: No, we were out of touch. I spent time then helping liberate some of the prisoners of war, following that point in time, after Yokasuka.

Riess: You've written descriptions of these prisoners of war. "Old man from South Africa" with a story that you must have gotten from him.

Miller: I don't remember, I don't remember those things.

Riess: [reading] "A young man from Michigan." "I am now aboard the USS Reeves continuing the prisoner of war operation." By September 1st you've gone to Shibaura district.

Did you transfer your notes from something to something else?

Miller: I must have been carrying with me my little Olivetti portable.

Riess: That would have been standard issue, the little Olivetti portable?

Miller: No, I think I paid for that myself. I have great difficulty writing and being legible, so I prefer the typewriter.

Riess: "Cheering men." "A group of Greeks." "A missionary from Montreal."

Miller: I made notes, and I transcribed these from my note pad to a typewriter.

Riess: At the end of this sheet of photo caption material, you say, "This is all, please forward all film to Captain Steichen after you're finished with it. Thanks, John."

Miller: I'm saying, "Thank you, John." John Drennan. "Please forward all film after you have finished with it," is so I am not hurting his feelings. He's under orders to not touch it but to send it on. And you see, it might have been two different shipments. I had to do things so that I got enough done to get it out quickly and then move on and do another one next time.

That was in Tokyo. You see, I developed a relationship with Jay, and then on the 3rd of September--all the other stuff took place between the 30th and the 3rd--we went down to Hiroshima. We didn't have any food, we didn't have any blankets, nothing of that sort. We just had our camera equipment and maybe a bunch of candy bars.

Riess: You call Hiroshima, "Atomic Bomb City #1." Was that how it was referred to?

Miller: I don't know when I put that in there.

See, I have two rolls of color, Agfacolor. I don't know what happened to that.

I guess it was being called that. But "atomic," that's like the new name of an automobile. Could have been.

Riess: Are you saying that with all that you saw in Tokyo of cities being destroyed, Hiroshima was just another city?

Miller: Another war scene. I didn't suffer any great impact, saying, "Oh, my God." Nothing like that. The place had been bombed, destroyed. I had seen other things not unlike that. As I understand it, this atomic bomb was kind of like a large incendiary bomb. It didn't dig a hole in the ground, it just exploded above the ground and blew things apart and burned everything

up. Well, Tokyo and Yokohama suffered equal, maybe comparable damage, and I understand that there may have been an even greater loss of life in Tokyo than there was in Hiroshima during the war. So you're dealing with destruction which is hard to comprehend. Hiroshima didn't stand out. Anyway, I didn't react to it.

Riess: I bet you've been asked about it so much since then.

Miller: Yes, I have. It's like the book I did in Chicago on the blacks. People say, "My God, listening to all that marvelous music. Gosh, what a lucky guy you were." In hindsight, I think I was tone deaf, I didn't hear any of that.

Riess: Your image, the man crossing the plaza, or empty area, is this the center of the city?

Miller: Yes, that's pretty much the center, yes.

Riess: And it's completely leveled.

Miller: Completely leveled. Of course, this bomb covered such a large area. It would take a panoramic camera to give it the sweep that it should have had. But that's one direction, and I think that right in the center of the town there had been a military encampment. And that's pretty well blown that military encampment apart.

The next picture shows a plank of wood. Planks were standing on which was written, "In memory of the southern army," that this was a memorial to soldiers of the eighth division of the Southern Area Army.

Riess: The next picture?

Miller: We arrived there in the morning. It was a misty rain. It wasn't a downpour, it was a misty rain, you stay outside, you get wet. Jay went off with his interpreter and I was on my own, and I wandered into this deserted building, or remnants of a building, which is concrete. I understood that it was a bank building. Nothing inside except this big open space. Here and there were people lying on mats, obviously wounded. There was no light, there were no nurses around, that I could see, and nobody attending these people. They were just there. So, I made these few pictures.

Riess: Where does the light come from?

Miller: A flash, these are all flash pictures. I had, in some cases, an extension flash. This was a flash that I held in my hand. I extended my arm out to make this picture.

Riess: Was the crutch across there? Or did you arrange it?

Miller: No, I didn't touch a thing. When I make a photograph, that's the way it is. I don't change anything.

Riess: Was that your rule for you or for the navy?

Miller: The navy never said anything about it, it was my rule.

Riess: You know, it was something that the FSA cameramen were asked, if they had moved anything.

Miller: No, I didn't. I might have moved something in order to be able to see the subject, but other than that, I don't think I ever did anything like that.

Riess: What are the specks over the people? I thought it might be blood.

Miller: It could be blood, but I think it's just flies. It was the 1st of September, and it was humid and all. It was great fly season. This you can see, this older woman lying there, and somebody brought her a letter of some sort. I think somebody's even interpreted some of those words on there. So she's just lying alone, and I have no idea how they got there or what it was about.

See, here's another, I think I had another light over here, an extension light.

Riess: Did you have an interpreter with you?

Miller: No.

Riess: So there was no way of you talking to these people?

Miller: No. I think it's the same people that had the crutch in the picture. This is the only medical person I saw, and she was taking care of this little child here, and I'm assuming that's the mother. That's the only medical person I saw at this time.

And this is a little temple, a temporary temple, I think, which was set up.

Riess: These people look mostly destitute.

Miller: But these people may not have been residents of Hiroshima. They came in, I think, afterwards from the countryside. Maybe to bring food to their families. Hiroshima was a railhead, so it was accessible to the larger community.

Riess: Did these pictures get beamed around the world?

Miller: I have no idea, no idea. I was in my own little vacuum when I made them, and afterwards I remained in my same little vacuum. I don't know what happened to them. I do remember that first picture I showed you, when *Newsweek* made a story on the anniversary a few years ago, they used this as the lead picture, which was interesting. They picked these up out of the archives. All these negatives are in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

I don't know what the impact [of the photographs] was, if anything. I do know that Joan and I were back there last year, or the year before last. And the museum back there, which is focused on this very moment, hadn't seen my photographs. I've been negligent not sending them a set of these pictures.

The Dealers, Collectors, Print Quality Questions

Riess: It's interesting to see your photo books here. What is the system you have with the green tags and the pink tags?

Miller: Some photo dealers, who sell photographs, recently were out here, last week or the week before last. The green ones are selections that one dealer would like to have, and the red ones another dealer would like to have. But as I told you, I raided the files in the National Archives, so I don't have the negatives. I may have duplicates of the original files. Others, I have made copy negatives, and made 11"x14" prints which are very, very good prints. I really can't tell if they're copies. Some of those are of interest to the market.

Riess: What do you have to sell to the dealers?

Miller: If I have duplicates of some of these, I may decide to sell a duplicate of this print, 8"x10" glossy. Or if I don't have a duplicate and I have a good copy, I'll ask him whether or not he'd like to have that copy.

This business of selling prints is a new aspect of photography. It's kind of mind boggling to me, another whole world. I'm not necessarily interested in doing it, but then I say, "Well, why not? Why not get the pictures out to other people?"

Riess: Where are these people coming to you from?

Miller: Let me say, there's one fellow in New York City, Howard Greenberg. He's a very well-recognized dealer in photography, he has a gallery in New York City. He was interested, and he came out, or his partner came out here. Then there's a fellow from Boston, he came out and he made one of these choices. Then there's another dealer in Chicago, Steve Dater, he came out.

Riess: You say it's a new thing?

Miller: For me. It's sort of been around since the beginning of time, I guess. But for me this is a new thing. Evidently these people are well established in their field and respected by others, so since I have them located geographically, why, it seems like an opportunity for me to distribute some of my work. And it's interesting that this fellow in Boston has sold a couple of my pictures to the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco. Evidently, there are some others that they're interested in as well. Rather than coming to me directly, I guess they like the "heat shield" concept, to deal at arms length with somebody like this. Yale University has bought some.

Riess: I was going to ask you if you had an agent.

Miller: No, these in effect are agents, you see.

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Riess: I was asking whether you think they're looking for art or history, and you're saying?

Miller: I've been led to believe that there's no way of nailing down why people buy photographs, except that there's a long list of reasons. Some are historical, others--well, one collector collects nothing but photographs showing Coca-Cola bottles. Then it was explained to me that's very logical, because her family has a tie-in, a history of bottling of Coke. I don't know. One fellow bought a picture of a boy boxer, and he bought it because his son is interested in boxing. Other people buy photographs, a good number of them, buy photographs as an investment. They don't buy photographs to put on the wall, they buy them to put in a box until they increase in value.

It's hard for me to get excited about this part of photography, selling to collectors, because I'm baffled as to who a collector is. It's hard to join that kind of enthusiasm they may have when in most cases it is alien to anything I can understand.

Riess: Have you always made archival prints whenever you print?

Miller: You don't make an archival print. Well, you do and you don't. An archival print, I pressed these dealers as to what is an archival print. Evidently, this is an area, which hasn't been nailed down. The prevalent, or one of the acceptable definitions is, an archival print is a print made close to the time that the original negative was made. In that sense I have lots of "archival prints" because when I'd make a print in a lab, in my dark room, I would work hard to get the quality print I wanted, and I would use that for the client or for whatever purpose. The other prints I made at the same time that didn't quite measure up to that, I'd put in boxes. So, I have a lot of archival prints. Other people would say, "Well, you should have thrown them out." Well, in hindsight, I think I maybe threw out too many.

Riess: I was thinking of issues like the paper's archival quality.

Miller: That's another definition. One in which the print has been treated so that it will have extended life. But it seems that for some reason or other, my normal way of operating, which most of us practice, the prints are holding up very well. They're not fading and so forth.

Riess: When these gallery dealers have come to see you, have any of them proposed a show?

Miller: Yes, they have, and no. I've had one dealer in New York City, a fellow by the name of Keith DeLellis, who showed maybe twenty photographs or so that I had given him for sale. Out of that, he made an exhibition. Very nice. I must say these were prints that he wanted, and I gave them to him because they weren't the best ones I had. I wanted to save the best ones for maybe family, maybe they'd like to have some eventually. So, I gave him third and fourth choice prints. I was embarrassed, in some ways, to give them to him. But by God, he got them on the wall, and they looked pretty good. [laughter]

Riess: Did he have you sign them?

Miller: Oh yes, the back of the print. A couple of them sold, good prices. As I say I was embarrassed. But the thing to do is to rise above it. Either that or not give him the bad prints. But a bad print to me is not necessarily a bad print to someone else.

Let me tell you something interesting. At the Museum of Modern Art, in the photography department, I looked at some of the prints that they have in their permanent collection that are mine. They have some prints in there that I just got almost sick looking at the quality of them,

they were so bad. I don't know how they got in their collection, but they're there. So I talked to Peter Galassi, who's the curator of the photography department at the museum, because I wanted to replace these and give them some better prints because they're representing who I am as a photographer and I'm embarrassed by these. He said, "Now wait a minute now. C'mon and let me show you something."

We left his office and went out into the museum where they had an exhibit of some early photographs, or a collection, I forget what it was around, from the museum collection. We looked at those. Specifically I remember a couple of Dorothea Lange prints, which I thought were pretty bad prints. Then we looked at some others, and they were too dark. Then he went on to describe how photography goes through phases of making very dark prints, or contrasty prints, or very light ones. So, in his mind it'd be hard to describe a "good" print, because it's related to the times, the fashions, the conditions. Not the conditions, but the acceptance level of what is a good print. So, I came back and looked at mine again, and by God, I could see his argument.

Riess: That your printing had been variable?

Miller: That my printing had been variable. Well, frankly, I questioned that to a degree, because I have prints here in my studio which I made at that time, and I can compare them with the prints I have made today, and they're almost identical.

Now Ansel Adams had a different attitude on this. Adams just said that he considers the negative kind of like the score for music, and the print is the performance. The print can vary, depending on the mood of the photographer, or the feeling he wants to express. So, again, there is no one "right" print. And, coming from Adams, that's pretty good because he's the quintessential technician, and knows what he's doing.

Riess: Peter Galassi talked you out of replacing the prints?

Miller: Well, it's not that he talked me out of it. He had the prints and he wouldn't give them to me. He wouldn't let me make substitutions.

Thinking about Picture Magazines and Information, and Museum Openings

Riess: Museums and dealers, a far cry from your $12.95 camera beginnings. What a business you've grown up through!

Miller: It's covered some years. I'm amazed at how many years have gone by, it doesn't seem like that at all. We're talking about World War II--well, that started in '42, '41, now that's sixty years!

Riess: I guess war increased the production and use of photographs?

Miller: I don't know if that's the case or not. I would say after the war people continued to be interested in news about the world, and the picture magazine came into full flower at that time because of its ability to communicate values that hadn't been available before. We didn't have television.

Riess: Communicate values?

Miller: I'm talking about information.

Riess: *Life* started in 1936. It was always a picture magazine?

Miller: Yes, it was designed to be that.

Riess: And in 1936, did your family have it?

Miller: No, I was unaware, really, of *Life* magazine at that time. Oh, I'm sure I knew about it.

Riess: And newspaper photography, was that minor compared to magazines?

Miller: Oh yes, newspaper photography was still hardcore, one-shot flash of the accident or receiving a plaque, or something of that nature, somebody jumping out of a window. That was the Weegee period really in so many ways, that kind of photography.

Riess: Police photography.

Miller: Yes, that's a good way of putting it. The files, the morgues of magazines didn't begin to build until after World War II. In fact, the first picture story in *Life* magazine's morgue that they had in their files was one in 1951 by Carl Mydans, a story in Texas. Looking for photographs for *Family of Man*, I ran across that. That doesn't mean anything, they had been doing picture stories for many years before that. But as far as their building up a structured file, a reservoir of pictures, that's the first one in their files because *Life* magazine up until that time did not make contact prints of their photographers' takes. The film was developed, and it was edited by a man whose name I've forgotten, maybe something like Grubner. He looked at the negatives, the strips of film, and with a punch he marked the edges of the negatives for printing. Without contact prints.

Riess: Could the photographer assert his preferences? On the negatives, or perhaps on the contact sheet?

Miller: The photographer might not be there to do it. He might still be on the job, or on a new job.

Life magazine, later when I knew them--well, I knew them about this time, after the war--a lovely woman there, I must remember her name, she was, in effect, doing this job. She could look at a story that had come in, the contacts, and she could, in effect, put the hat of that photographer's head on her head and look at those pictures through the eyes of the photographer. She was very fine. She would pick out exactly what I wanted to show, she would get it every time. What was her name? It was a beautiful thing, and she loved photographs, and she loved the photographers. Her walls were just covered with pictures of photographs.

Make a note that I'd like to tell you about looking for pictures for the *Family of Man*, how *Life* was in the process of throwing out all photographs that hadn't appeared in the magazine. It's a nice story. Make a note of that so we can touch on that sometime.

Riess: I'm also interested, in doing the *Family of Man,* whether you dug into the Farm Security archives?

Miller: No, I did not. I don't know why. I don't know if that's because Steichen knew the archive so well, or he had enough books on it, or records of it. He had done a show on Farm Security.

Riess: *The Bitter Years.* That was in 1962.

Miller: I thought he had done an earlier one, too. Anyway, I did not go through their files. I wish I had.

Riess: One article you gave me, I guess from *U.S. Camera*, you were in New York in 1946 and you photographed a Weston opening. I was trying to get into your mind, because you seem very ironic in your comments about the sort of holiness and hushed voices, hovering around these pictures. I thought, "Wayne Miller has just come back from the theater of war and he's arriving at this temple of art and he's commenting on something here."

Miller: I was trying to express just that. I considered it a temple. Of course, a good bit of this is the arrogance of a young person which I've done my best to try to overcome. But it was a holiness, and a preciousness, that I didn't feel in photography. I was interested in human emotions and unpretentious presentations. The Stieglitz school and some of these other approaches, it's another kind of photography that I was just not sympathetic to.

I was just unappreciative, because I didn't understand, really, what they were after, what they were trying to do. As a young, virile man, I was not concerned with sunlight on the landscape, per se. I felt there was a form of posturing in that kind of photography.

Riess: Weston's an example of a photographer who reported on his feelings as he was taking pictures, in his *Daybooks*.

Miller: I had great respect for Weston and his efforts to do his thing. I must say that some of his images were not as exciting to me as others. But I could understand him as a human being, and his struggles. I didn't know him very well, God almighty, I knew very little about him. Maybe I spent an hour in his presence.

Riess: Given what we talked about last time, about making a last creative stab, Weston had Parkinson's disease in 1948, and then he died maybe six years later, I'm not sure. But four years before he died he said, "Was I cut off from my creative work at just the right time? Was I through? I don't think so, but could be." I was interested that he was even--

Miller: --thinking about it?--

Riess: --thinking about it in those terms. "Cut off at just the right time."

Miller: Well, it's hard to argue with a man's self-examination. But Ansel Adams' current show--I haven't seen it, but I understand that Szarkowski said that he didn't include anything later than 1950. In other words, his very young years were his best. I don't know any photographers whose work improved as they got older. I think much of it is based on the juices they had and exercised during those early experiences.

Marriage to Joan

Riess: Now a thread that we have to pick up here is your marriage to Joan. She was a college sweetheart?

Miller: Yes, I met her when she was a freshman, I think, at the University of Illinois at Urbana. She lived in Urbana, Illinois. She was a town girl, and I was a senior, or a junior, I guess, when I first met her. We hit it off, and through a series of emotional tornadoes, and earthquakes, and forest fires, we stuck together.

Riess: Did you get married on leave or something?

Miller: In June of '42 Steichen arranged for me to have time off to go back to Chicago from Washington, D.C., and I went back to Urbana, Illinois, where she lived. Then Steichen invited us to use his home in Connecticut, outside of Ridgefield, for a week or so for a honeymoon. He had a housekeeper there for us, it was just grand. He was living in Washington with his wife, Dana. That was the beginning of my married life with Joan.

During the war we had an apartment in Washington, and she stayed there until she became pregnant with our first child, Jeanette. She went back to Chicago for my father to deliver Jeanette, and I managed to fly in over the heads of our landing GIs in Linguyan Gulf, Philippines, to be there for Jeanette's birth. Afterwards Joan returned to Washington just for visits, and I remember the photographs that I made of Jeanette in Washington.

Riess: Given the liberty you had in your job, you could probably be together more frequently than many enlisted people.

Miller: Yes, I had that great freedom. But that's a mixed pleasure in that it got to the point toward the end of the war that I didn't want to come home as much, because coming back, my world and my rhythms were so different than hers. She had her own world and rhythms. Not until the last hours of our being together, before I went out again, was there the quietude.

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[Interview 3: August 24, 2001]##

***Newsweek* Covers, Marshall McLuhan**

Riess: You were saying something about Marshall McLuhan.

Miller: Yes, Marshall McLuhan. I photographed him in Canada somewhere, in Montreal or someplace. A marvelous experience. He talked about how when people go on trips they invariably go to check out whether or not the postcard is really true. Once they see it, well, they quickly run on. The image is so important to most of us. He met this woman with her baby in the baby carriage and he bent over and said, "What a lovely child you have, ma'am." She said, "Well, that's nothing, you should see his picture." [laughter]

Riess: That's very funny.

Miller: He was an interesting man. I did a *Newsweek* cover on him. It was a fun kind of cover. It shows the gambling quality in my make-up. I flew from San Francisco to Ontario, or wherever in Canada it was. I photographed him. One roll of Kodachrome, a roll of color, I don't know, maybe Ektachrome. I had marked on my ground glass where I wanted him to be. And I took that roll of color, because they wanted a color cover. Then while I was there I made, oh, probably a dozen other black and white photographs of him, all kind of miscellaneous poses.

I came back to San Francisco, developed the black and white negatives, and I made prints, and took the prints down to KQED television studio and had them project them. I still had this roll of color in my camera and I backed it off and re-exposed it together with each of half a dozen or about eight different black and white images, I think. I'd make one exposure, advance it, move the image around or another image there, another frame, and expose that onto that one. Then I backed it off and redid it on all these different black and white prints I had, to make up this collage, I guess, for a cover.

That was a hell of a gamble, because all I had was that one roll of color. It worked pretty well, it came out fine. I can show it to you. I thought, "Well, why not?" Just try it, you know? I didn't cover myself in any other way. I could have had a mechanical problem of backing this film off and rewinding it, because this camera, you can't make a double exposure, you have to rewind it and re-expose it. At any rate, that kind of a gamble, I don't know why I did it, except that I thought it would be fun to try it.

Riess: Were you a contract photographer for *Newsweek*?

Miller: No, no. I would do different assignments. I did maybe four or five, six covers for them at different times.

Riess: And once you do something well they'll call you again, right?

Miller: Well, it seemed so, yes. I don't know whether it's because they like one's work or because they get comfortable with you. But it makes it easy to do it, yes.

Riess: That idea of how to photograph Marshall McLuhan, was it a play on what he was interested in?

Miller: Yes. It was a play on his point of view about communications, and how we're exposed to all kinds of input. I had even had some oscilloscope images that I photographed and had it coming out of his ear. [laughter] It was just a play on his concept.

Riess: How much were you paid for something like that?

Miller: I have no idea. I'm wondering where I would have a record of it. Not very much. I would be getting, maybe--this was some time ago--I would be getting all expenses plus probably five hundred dollars or something like that. I was not a top drawer business man when it came to this sort of thing. I just sort of took whatever seemed to be reasonable, not fighting for prices.

Riess: I would think it would be hard to organize your finances as a freelance photographer. The record-keeping, the tax reporting.

Miller: Well, it's not difficult, it's just impossible. It got to the point when I'd do assignments that I would probably do it in an airplane or something of that nature, or in a coffee shop if I was driving. I'd take out my wallet and see how much money I had. When I got back home I would do the same thing. The difference I'd weave into an expense account. I'd figure that whatever I spent in the time I left home and the time I got back was job related.

The Doukhobors

Miller: I remember I was photographing Doukhobors, up in Canada.

Riess: That's the religious group?

Miller: Yes, Tolstoy encouraged them to come over.

I did this for *Life* magazine--I don't know, a few pages in there. The Doukhobors were against government interference, and they wanted to be absolutely free. I think freedom fighters, or freedom something was part of their nomenclature as far as identifying themselves. They were free of any material commitment.

They lived on this ridge out in the middle of nowhere, and they built these little wooden homes, nice little homes. There may have been twenty-five of them. This was wintertime, or cold weather when I was there. When God told them, or spoke to them about the purity of the

soul, and how they should express themselves, that they were free of all shackles of mankind, they would set fire to their homes, stand there nude, and sing to their God. This was directly related while I was there to protests they were having; they were protesting the Canadian government demanding that they send their children to school.

Riess: You had been sent on the assignment because they were in the news?

Miller: That was the news hook. Plus the fact that they would burn their homes.

I was up there, but they wouldn't make a thing out of this, they wouldn't tell me in advance they were going to set fire to something. When the mood happened, or the moment happened, they would gather a few things together in a little bag or handkerchief or something and put it out by the back door. When they got the mood they'd set fire to it and pick up their little ditty bag and walk off. Others would see the smoke and they would come over to join them to sing. [laughter] I'm making a long story out of a short point.

Riess: It's not a very convincing system.

Miller: Well, I saw this smoke coming up, so I ran over there because nobody had told me about it. I had to climb through a barbed wire fence and I went down and made some pictures. A group of young women, teenage girls, I photographed them, and as they came to the end of their singing one of them looked at me and smiled and said, "You've joined us." I didn't understand until she looked down at my trousers, and going through the barbed wire fence I had torn the crotch out of my trousers! That went on the expense account, a new pair of trousers!

Riess: As you describe these *Life* stories, I feel like I remember them. I'm sure you have this experience when you talk to people about stories you've done, people in the *Life* magazine generation.

Miller: Yes, it was important to us. I remember when *Life* first came out. I was in Chicago, and of course this was before the war. *Life* came out and people would stand in line at the newsstand to get their copies. It was fascinating. They didn't have visual news, and it was very important.

Riess: Were you always the reporter on the story? I mean, was there a reporter and a photographer, or was it sometimes one and the same?

Miller: No, I was never a reporter *per se*. I would do captions.

Riess: But in this Doukhobor story?

Miller: In the Doukhobor I was the only person, there was not a reporter there. I believe that's true. The reporter-photographer relationship is a measure, in my mind, of the development of photo journalism. Right after the war, in Chicago, I was working as a stringer--not a stringer, but just as a photographer.

Editorial Struggles with *Life* Magazine--Space, Layout, Rate

Miller: I'd work with *Life* once in a while. I had a relationship there that I could call--it happened several times--I'd call Hugh Moffit. He was head of our Chicago office at that time. I'd say, "Hugh, I've got a great idea." I'd describe it to him over the phone. He'd say, "It sounds good, go ahead and do it."

Well, I'm using that as one end of the spectrum, and at the very end of *Life* magazine, I felt it got to the point where they had to have a committee make a decision whether or not to cover a news story. They wanted to know what the end of the news story would be before they would assign it, which is absurd of course. Then they would have a writer research it, or some other people research it. Then you'd go out with a writer.

Practically speaking, I believe it became illustration, not photojournalism, where you went out and explored a subject photographically and were able to interpret it according to your own abilities or expertise, to bring something to it that straight journalism was unable to do. We were able to give it a little extra bit. That was lost as efficiency moved in.

I remember some of the early assignments that *Life* magazine made, maybe one out of six stories or something of that nature would run. They overshot that much. At the end, I think there were very few stories they didn't run. Through economics, they had to be more efficient.

Riess: Were they stories with time value?

Miller: Some were. For example, time value in that you'd photograph it and it was all laid out, but at the last minute the more important news story would come in, and they would bump it from that section.

I did a cover for them one time, it was going to be a story they did on my book, *The World is Young*. They reviewed that. They had the cover all laid out and all, and at the last minute Henry Luce came in and thought that maybe it'd be better to have a picture of this British general--he had a thing for that particular general, I forget who it was. So at the last minute that cover was bumped, because of that little, that variation. The editors were all set, but by chance he walked in, so he just expressed his opinion. The vagaries of this sort of thing are a fact of life, a fact of the business of photojournalism in the news world. When something better comes along, it's understandable they want to do the best they can, so you do get bumped.

Riess: Do they archive those and use them later, some of them?

Miller: Sometimes, sometimes yes. I did a story, a funny little story I thought, on the potato chip convention in Chicago. An absurd activity which was just a PR promotion deal, having a potato chip convention. All the fanfare that went on about it was just to draw attention to their activities and to their industry. I photographed it and got, I thought, some kind of funny pictures. It interested the people at *Life* and they laid it out, but they shoved it aside. Then something like four or five months later they use it as a lead news story in *Life*, they brought it back. Well, that's an example of what you're talking about.

Riess: That's great when you have an editor with a long memory.

Miller: Yes. Or a magazine that has a weak spot. [laughter] Anyway, that's right, they do have that.

Riess: When you would shoot that potato chip convention, was there a standard number of images that every story got? Could you pre-visualize the ideal layout and did you shoot for that layout?

Miller: Well, I think a photographer always wants more space than he ever can expect to get. I suppose a smart photographer would be able to do that, but I was never able to do that. I just shot the story, and when I thought it had enough for there to be a rounded package then I'd--sometimes you don't know that until you get done, but as you work through it you think, "Well, this says this and I need something else to back that up and here's a little side thing that would be fun to have here."

There's an old saying at *Life* that it's like making a sandwich. You find the second best picture, and plan on that as being your lead, and your last picture is the best picture. Then you put all the other stuff inside of it, all of the other pictures inside of it like a sandwich to make it work. That's kind of the structure. In other words, you want to have that socko picture at the end to capture the spirit of what you've exposed the viewer to up to that point.

Riess: Did stories always end on the right hand side?

Miller: They used to. That was because that's what got the most attention. As time went on, the ad took over that position. So the ads began to reshape the magazine.

That's another thing about advertising. An editor, Ed Thompson, the editor of *Life* when I was there, showed me one time what he had to work with. I had talked about the ads stealing the pictures, stealing the emotions of a story, and he said, "Look, Wayne, I have this dummy to work with, and the ads are already printed and laid out using those pages, and I have the space between it to fill up." Maybe that wasn't always the case, but it seemed, in his mind he was constrained by that sort of economic reality, I guess.

Also, a magazine is not put together and printed all at one crack. Color ads and some stories--to get the best quality printing you take time, and you print those things up ahead of time. Stories that don't have a time element. I forget how many sections there were in the magazine. But there was a news section, and then you had the back of the book section.

The back of the book had the stories that you could put to bed early on; because they weren't going to be interrupting the news area they would be printed early on. In the late forties and fifties *Life* would close the news section on Saturday evening, and if all hell broke loose, maybe Sunday morning or something.

Then it was done up in duplicate. It was edited in New York, but it was printed in Chicago at the Donnelly Press. So one set of the magazine was flown to Chicago from New York, and the other was put on the train to Chicago. Two sets were made up to go. The timing was down to the minute, down to the fraction of a minute.

Riess: That was just insurance?

Miller: Yes, that was their coverage in case something happened.

Riess: Editorial was all in New York. When you talk about Luce taking a look at something, that would be in New York?

Miller: It all happened in New York.

Riess: In the center of the universe. I mean, in some way.

Miller: In some ways, it is the universe. It depends on who you are.

Riess: In terms of going to color, I don't remember color in *Life*.

Miller: Well, that's where you had the essays, some of the essays. I'm thinking of one by Gjon Mili in Ireland. There's many of them. But they would have a color essay in there later on. That's the sort of thing that would go to press early on, you see. You have some of these things that are locked up, but the editor has to be careful he doesn't put himself in a straight jacket so that he doesn't have any room to move. But some of those constraints in a news story meant that.

I got a note from Ed Thompson one time saying, "Wayne, I wish this had gotten to us sooner, but we just didn't have the space. At the last minute this happened, so we're stuck." An editor has terrible constraints, he doesn't have the freedom to wave his baton and to make these things happen, because he's locked in.

Riess: Do you get paid for it anyway, whether it runs or not?

Miller: You get paid a day rate. But a photographer always received a page rate as well, whatever is higher. I had some essays that were laid out for ten pages that ended up with four or five because of this kind of a contraction. And you're a little upset, because if you no longer have the whole sweep of it, that whole treatment of the work, you're very unhappy about it. But you've got to move on, and get on to the next job.

Sometimes you're surprised, you get more space than you expected, and that's because these constraints were less and the editors felt that they could afford to do that.

Riess: Was Ed [Edward K.] Thompson particularly who you worked with?

Miller: Well, he was there the majority of the time that I was there. I'm talking about the late forties and fifties.

Sputnik

Miller: I remember on a news story, a couple of them actually, where it was on a Saturday, I guess, and I had time to develop my negatives, make some prints, but I didn't have time to dry them. I went to the airport with the wet prints on the seat of the taxicab with me, and by the time I got to the airport they were pretty well dry. I flew them to New York in order to get them in there, because they wouldn't have time to make prints there, you see.

A funny thing happened, one of these cases. I'd made the pictures in Washington, D.C., and I rushed them to New York. What I'd done was I photographed Sputnik flying over the capital dome in Washington. I'd waited, I'd figured out, I'd talked to this fellow at the space office. He had an office on Pennsylvania Avenue in an old storefront or something. He ended up head of the whole big NASA deal.

I talked to him and got an idea of what the orbit would look like and where it would be coming over the Capitol dome. So I got up, I positioned myself on a street facing the Capitol dome at night, and sure enough, there it comes, Sputnik. Beautiful. Then a taxicab started coming down the street, so I took my wallet, put it over the lens to hold it so it wouldn't destroy that image. It went by, and I took this film [makes jet noise, whoosh] to the airplane.

I had prints made as soon as I got there, notified the lab that I was coming, and they made prints quickly. Then I took these wet prints again to the Hayden Planetarium in New York City. The scientist there looked at this and said, "Yep, yep." He got his calipers out, "Yes, yes, that's the Dog Star, all right!" [laughter] Sputnik was in an orbit, and the atmosphere was such that I couldn't have seen it that night. I was so happy I had this great symbolic image, the Dog Star flying over the Capitol!

Riess: But you had some qualms, which is why you went to the Hayden?

Miller: Yes, you always have qualms.

Riess: Putting the wallet over the lens--you must have developed so many impromptu solutions.

Miller: Well, I could have used my hands, I could have stood over it or something. But that's right, there are impromptu things like that.

Close-ups, Rapport, Photographing Children

Riess: In a story, did *Life* always want to have some close-up faces? Was there a formula about people and heads and the physical person? How much did that turn up in a story? Was that the story, the person?

Miller: It was the person, I believe. I never heard any mention made of how to photograph those things. You knew that you needed to have an establishing shot, and then some close-ups, what's happening within that larger image.

What you remember on a job and what you don't remember reminds me, I had lunch at the Museum of Modern Art with Robert Frank, he came up for lunch one day. And this is, I guess, while we were working on *The Family of Man*.

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Miller: He was just back from seeing the art director of *Fortune* magazine. I knew that he had been on a job to photograph the inventor, or the developer, of the Maytag washing machine--he spent time flying with him from coast to coast. And he'd taken his photographs to the art director

and the art director evidently was somewhat unhappy because he didn't have a picture of this man with a Maytag washing machine. So this is the kind of thing, a detail, but it's kind of funny. Funny but sad.

Riess: For you, your predisposition is to photograph people, isn't it?

Miller: Yes. I have a lack of appreciation, and I know I have a lack of talent, in being able to make forms, inanimate forms by themselves, attractive. I don't react that way to them like a Harry Callahan might, or others. I'm not interested in them. I'm more interested in how people feel, and how they react, what makes them tick, in a manner of speaking. I'm interested in doing my best to capture how they feel and what they're thinking about. Not what I think they're thinking about, but what they are thinking about. Another way of putting it is that I want to tell their story, not mine.

Riess: Is that through establishing rapport first?

Miller: Rapport is an interesting thing. Sometimes it takes a long time to do it, or it seems to take a long time. Other times it's immediate when the subject feels comfortable with you, and feels that you're not trying to exploit them or criticize them, or to hurt them in any way. Everybody wants to tell their story, their own story. In effect, they almost welcome you into it.

I've been fortunate. I feel I've been lucky in being able to do that, and do it quickly. I know that when I was working on this children's book, where I would be photographing childhood, I would spend time around the schools, schoolrooms. It got to the point that I figured out how to do it. I'd stand up in front of the class while the teacher was talking, and I'd take my camera, open the back of my Rolleiflex up, and take a roll of film out and put another one back in kind of slowly. I'd let the kids see what I was doing there, and fold it up again.

Then without looking at them at all I would move about and start making some photographs. It got to the point that I could walk into a classroom unannounced and walk down between the desks beside a child and make photographs and not interrupt the class or interrupt that child. I always found it kind of surprising that it would be so easy. If a child was curious and looked at me and started to smile, and maybe react to me, I would say, "Please keep doing what you're doing." And surprisingly enough, they would. It's worked with adults the same way.

Riess: That's a little of how you describe working with the Rolleiflex. You said that was important, that you were not <u>behind</u> the lens.

Miller: That's a possibility there. But also when I'm using an eye level camera it seemed to be the same kind of reaction.

<u>Thoughts on Cameras, Getting the Shot, Art, Beauty, Et Cetera</u>

Riess: When you were working for *Life* in those early years were you using both cameras?

Miller: No, I was using the Rolleiflex, because it was the only camera I owned. I didn't have a 35mm that I could feel comfortable with.

Riess: You tried it and weren't comfortable, or you weren't financially able to move from one to the other?

Miller: Well, the camera I had was a Contax, and it was an inferior camera. I wasn't comfortable with it and didn't get the results, so I just didn't do it. I did have two Rolleiflexes, and used them. I'd carry them with me because that's a case where I had one always filled with film, you see. I didn't have to be at the mercy of running out of film.

Riess: Are there a variety of lenses for Rolleiflexes?

Miller: No. Well, there was a little slip-on lens. They call them Proxars, little extra lenses you slip onto the lens and it gives you the opportunity to work closer to the subject. I used those not infrequently because I wanted to get closer and closer to my subject. What I couldn't do intellectually or through design or whatever else you want to call it, I tried to get closer physically to a subject. In fact, those pictures I made of Joan and childbirth are all with Proxar lenses.

Riess: You would get distortion with an ordinary lens, if you got that close?

Miller: No, it wouldn't be in focus. It's not a case of correcting distortion, it's enabling me to move the camera closer to the subject because the Rolleiflex, I think, is a little less than three--about two and a half feet is as close as you can get to the subject. If I wanted to get closer, I had to use the Proxars on there.

Riess: This is interesting. It sounds like you were making some decisions to work within a format. Whereas, I mean, maybe other people are more interested in experimenting with going with the technology. Do you think at some point you were saying that the technology was of secondary interest?

Miller: It definitely was. I felt that the straight, available technology, was enough if I could just exploit it and use it. I didn't feel that I was being held back by lack of technology. It was my lack of perception, my lack of sensitivity, my lack of being able to understand what was taking place that I was working on constantly. Trying to squeeze more out of my nerve ends and my brain and my emotion, in order to better understand.

Once I could understand what was going on, then I could photograph it. That was a challenge. At times I would say, "My god, this is important, but what the hell is it there that is saying it?" And, "What is there in this image here that says what I feel?" So I'd be struggling to find that to photograph.

Riess: Do you think sometimes it's the first shot that's the great shot, before you know what's going on?

Miller: Well, here's a story. Eleanor Roosevelt came out to help her son Jimmy Roosevelt in his bid for the governorship of California. With them was Helen Gahagan Douglas. They stopped at a home in Berkeley to visit and I was with them and I photographed a conversation going on. This was a group of five or six people. I made maybe a dozen photographs, and all of a sudden I stopped because I knew I'd gotten that last one.

Sometimes it happens that you know you've got it so there is no reason to keep doing it. These images were used in the back of *Life* magazine where they had a little section, the last picture in the book, "What's behind the picture," or something of that nature. They used this [photograph with Eleanor Roosevelt]. When I see a moment that really works, and I make a picture then, I don't have to develop the film to see whether or not it's on the film, I know it's there.

For example, when I would come back from an assignment or leave an assignment or a picture situation, if I had been really excited by it and affected by it, I knew it would be on the film. But if I left it and it was one of those situations where you couldn't care less about it, it was kind of unimportant, it was a nothing kind of thing, I knew I wouldn't have anything on the film. The personal involvement with the making of a photograph is all-important to me: to feel at one with that moment regardless of whether it be excitement, love, fear, or repugnancy, whatever it might be. To have experienced that, it will be there. But to not have had enjoyed that excitement or moment of sharing, it's a loss, nothing happens.

Riess: Was this born out in other people's reactions to the images?

Miller: Yes, I think it's fair to say that people believed that I had a little extra emotional quality in my pictures that made my work a little unique.

Riess: It wouldn't need a caption?

Miller: I wouldn't say it didn't need a caption, because what I was reacting to might just be a small facet of that image. The overall image is not a stand-alone icon of some sort. No, I'm talking about the run-of-the-mill assignments. To touch on the human qualities of the subject was what I felt I could do pretty well.

Riess: When you use the expression "the stand-alone icon" I think of the Dorothea Lange "Migrant Mother." Is that an example?"

Miller: I think so, yes. But also it's a kind of an image which many of us make during our regular work, and some of these things are better than others. I think pictures of maybe comparable quality have been made by other photographers at different times. But somehow or other the readiness to view them and see them and look at them more than once or twice hasn't arisen, so that facet doesn't begin to develop.

I think it was Alexander Pope who said, "Great audiences make great poets." When there is a readiness to see some things, a picture develops extra qualities.

Riess: Were there some who were accused of too much artistry in their pictures? Can you think of examples of people who failed as *Life* magazine photographers because they came back with too arty a product?

Miller: No, I don't think so.

Riess: How much was that valued, the purely beautiful?

Miller: I think if it's well done, people stand and salute, regardless.

Riess: An editor wouldn't say, “This is too arty for us?”

Miller: I don't think so. But if it's well done, it's not “arty.”

I was in the *Life* magazine photographers' locker room one day and I was speaking with, I don't know, Carl Mydans or somebody else and in walks [Alfred] Eisenstadt, and in his arms he had this 11”x14” box that was obviously filled with prints. He was glum. He walked over to his locker and he was putting these things into his locker. The photographer I was with said, “Well, how’d it come out Eisie? Did he like them? What was his reaction?”

Eisenstadt said, “He looked at them, riffled through them, and he handed them back to me, and he said, 'You know I don't like ballet, Eisie.'” Eisie had spent a month or so on this assignment, on this effort. He had done these bodies and all of this, beautiful things. I don't know whether this was an assignment or whether it was a self-assignment on his [Eisenstadt's] part, I don't know how it arose. But that's a partial answer to your question, because these were beautiful pictures.

Other things happen. I did a story on Rose Resnick. Rose is a blind teacher here in San Francisco and she's been blind since she was quite young, I don't know, three or four, five or six. I did what I felt was a pretty sensitive story on Rose and the summer camp that she was directing. (A little side story here, we were sitting on a log there just talking between ourselves. She interrupted me and she said, “Wayne, tell me, what's a photograph?” And I just started to explain to her what it was, and all of the sudden, I had to stop. I didn't know, I couldn't describe it.)

Anyway, that group of photographs which I sent on in to *Life*, this was an individual project. In other words, it wasn't assigned, it was self-assigned. Photographers like myself and others would do these things. We wanted to do it, we couldn't get an assignment, and we would go ahead and do it anyway. I sent them in, and he says, “Gee, Wayne, I wish you'd told me you'd been working on this. We've just done our blind story for the year.” These things happen.

Riess: Was Ed Thompson a kind of clone of Luce in terms of knowing what Luce wanted?

Miller: No, he was a newspaperman from Milwaukee, I believe. He ushered in a breath of fresh air, of reality. It wasn't self-conscious or anything of that nature.

Riess: He had a pretty free hand?

Miller: I think so. I really can't comment on that because I really don't know. When he retired from that, he took over and he created the *Smithsonian* magazine. So, he did that for quite a while.

Riess: Tell me about the locker room, what do you mean, the “locker room?”

Miller: Well, it was a space set aside where photographers could keep their gear. Not much more than that.

Riess: Were you particularly assigned to cover politics, like this Roosevelt thing?

Miller: I did that. I did several national conventions. But I don't think it was because of any particular appreciation or recognition of any special talents I had except that I enjoyed working that kind of thing.

Riess: Do you remember the series "How America Lives?" The house I lived in Pennsylvania had been photographed by *Life* in the "How America Lives" series. It was about two GI Bill couples who were living in a farmhouse in Pennsylvania.

Miller: Was this at *Life* or at *Ladies' Home Journal*?

Riess: I thought it was *Life*. It seemed a *Life* magazine thing.

Miller: No, John Morris, I think, did that for *Ladies' Home Journal* when he was picture editor there.

I don't know how it happened, but Agnes Meyer [wife of *Washington Post* owner Eugene Meyer] had been a journalist at one time. I forget how it happened, but the idea was that Agnes and I would work together on a story in Appalachia. It never came off, it never came to fruition. She mentioned it several times later in life. But I'm just saying that's that kind of thing, like "How America Lives."

Riess: Agnes Meyer, did you do anything else with her?

Miller: No, I spent some time with her at her home on Connecticut Avenue in Washington. I visited with her in Mt. Kisco. No, my relationship there was created through Steichen, who had been a family friend since 1900 or 1903.

The Birth Series

Riess: Back to our chronology. You came back to Chicago after the war and you did freelance magazine work. I see that Steichen put you into a show with three other people at the Museum of Modern Art in October, 1947. That included the birth pictures. The birth pictures are so important. You should, if you would, talk about how and why you decided to do that series.

Miller: I'd been photographing around the home and Joan was pregnant. Obviously a young couple, you think a great deal about pregnancy. This was Joan's second pregnancy; we already had had a girl, and this was the second pregnancy. I don't know how it actually came up, I don't remember exactly, but I decided that I'd love to photograph this. Not a factual thing, but the symbolism of birth, the creation of life.

I knew enough about the medical aspects of it, because my father was an obstetrician and he'd exposed me to delivery rooms and Caesarians and what not. This was not going to be a Caesarian, this was going to be a natural delivery. I thought that this would be a way of touching, and getting at the essence of life, to be able to photograph this sort of a happening. I wanted to see if I couldn't do that, to get that close to Joan, that close to this happening, to this new thing in our lives.

I had no problems whatsoever with the hospital, because my father was on the staff there. I don't know if he was chief of staff there or not. So that posed no problems. In the delivery, in the labor room, this struggle of Joan to give birth in the labor room is what I focused on. It's one of those things I tried to describe before, when you knew things were going right. It was so close, I was right close to this reality, this core nerve end, this exposed nerve end that I had been looking for, reacting to and all. I made these photographs, and it all happened so quickly somehow. I don't even remember how long. I don't even remember being there. I don't remember any problems of making the photographs, it all happened so naturally.

Riess: And it's natural light, is it?

Miller: No, it's all flash. This is a technical aspect that I'd learned, that the bare flash bulb was better light than one with reflectors, so these pictures have that luminous quality to them which I think they enjoy because I didn't have the reflector on my flashgun. I think that was the case. Also, it was in a light-colored, small room that reflected the light nicely.

Anyhow, I remember making these pictures and moving out of that labor room into the delivery room, and making those few pictures of the actual delivery, which were--I don't remember if any of them had Joan's face in it or not. It was my father now who was dealing with this new life. My father was so happy, although he jokingly was unhappy that David, our son, wasn't born on his birthday. Instead he was born on the nineteenth of September, my birthday. My father's birthday was the fourteenth. He had done his best!

Riess: What was the first public exposure of the birth pictures? Was it the exhibition that Steichen did at the Museum of Modern Art in October 1947?

Miller: Yes, but there I did not include the picture of David being held by my father. So the MOMA exhibition showed the closeups of Joan in labor, a total of eight prints.[6] I did not include the print of David being held up by my father. I thought that it was a little too spectacular for the MOMA show, and instead I included an image of David lying on a table in the delivery room. The picture of David being held up by my father was first displayed in the Family of Man Exhibition at MOMA in January 1955.

Those pictures were first published in a magazine called *Magazine of the Year.* I don't know if you ever knew that magazine, but it was a magazine put together by writers and photographers to include the best of that year's work. Then Tom Maloney of *U.S. Camera Annual* published them. He gave quite a bit of space to them there, a page per picture, I think.

That brings up another subject. Somebody from Tom's office said they needed some captions--would I get him some captions? I had drug my feet on that, because that's a sore spot for many photographers, where you feel that not only have you made a picture that you think has told a story, but now you have to put it into words so people can understand what they're looking at. It got to me a little bit. They finally said, "We need the captions," so I said "Okay," so I sent them captions.

6."The Beginning"was the title of the set of prints, and Wayne Miller was identified in a *New York Herald Tribune* article (Oct. 5, 1947) as a "twenty-nine-year-old fomer navy camera man, who turned to photography after a career in banking and finance...the picture sequence is described by Mr. Steichen without a gram of overstatement as having 'the stature of an epic poem'...one of the most stirring works ever to appear in a photographic exhibition."

Let me get them for you.

Riess: We're looking at *U.S. Camera Annual, 1949*. You say, "You wished camera data on the birth series, so here it is. Taken with a Rolleiflex, 3.5 Tessar stopped down to a 1/250th at F22. I used Proxar lenses, making it possible to use the full negative, used one GE-11 flash without any reflector, 120 film printed on Varigam paper, I had just had a haircut, was wearing black socks and a comfortable shirt. Anyone so equipped should have no trouble duplicating this series." [laughter]

U.S. Camera Annual says, "The portrayal is beautiful enough and remarkable enough to make any descriptive superlatives useless. This series is photo-art at its best. No one looking at these pictures wonders or worries about art. These are great photographs because they perform an admirable duty to medicine in a matchless manner."

The reviews of the show at the Museum of Modern Art were all superlatives. People were "awestruck" by them. You did something that nobody had done before?

Miller: It seemed to be that way.

Riess: You said in the museum release. "I should like to think that through photographs of the emotions of everyday living common to all man, it will be possible to explain man to man." A big mission for a photographer.

Miller: I believed it, too. That's what I was doing with my Guggenheim.

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Baby's First Year **and the Captions**

Riess: The birth pictures, were you originally doing them for yourself and Joan?

Miller: We just did it for us. We had no assignment, per se.

Let me tell you a funny story about an assignment. I had been working for *Ladies' Home Journal*, and Bruce Gould was the editor, together with his wife. I think they were co-editors of *Ladies' Home Journal*. One day we talked about my doing a story for the magazine about baby's first year, pictures made every month of a child's development. It was a casual kind of conversation. I didn't really focus in on it too well.

I saw him about a year later, nine months or a year later, and he said, "Well, Wayne, how are the pictures coming?" I said, "What pictures?" "The baby's first year!" I said, "Gosh, I didn't think you were serious about that. I haven't been doing that." He thought for a minute or two and he said, "Do you plan to have another baby?" [laughter] I said, "It just happens that Joan is pregnant again." And he says, "Let's go ahead with the baby's first year."

Then I got involved in doing that, photographing Dana, our second daughter and third child. I photographed her delivery, as well as each month I would spend three or four days or a week

photographing her life. That eventually came out in the *Ladies' Home Journal*. The first issue, I think, had four or five pages. Then they had two pages every month thereafter of her life. The same time.

During this same period, Dr. Ben Spock was doing a column for them. And after these pictures had run they got in touch with me and said, "Would you be interested in working with Ben Spock to do a book? He's asked about these pictures." I said yes. So, as a result of that, why, we came out with the book, *Baby's First Year.*

Problems of Teaching, Chicago Institute of Design

Riess: You were teaching at the Institute of Design. And Harry Callahan was there, and Buckminster Fuller was there.

Miller: And Art Siegel, I think.

Riess: What is the Chicago Institute of Design?

Miller: This is an outgrowth of Moholy Nagy's Bauhaus. In fact, in the summer of 1941 I attended the Institute of Design on a different campus. It was downtown Chicago. Moholy was there, and Gyorgy Kepes. I took his course but I didn't do very well in it.

Riess: They were refugees?

Miller: Yes, Hungarians, I guess.

So that was my first contact with it. Then, after the war, in the Chicago period, Harry Callahan contacted me about maybe teaching at the Institute of Design. You see, the GI Bill was in effect, and they had lots of students. They had given these photographic students two or three or four years of classes, and my understanding was that now they had run out of classes and they wanted something else. They asked me to come in.

Serge Chermayeff was director of it. Serge and I talked one day and he said, "I'd like to have you teach a course. I said, "About what?" He said, "Oh, you decide that." He left it entirely up to me what to teach them. But he knew that I was not an abstract photographer, I was a photojournalist, and so he was saying, anything in photojournalism, I guess.

I showed up at the first day of this class, and on the way down--I left home from the south side of Chicago in my car--I thought, "Well, I've got to figure out something to teach them." Between the time I left home and the time I got to school I had it all worked out. It would be the photographer's self-expression or self-understanding of the world around him.

I described to them that during this class we were going to cover a series of different facets of the same concept. One is, your being able to say with your camera what is a rich man, what is a poor man. What is a happy person, what is an unhappy person. I had a list of those, and that was the syllabus, if you want to call it.

It was very difficult for some of those students. We looked at that paper a minute ago from the [Chicago] Art Institute--what was his name?

Riess: You were showing me a mailing about the Art Institute getting ready for an exhibition?

Miller: They're doing an exhibition and a catalogue. It's an exhibition on the Institute of Design during the fifties, forties, forties and fifties.

One student in my class, an interesting student, was Art [Arthur R.] Sinsabaugh. The Art Institute unearthed some notes that Art made from my class about what I was suggesting, and Art was not very happy about it, this wasn't his world.

Many of the students at the institute had been living a cloistered life. They worked in the abstract world, and they enjoyed shapes and textures and tones. I came along, and I was getting them into something entirely different, which was documentary photography, and self-expression about people. Some of the students in this class of mine had moved away from people and had lived a life with inanimate objects where they were free and not being threatened. And some in the class, why, it seems they had been waiting for something like this. Because they just enjoyed it, they embraced it.

Well, Art, for example, who did beautiful landscapes and design things, had troubles with this. This class met five times a week; I was there one day a week and they had another person come in and take over the other four days, an assistant, somebody to talk to. But I led the class and directed it and did the critiquing and all. Art--the day I showed up, Art wouldn't show up until 2, 2:30, 3 o'clock in the day. He couldn't get out of bed, he'd be sleeping. He just couldn't handle it.

That kind of a mind set was symptomatic or reflective somehow of the kind of people who were there who were immersed in this other world of photography. Here I was wrenching them out of that to do something else. It was very, very difficult for them.

Riess: Do you think it had something to do with the war?

Miller: No, these were young people.

Riess: These weren't the GI Bill people?

Miller: Well, there were some GI. No, it's not the war, I just don't feel that they were that old. I don't know, I can't explain it, but it certainly made loud and clear to me that there's different ways of looking at, using photography.

Riess: Did these people become professional photographers? Or was this just part of their design education?

Miller: I think mostly the latter. We did put up a show, an exhibition which was, for all practical purposes, an early version of the *Family of Man* show, these different people. It was just lovely, grand.

Riess: It was organized by the themes that you're talking about?

Miller: Yes, yes.

Riess: Did you enjoy teaching?

Miller: Yes and no. I really enjoyed it, I did enjoy it. But I found that it was using up juices in my makeup that I wanted to save for other things, for my own work, for my own photography. I found it was a drain. If I had devoted myself to being a teacher, that's something else. But I was not, I was doing one foot on the pier and one on the boat.

Riess: That the last time you've taught, the only time?

Miller: I think so. I've done seminars, things of that nature. But I don't find it as satisfying as I might. Some people, they would teach and get rejuvenated, re-excited, energized by teaching. But quite the opposite was the case for me, I'd feel drained.

Also, looking at other people's pictures, I found that not as exciting as it might be. I only wanted to see my images, I didn't want--as a photographer, when you look through the view finder and you see pictures that you've made before, it's kind of discouraging. Also, if you look through the view finder and you see somebody else's pictures, then why make it? So that kind of slows you down some. I think that it takes the edge off of curiosity and one's drive, or my drive, to think it's already been made. And awful nice pictures, made very well, so why do it again? So it wasn't for me.

Riess: That's interesting, that inner censor. I mean, the older you would get, the more you would be likely to hear that voice.

Miller: Well, one of the reasons I got out of photography is that I didn't like--going back to photojournalism, I didn't like to do the same kind of an assignment over again. "First day at school," or "Somebody's wedding," or "Somebody's something else." I've been there. And also like photographing industry and heads of industry, I wasn't a portrait person. I was curious, I loved doing it the first time, and the first couple of times, but to make that my world? No. That's not unrelated in my mind to looking at other people's photography.

My impression, my understanding of what happens under certain circumstances is what is important to me, and trying to capture that. It can be dulled if other people have already been walking over the same ground. It makes it a bit stale, somehow.

Photographing "The Way of Life of the Northern Negro," Chicago

Riess: You received two Guggenheims to do "The Way of Life of the Northern Negro" [1946-1948]?

Miller: Yes. It was the idea that I wanted to do, and I wasn't thinking about the economics, I don't think, as much as the commitment to do something like that. I certainly needed the money, that's for sure, but it was the idea of committing myself to a big idea and to pursuing that until I felt that I couldn't do it anymore, or couldn't--

Riess: --say anything more about it?

Miller: Yes. That I would feel that I had reached my limits of being able to see, react, or be sensitive to these things. And so it's time to move on. I experienced that later on in life, as well, with different subjects.

Riess: How did you select your subject?

Miller: Well, it was during the war, towards the end of the war. You can't help but feel, when you're in service, that "Why are you there? What's it all about?" And, "Who's doing what?" "Is this important?" You question things. "What are we fighting for?"

As I mention in my book, I was talking with some shipmates one day, one evening, on a carrier. We were talking about this, that we didn't know the enemy and they don't know us, and what the hell was it all about? I felt that if we could better know each other and could better understand each other's problems, there might be less fighting. I carried that with me, and I would try to figure out how I could approach it.

I didn't want to go out and photograph all mankind and try to simplify it, put some boards around it. I came up with the idea of photographing blacks in Chicago. One, that I was planning to go back there and live where I'd been born, in Chicago. I didn't know anything about the black culture in Chicago, I don't remember even being there, visiting it. But that wasn't important. I was concerned with a defined group of people, and they wouldn't necessarily have to be black, they could have been anything. But this made it easier for me, to have it that well packaged.

I applied for a Guggenheim, and I think it's probably to do with Steichen's sponsorship that I got it. I just wanted to photograph, as I said, "The Way of Life of the Northern Negro." Kind of a pompous title, but it had to have a title. That was it. I had no scenario, no story line, no list, of what I was going to do.

Do you want to go ahead on this area?

Riess: Yes.

Miller: So the time came, and I set time aside to do this, and I found that I was just immobilized, I didn't know how to do it. Joan tells me--I say, "I sat there in the house we had there on the south side of Chicago for weeks," and she says, "No, Wayne, it was months." I just couldn't figure out how to function, because I couldn't find any handles to grab hold of. I finally threw up my hands emotionally, or mentally, and I took my camera and drove into the Black Belt.

There I met, I don't know how I did it, but I met this man who was director of this community house, South Parkway Community Center. I guess somehow or other I learned about that. I went in and introduced myself, and he became the can opener. He became the guy who got it

started for me. That was Horace Cayton. And he and a colleague had written a book on the Black Belt, Bronzeville, called *Black Metropolis*.

Riess: What was that word, Brownsville?

Miller: Bronzeville. It's just called *Black Metropolis*. I think Richard Wright did a story called "Bronzeville" and *Ebony* used my photographs for it.

Riess: The blacks referred to the community as Bronzeville?

Miller: Well, some of them did, yes.

Riess: Why were you immobilized, now when you look back at it?

Miller: I was just trying to grab hold of what was I going to photograph. I realized the immensity of this concept, and the presumptuousness of a naive guy like myself to be involved in it. Here I was going to go out and set the world straight. All of the sudden you realize that that's a kind of a big job.

Riess: Were you supposed to produce a book, a product, for the Guggenheim?

Miller: No. In fact I can't find that I even supplied an application that said just what I was going to do, except that I wanted to photograph the blacks in the south side of Chicago.[7]

Riess: Had you been among the blacks for any of your magazine assignments?

Miller: No, never. I did photograph black sailors during the navy assignment, and I believe their supply base in Guam. I certainly enjoyed that, being with them.

Riess: And are you saying that images of blacks were not that common?

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Miller: Well, blacks were not a hidden culture or a hidden people. But in Chicago I hadn't gotten to know any blacks, really. I met some in grammar school or something, but I hadn't lived among them or spent time among them or even gone to bars with them.

So what would I photograph? And how do I do it?

I finally ended up just walking down the street after I talked to Horace and he introduced me to people, and happenings and all. And he also introduced me to *Ebony*. In the same building they had this publishing group called Johnson Publishing who published *Negro Digest* and had just started *Ebony*. I met Ben Burns, who was the editor of *Ebony*, and he was looking for photographers and he was very interested in my working with him. That was one of the things that helped get me started, because he gave me assignments to get my bottom off the chair and get out there.

7.See Wayne Miller's notes on this project in Appendices.

During those times I was able to begin to get a feeling of what I was after. (You might be interested in seeing his [Ben Burns'] book, *Nitty Gritty, A White Editor in Black Journalism* [1996]. He refers to me there several times.)

[tape interruption]

Riess: This quote about the book, "...giving many White Americans their first glimpse of the northern city's burgeoning post-war black community."

Miller: That's from the flap of the book or something?

Riess: Something, yes.

Miller: Well, the viewer can't help but see this as being a thing of blacks, we're conditioned. But I'd like to think that somehow or other they could look upon them just as the emotions and actions and drives that we all share.

Riess: You mentioned somewhere that you knew Langston Hughes and Nelson Algren in Chicago. Was that around the same time?

Miller: Oh yes, yes. I don't remember much about Langston. Joan tells me that he came out to the house and had dinner with us and spent time with us.

Riess: Would you have met him because of this project?

Miller: Yes. I met him through these gatherings and what not. I met him, probably, through Horace. I'm not sure. As far as Nelson, I spent time with Nelson at his home. Nice fellow. I can't remember how I met him.

Riess: It sounds like you were very well connected in Chicago. You knew the famous people.

Miller: Not at the time, they were just people at the time. Nelson was interested in doing a book with my photographs. At that time he was also involved with activism and political groups that I think were using Nelson. I don't think he was a communist, but some communist groups were interested in Nelson, inviting him to give talks here and there. I went with him one time to a talk in the Bismarck Hotel, I think it was, in Chicago. I felt at that time that he was a dupe, as far as he didn't really know what it was all about. But he was going along, being a nice guy.

The Market and a Gallery in New York

Riess: Back to Steichen and the Museum of Modern Art, was he trying to show new photographers?

Miller: Well, this first exhibit he showed was entitled *Three Young Photographers*, I believe. That was Leonard McComb and Homer Page and myself. I don't know, I'm sure he had some feelings at that time, but I think his feelings developed as time went on as to what he was hoping to do. I can't--it doesn't come to my mind. He did a series of exhibits there. I didn't

keep track of them. But he included me in, I don't know, half a dozen of his first exhibits there.

Riess: Does that mean that those particular prints went into the museum's collection?

Miller: I don't think so, I don't know. When I was so busy doing things, I didn't pay any attention to what was going on there. I'd find out that, "Oh my gosh, I'm in that exhibit he's got going on." I wasn't blase about it, it was a case that other things were more important to me. And in hindsight, well, it was pretty swell to have done that, to have been involved in that.

Riess: You weren't thinking about how this gave those images a certain market value?

Miller: Never thought of it, never came up. People weren't buying photographs then.

Well, I remember in 1954 or so I was chairman of the American Society of Magazine Photographers. Edward Weston wanted to sell photographs, so we arranged an evening for his photographs to be there, in New York. He wasn't there, I don't believe. And here was this great big box of photographs, all with little frames around them. And for $25 a piece, maybe some for $30. We sold quite a few of them. Eliot Elisofon bought quite a few, I know. I don't know how it all came out. I got a nice note from Weston, thanking me for it.

Riess: Photographers didn't expect to have a market?

Miller: I don't think we thought about it.

Riess: Well, that's interesting.

Miller: Maybe we did, but I certainly didn't. I was unaware of it. I mean, for Edward Weston to be selling his stuff for $25, it was the equivalent to standing outside the museum in the rain with an umbrella and showing your stuff on a push cart there, you know?

Well, I wasn't part of it. If photographers did think about that, I wasn't a part of it. Limelight, the coffee shop down in the Village--what was her name? She had shows down there and tried to sell pictures? She married a Chinese painter and had a child. Helen Gee! She had a gallery that she made into a coffee shop where photographers could gather, and sell their materials, and have coffee. She built this up on her own. She had been a color re-toucher for magazines like *Condé Nast* and *Vogue* and that sort of thing. Very nice woman. She wrote a book.[8]

Those pictures were being sold there, and people would come in and she had all the leading photographers of the time then. They were just getting started, you know. Everything from Gene Smith to Gjon Mili to others. The pictures would be sold from the walls for $15, $25.

Riess: And there was the gallery Photo-secession, Stieglitz's place?

Miller: Yes, I guess that's right. I've never been there. I don't know that history of any of that world.

8.Helen Gee, *Limelight: A Greenwich Village Photography Gallery and Coffeehouse in the Fifties, A Memoir*, University of New Mexico Press, 1997.

The Continued Value of the Project, Terkel Interview

Riess: Talking about "The Way of Life of the Northern Negro," I would like, with some of the time we have today, your thoughts on how this project has taken on a new life and now new generations see things anew.[9] Recently you were in Chicago for two weeks around the publication and so on of your book.[10]

Miller: I was there four different times.

Riess: It's interesting, isn't it, the life the book has?

Miller: It's fascinating. The first exhibition was at a public library, the South Side of Chicago, nice exhibit space, and very close to where I made the photographs. And it was a lovely experience for me in that a hundred photographs were on the walls, and then I gave a talk to an audience, a large audience, and I think there were only two white faces in this large audience.

Also there were some people in there who appeared in the photographs. Or their family had appeared in them. It was just like being with family, it was a lovely warm experience. I gave an hour presentation of slides, actually from the book, but I was able to add words to them as I thought of them, and refer to some of the people in the audience.

The reception was just so great, because here are people who--it wasn't like talking to a museum group, these people knew the subject, and they liked the pictures, and the reason they liked them were real. I really liked it. I've been involved with different groups, and I must say that my appreciation of who the audience is is not as warm as it might be because I think they are--they don't have any place else to go that night or that afternoon, and I just don't think they are really as concerned about the subject as they might be. That's just my reaction.

But these people, they liked it. I think I may have mentioned another reason they liked it. One said, "We don't have scrap-books and this gives us a chance to understand what our parents' life was like." Also the older people would say, "Now I can show the grandchildren what it was like." It had a nice feeling there. That was one area.

This talk I'm giving in Chicago in about ten days [November 2001], they've got a panel on the Chicago South Side [Parkway] Community House, how important it was in Chicago.[11] And I'm going to show some pictures that I'd made at the Chicago Community House. I'm going to start weaving some in about how they did all these great things there. I showed it in the South Side of Chicago, where the Black Belt was, and the other end of Chicago, where the white folks live, and the rich people live, which is up at Evanston and Northwestern University. The audience was very receptive there too.

I'll tell how in the director's apartment he was doing his best to throw parties for the sponsors and artists and what not--how other things went on. And there I'm going to show one of the

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9. Insert from Interview 7.
10. *Chicago's South Side*, *1946-1948*, Wayne F. Miller, foreword by Orville Schell and commentaries by Gordon Parks and Robert B. Stepto. University of California Press published in association with the Graduate School of Journalism, Center for Photography, University of California, Berkeley, 2000.
11. Inserted from Interview 6.

pictures in the book, with the drink coming in, you know, and the guy leaning over the woman at the bar.[12] Also I'll say something about how one of the sponsors was very helpful to Horace Cayton in hanging the pictures on his walls. [laughter]

Riess: Oh, this photograph of the woman hammering with the butt end of a revolver!

Miller: I just thought it would be kind of fun to liven up this talk.

Riess: It will be a slide show?

Miller: I'll take the prints out and have slides made. It's not video or anything, just normal 35mm black and white slides.

Riess: You don't feel that you should have to do that type of stuff yourself.

Miller: Time is important, and it's much cheaper to have somebody else do it who is set up to do it, and he just does it.

Riess: I am interested in that question of how much you as a photographer think that you are the only one who could do a good job.

Miller: No, no, that's a lot of foolishness to think that way. Henri Cartier-Bresson sends his stuff out, he never touches it. He just has the prints made and doesn't have to see it from cradle to grave, you know.[13]

Riess: You get to see the exhibition differently hung each time.

Miller: Oh yes, because of the different audience, different facilities. When it was at the other end of Chicago, the Block Museum [Northwestern University], it was beautifully hung. Much better than it was in the south side. They now had frames around it, and beautiful lighting and beautiful graphics of the words of different people related to the subject matter on the walls. It was an A-1 deal. I also gave a talk there, and it was well-received. They had a panel there of people, mostly blacks that I'd known.

Then I went back for a book tour in Chicago, and gave talks at the Chicago Art Institute to students, and I had interviews on TV as well as radio. That's where Studs Terkel interviewed me.

Riess: Studs Terkel interviewed you?

Miller: He interviewed me for his public radio program. Did I ever show you that?

[tape interruption]

Miller: This was November 2000, I think. I was on this book tour, and it was arranged that I would be interviewed by Studs Terkel. I showed up at the studio, and I came up in the elevator and it opened on this little lobby, and the next elevator that came up, Studs Terkel was in it. He

12.*Chicago's South Side, 1946-1948*, University of California Press, 2000, p. 50.
13.End insert from Interview 6.

came bouncing out of that elevator, just the most alive guy in the world, beautiful red vest and sparkling eyes. And he had my book under his arm. God, he's about four years older than I am, I think, and with such a sense of enthusiasm and excitement. His life has been spent interviewing Chicagoans, people from all over Chicago. Plus other people. He knows Chicago like the end of his nose.

We went into the studio, and he had an assistant there with him, and he said, "I want to use this and I want to use that." He opened my book--[showing Riess] this is the book he had with him--he opened this book written all over with his notes preparing for this interview with me.

Riess: Oh yes, he's underlined key things, he's got pictures marked.

Miller: Much of it what he marked was references to music that he wanted to cut into this interview.

Riess: "Ellington piece, Boogie Woogie."

Miller: He knew all the names of these people, the music, and how important it was. Anyway, he was such a charming guy. He sat there with this book on his lap, and then I had a book on mine. He'd call me to look at this page and that page, and he would make his remarks. I felt that this interview was a real, A-1 performance. I was kind of like a foil for him to be able to talk about Chicago, and it's lovely, I'll give you a copy of this tape to listen to. He's just an exceptional guy.

Riess: How did he handle the fact that he didn't have visuals, that it was radio, not TV?

Miller: When he talked about it, he made them come alive.

I'd been forewarned that if he does have some notes, that when the show's over, ask him if you can have them. So when it was over I asked him and he said, "Sure, take it," so he gave me this book and I replaced it with another one.

Riess: Did he talk to you first about your background?

Miller: He just didn't waste a moment, he went right into it.

So that was another trip, that was the book tour. I can't seem to find my notes from that trip, but it was a very busy three or four days. Then I went back for the opening of the two shows, the South Side Community House and the Block Museum at Northwestern University. Also I had two shows out here before I went, one at Berkeley, at the Graduate School of Journalism, the other at the public library in the south side here in Oakland. Those two things, and then the book tour.

Then I went back for the Chicago Arts Festival, which was a two-week happening. That was in November. And there I gave a couple of talks and interviews and those things. Prior to all this, in September I'd gone to France for a show of the same material in Perpignan.

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Riess: All of which would make you think that book was the most important piece of work you had done.

Miller: [laughs] In the last two years, yes. It seems to have been.

Riess: But you wouldn't subscribe to that?

Miller: Oh, sure I would, I'll settle for anything. "If the dinner's hot, let's eat it!" Photographically, it seems to have been the best package I've done.

Riess: Do you ever look at the book and wish you had photographed things differently?

Miller: No. I've been there, I'm not going to reedit it. I worked very hard on it, making the selections for the book, so I got rid of a lot of those second thoughts in the process of editing.[14]

Riess: You've talked to groups about this book. Do you find that there's a great gap in people's understanding? Or do you think the pictures close the gap?

Miller: What I'm struck by is the fact that people, they're interested in the time frame, how things were different then than they are now. And how photography tells them it was different than it is now. That, to me, is pretty important, to realize that photography has that ability to provide information that--they're still unaware of what's happening, say in the black culture.

Also the way that the times have changed in the ability for a photographer to move among groups of people. At that time I was unfettered and completely free, and today it's a measure of photography that people today are highly suspicious. "Why are you here?" "Are you from the government?" "Do you have some ulterior motive for doing this?" The sense of acceptance today is very low compared to what it was then.

I'm not talking about dealing with individuals, I don't think that changes much. But in a group. If I were to show up at a bar or if I were to show up in a public meeting I'd be treated a lot differently today than I was then. I think it's because people are aware that photographs can be manipulated today to maybe hurt them, or expose them to something that is not right. In a way, we're talking about two things. We're talking about the development of our culture, and we're talking about the awareness of the camera and how it relates to that point in time.

Riess: How could they distinguish you from a TV reporter?

Miller: Yes, yes. Or my photographing children, which I loved to photograph. Today I'd be highly suspect of being a pedophile. All kinds of little things. To me it's just terribly discouraging.

Riess: Yes, that is terribly discouraging.

Your first response, that there's so much information in a picture, that's very validating. It makes photography so important.

Miller: That is the hallmark of photography, or the very essence of it, that if the material can be organized within the picture to be meaningful rather than just--well, every photograph has some meaningful stuff in it, it doesn't have to be a meaningful photograph. If we have so much of it, or so little--I think we have too much of it, that's why we can't focus on it, to grab

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14.End insert from Interview 7.

it. In a book you're capturing the viewer. Not like television, watching a news program where the stuff comes and goes and you can make yourself another drink or go to the john while you're watching it, so the viewer is in charge and the viewer maybe doesn't care too much about the subject.

I don't know, it's a deep subject. The deep subject.

The West Coast, Viewed from the Time-Life Building

Riess: Earlier, when we were talking about the *Time-Life* building and I said it was the center of the world, you said it was the world. Would you expand on that feeling?

Miller: Well, the *Time Life* staff, the ones that I knew--and I didn't begin to know all of them, I only knew a few of them--they by and large were prima donnas. They realized that they were different, and had been selected, and that they were the top of the heap. I think it hurt some of their abilities to do good journalism because of that. Some of the photographers would move into a situation and kind of take it over.

Riess: You should name names if you can.

Miller: I'd rather not. Well, I will say one. Eliot Elisofon. He photographed the Pacific Islands, and he went from island to island. He demanded so much from these people in the way of setting up his photographs, in the way he made them, that he lost his welcome at one island after another. There were complaints made to the--let me get this righ--I think UNESCO. I don't know. I may have this absolutely backwards, I shouldn't be talking about this other than I know the flap that took place. But he was really made a persona non-grata. Because he just went in and made these people his--not slaves, but his subjects to make his pictures. And it was something to do with the woman who was working with him as a writer, whether her father was the UNESCO head or somebody big. It got all snarled up here, he got in a bad, bad mixup.

But, anyway, photographers in some cases can impose themselves on people and use them. Which is just, in my book, is just not right. Especially for a news magazine. That's creating news. But I don't think he was doing news, he was doing an essay on the way of life of the Polynesians or the Pacific Ocean Islanders.

I don't know what your question was.

Riess: That sense of *Time-Life* being "the world."

Miller: It was a self-centeredness. For example, it was difficult--we'd laugh about it, but it seemed to be true--unless a story had been written and published in the *New York Times* newspaper, we wouldn't expect to get an assignment on that subject. In other words, that it was felt that anything west of the Hudson River wasn't really worth photographing. This kind of an attitude.

Riess: I'd like to hear more about that attitude. You're saying that this is not just photography, this is news value.

Miller: That's right, yes. I would say news value, and it doesn't have to be hard news. For example, I was responsible for many assignments out of the San Francisco area, which extended up into Oregon and Washington and some in Canada. Los Angeles had their own staff, they had half a dozen or more photographers down there. I was the only one here. And I found that I was doing an appreciable number of my stories east of the Mississippi River. In other words, they would give me assignments to go there and not--it wasn't here. Most of the stuff happened back there, you know. The provincialism, I think, if you want to call it that, or narrow mindedness or snobbishness or whatever it might be, I was very sensitive to. But Los Angeles, there're obviously lots of exciting things to be done there. Oh gee.

I walked into the picture editor's office, Ray Mackland's office, one day. He was leaning over his light table there looking at 35mm color slides. He explained to me that he was trying to make some decisions, trying to make some choices to take into Ed Thompson to make color selection. These pictures were all of pretty Hollywood starlets. I said, "Well, what are your choices here, Ray?" He led me to believe the reason he was dealing with these Hollywood starlets was because they had a hell of a good one last week and he felt another one might be accepted.

This kind of thinking kind of bowls you over. You think, God almighty, it's only ten o'clock in the morning, I better get a drink!

Riess: How about covering the return of the Japanese Americans from the camps back to the San Francisco Bay Area? Was that a story?

Miller: I don't know about that. I should imagine that that wasn't too important to the New York office. Hell, they didn't see any Japanese Americans on the way to work that morning. And probably very few of them, if any, were working in the office. So it couldn't be very important, I just don't know.

Riess: And the University of California, with all its Nobel Prize winners and accelerators?

Miller: Well, really the important things in California are happening in Hollywood. And we've done enough on California, after those last two show biz articles we did, you know?

Riess: They must have liked hippies.

Miller: Well, that had a little pizzazz to it. They couldn't avoid that.

Riess: Speaking of people who had their run-ins with *Life* magazine, how about Gene Smith? I read that he kept working and quitting and then starting again and quitting?

Miller: Well, Gene was an exceptional photographer and a very committed guy. And the problems with Gene and *Life* magazine and other magazines came about because his drum beat is different than theirs.

I remember, again going back to Ed Thompson, I walked into his office and he said, "Look at this!" He held up a sheaf of papers, I don't know, ten, twelve, fifteen pages, "A letter from

Gene Smith telling me how we ought to handle his Pittsburgh story." He said, "My god, I don't have time to read this stuff!" Gene felt, perhaps rightfully so, that the material is terribly important. But it was a little difficult for him to find people to share it to that degree.

I kind of remember that Bruce Downs of *Popular Photography*, who finally published quite a bit of this Pittsburgh story he did, also had real problems on the layout and the number of pictures to include and what not. You know, a big magazine like that had its own commitments and own responsibilities and all. The values shared by the editors and the photographer are not necessarily the same. I can't--I don't know what else to say about that.

Riess: Okay. Now, to get you out of Chicago, you've said you felt you were doing things over and over again?

Miller: The problem was not there, the problem was in my own head, I'm sure, because I just couldn't see things that were exciting to me. I couldn't figure out how to do them enthusiastically. Call it the impatience of youth or what you want to call it, but I wanted out.

I talked to *Life* magazine, and Wilson Hicks, who was the major editor there in charge of photography. I asked Wilson if it would make a difference to him where I moved, whether it be East Coast or West Coast. He said, "No, no difference." I'd been offered--ever since World War II I'd been offered a staff job at *Life*. And as I told you, I'd turned that down. So we made an arrangement that I'd work out here at San Francisco on a retainer agreement. So that's how I worked out here.

It was a contract, in fact, and it enabled me to work for other publications as well as *Life,* and also I could turn down things that way. I didn't want to come out here and be a staff photographer and be at the mercy, be at the end of somebody's string, I could be pulled out. In fact, it was said that whenever a *Life* photographer became comfortable where he was assigned they'd move him; once he bought a house they'd move him.

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[Interview 4: August 29, 2001]##

Moving West: Choosing a Community in California

Riess: Could we begin by your telling me again why you came out here from Chicago?

Miller: Well, in Chicago I found that I wasn't excited by the kinds of things that I was doing and also I found that there was a kind of repetition of assignments and subject matter.

I'd been working very, very hard on so many different things that I found that I was just not--it was time to move on. I had finished the Guggenheim and I'd finished a period of working on assignments for all different magazines and I just felt that I wanted a change of world.

Riess: Did you have an image of where you were going in photography?

Miller: No, I really didn't. I knew I wanted to use my energies in stories that were more satisfying than what I was doing. Also, the city, strangely enough, became somewhat depressing to me. I found that you could stand on the roof of an automobile and see for six hundred miles in every direction. And in the wintertime it was gray and overcast. The world seemed kind of dull and uninteresting physically. And I wasn't excited by the--. It was either too hot or too cold, though that didn't really bother me. Actually, while we were there for three years after the war we had some of the hottest summers and the coldest winters and I was unaware of any of that. But it was kind of a physical monotony that I found. I wanted to get out.

I talked to Joan about it and she said, "Whatever you want to do, fine." I talked to *Life* magazine and they said, "Well, we don't care where you want to go, we'll work out something." I thought, "Well, I could go to New York or I could go to the West Coast." I felt going to New York would be more like a repetition, really, of much of what Chicago had. So I decided to come out here.

I didn't know anybody out here at all. However, one time during World War II, coming through here from Washington, D.C. to the Pacific Ocean, I stopped in and met Dorothea Lange. A very generous woman. We sat in her garden and I think we had some coffee and maybe a piece of apple pie or something of that nature.

Riess: How did you know her well enough to do that?

Miller: I just don't know, I have no idea.

Riess: Did Steichen say to look her up?

Miller: No, no, he didn't say that. I don't know. Horace Bristol, one of our fellows in our Navy unit, he knew her. He may have mentioned it. I just don't know where the name came from. I knew her work from FSA. Anyway, when we thought about coming out here, literally she was the only person we knew.

We got a room in a San Francisco hotel and Joan and I spent two weeks out here. I guess we drove out. And we took a map and made concentric circles on it, and figured out how far it took to get where and what was it like there, what were the schools like. And if we lived there, where could we go conveniently to do other things other than just live there.

We found that going down the Peninsula south of San Francisco, at that time traffic was not good, and also it was kind of an older community, older communities. It didn't seem like a nice place for children. North of San Francisco, across the Golden Gate Bridge, we'd have to pay a toll every day going across that bridge, and to get into Marin County, it wasn't as well developed as it might be. Also, when we got there, the communities were a little too rich for us, or upper scale for us, where we could be living.

We looked at East Bay, Berkeley and Oakland, and finally behind those cities in Orinda. And we found out here that this was pretty swell for us. We liked it because the summers would be warmer and the winters would be colder. Right in Oakland and Berkeley, the weather was softened by the bay, so it was not as great a change physically. And also, the most important thing was the schools out here were considered exceptional. There was a waiting list of teachers that wanted to teach here.

It was a comparatively new community, and many younger people here. And also from Orinda, it's on the way to the Sierras, and to the capital, Sacramento, and the farming community in the Sacramento Valley. And proximity to Oakland was important. I thought that I could develop some projects where I could photograph some city life, urban life. Oakland was attractive to me. I must say in hindsight, I never did do anything in Oakland. But at that time it was important.

And also, right north of Oakland is Berkeley, the University of California, which at that time was only fifteen minutes away from Orinda. That was to me as exciting. Kind of a nerve center there. Just beyond the university a few minutes, why, Dorothea Lange's home was. So that's the long story of why we settled in Orinda.

Riess: That's an exceptional and accurate analysis. You could do that on your own just by sniffing around?

Miller: Yes. We found out how long it took to go into San Francisco. I talked to *Life*, they said, "Fine, you can work out of San Francisco, you do the work for us there." This [Orinda] was a good location for that. It worked out.

Riess: This hill that you're living on now was undeveloped?

Miller: Well, at that time I understand that Orinda had been, before the war, kind of a summer escape place for people who lived in San Francisco who wanted to get out of the fog. It was warmer over here, and they had a little summer home kind of a thing. After the war it began to be further developed where these seasonal homes became permanent, and the increasing population, it was available space so it was beginning to be developed. It wasn't a primitive

place, it was quite sophisticated even from early on, as I understand it. But gentle as far as the number of people goes.

Riess: Did you drive around with a realtor?

Miller: Well, the first thing we did is we rented a home, a *spec* home that hadn't sold. Then when we decided we wanted to live here we took that home. And from that home we started looking around, driving around, and finding out where we'd like to be. I don't think we had a realtor, maybe we did.

This area, at that time, was grazing land for cattle and there were very few trees. Now it's covered with trees. A lot of them are exotic trees, a lot of Monterey pines, and some spots are oak. We have a lot of oaks here, but the early pictures I have, we only have one little clump of oaks, which we still have. Since then, those oaks have thrown acorns and we have more oaks. The ranchers, I guess, or the people who were grazing cattle here, probably burned it off to keep the grass coming on. Anyway, now it's filled with trees and we've changed the environment here appreciably by just living here, people living here in this community.

Architectural Decisions

Riess: How did you find your architect?

Miller: I don't know, actually. I know that we talked to everybody we could. We went and saw Bernard Maybeck in his home in the Berkeley hills. As we approached his home there, I recall there was a gate. Mrs. Maybeck came to the gate, and the first thing she said is, "Do you smoke?" She had been, you could say, traumatized by the earlier Berkeley Hills fire, in 1923. We assured her we didn't smoke, and then we were invited into this very small home.

We were struck by the fact that this home had siding that consisted of burlap bags that had been dipped in wet cement and hung up on the sides of the building. So it made a fireproof siding. We walked into the house and sat in the very small living room, or what you want to call it, and there was no place to sit. There were a couple of chairs and a couch, but everything was covered in papers and books. Mr. Maybeck cleared things off so that Joan could sit down, I could sit down.

We talked to him about we were interested in him designing a house for us. He said, "Okay, I'll do that," but he said, "You'll have to agree that it won't cost more than ten thousand dollars and that you'll do a lot of the work yourself."

He handed us a large sheet of drawing paper, I guess it was newsprint, and a piece of charcoal. He said, "You draw some of the feelings you have about a house you'd like to have and come back and we'll talk further." So that was it. But I was not intending to spend time on a house, building a house, I wanted to get active in photography because I needed to support my family. So, we didn't pay much further attention to that.

We talked with other architects, we talked to every leading architect in the area at the time. [William] Wurster, I guess it was, and we talked with, I don't know, the top, big names of that

era. A lot of building was going on, so these architects were very active. I remember one architect, big name, why in every house he had he had a circular window.

Anyway, in this search we finally came across a man who I believe was teaching at Berkeley at that time as well, and also he was actively developing a housing area in Marin County on Wolfback Ridge. And that was Mario Corbett. He was a comparatively young man, and had not designed, as I recall, many family homes. I don't know what other things he had done. I just kind of remember that. But he was interested, and so we started working with Mario, and we talked to him about what our interests were. He was a very attractive man, and we saw some things he had done, which were so open and free and struck nerves. We resonated to those things. So, we worked with him.

We had three children now. This area, the roads weren't hard topped, or they weren't asphalted. This, like most parts of this area, was adobe soil, so in wet weather it's a sticky mess. We wanted lots of hard surface around so the kids with their wheeled toys could enjoy it. So he designed this house around the needs of the children. For example, one side of the house, which is about ninety feet long, we had glass and sliding doors on it. Big panels seven and a half feet square. And he designed an area that lined the hallway outside of the children's bedrooms, and when they got up in the morning they could go in the hallway and walk past these sliding doors to go outside. It became a nice, big open activity.

Along this wall we had the kitchen. He designed that area so that outside the trees there would create an island, a marvelous play area among the trees where the kids would play. And while they're playing, they could see inside and see Joan in there working away, which gives them a little sense of security. That island also, as far as the inside of the house goes, created a buffer from further extension beyond that island inside the house, which became our living room. Our little cave, just for adults. The trees became a break point between the family and the kid area and the adult area.

For me, I wanted a work space for my photographic work. I had had experiences in Chicago--we had a home in Chicago in a tract, the south side of Chicago. I had a darkroom in the basement of that house. It had a coal-burning furnace and I replaced the coal-burning things with gas, or oil, I guess it was. I used the coal bin then, I cleaned the coal bin out and made that into a dark room.

And also in this basement, this very small basement, I had my darkroom and layout space and office kind of space. Also we had our washing machine down there for clothes, and Joan had her ironing board down there. We didn't have any drier at that time, everything was outside, or inside. Really cramped. But also, I found that what happened having the darkroom that close, just down some steps from the kitchen to the basement, between bites at the breakfast or dinner table I would have to run downstairs to take something out of the wash or do this little bit.

So I was never free to be able to sit down in our home and enjoy it, separate from my work, or I couldn't be in my work and be separate from the home. When we designed this house in Orinda that was important to me. I decided to build a studio space with an outside entrance, so that when I left home I was going to work, and the kids knew I was going to work.

Riess: I hadn't realized there's no inner access.

Miller: No inner access, and that was done purposefully. So that there is that division, of sorts.

Riess: And also there's so much light.

Miller: Yes, it works. At least it works for me here. At one time this was all open and I used to use that wall as a background for some photographs. I never really did use it, but I played with it. But now, since I'm no longer interested in that sort of thing, I've filled it up with bookcases and files and so forth. But it was a fine, big space at one time. Also up here, of course, is the darkroom.

Now, one thing we did insist on, or I insisted on, was that I didn't want to stumble on anything. So as a result there are no steps going into our house. It's even with the outside. The builders and the architect thought I was crazy. They said, "My gosh, the wind is going to blow everything in the house, it will be terrible." I said, "I don't care, I want it equal to the outside." So that's the way that we have that.

Another thing is that we didn't want maintenance problems, minimum maintenance. So we have unfinished redwood on the outside and unfinished redwood on the inside. And the only painted surfaces are the few I have here in the studio space. And maybe inside a couple closets, but the rest of it is all unfinished inside and out. So, I think that about handles that. Joan, in hindsight, wishes that there was more light available downstairs.

Riess: You mean, more natural light.

Miller: More natural light coming in. We have overhangs here, but of course the trees have grown up around us, that's one thing.

Riess: You said you had Thomas Church as your landscape architect. Did he come with Mario Corbett? Was he sort of part of the package?

Miller: We began to think about this sort of thing as we were working with Mario on designs, and the name Thomas Church came up as a landscape architect. He came up and he sited the house. He related the house to the ground. And then he also designed a garden and put the garden in for us.

Strangely enough, in hindsight, it was very modest or even cheap in construction and all. It was a very modest house, something like ten dollars a square foot or something to build. Today, why, that's unbelievable. Anyway, we certainly didn't have any money and we had to go into debt to do it, but it worked out for us.

Riess: Did your kids walk down the hill, or was there transportation?

Miller: Well, we're quite close to the grammar school, and they could walk. It's about a mile to school, and they could do it fine. Eventually buses came, which we didn't need because the kids were able to walk to school. It was very nice to walk to school.

We had one time a kind of funny thing. While they were building this house, it got into good enough shape so that we could live in this studio space on the second floor. So before the glass was even put in, we had some canvas hanging here, and we were living up here. We made the darkroom into a kitchen, and we ran an electric cord down to a refrigerator that we had--I don't

know where the refrigerator came from. Anyway, it was downstairs on the ground, literally on the ground. We ran a cord down there to take care of it. We lived here while they were finishing the rest of the house.

At one point, one of the children had a cold or something, was kind of sick, nothing really serious, but a pediatrician came out on a house call, believe it or not. Very nice man, Dr. Ornduff. He had to come over from an adjoining lot and climb down a hill here. We had a little ladder built there so that you could get down. But there was no asphalt here, it was winter time, and it was wet and the ground was sticky. He came up here and checked out the child, and we noticed when he left he only had one shoe on! He told us that he had lost it on the way over, he had gotten stuck in the adobe. Those were the kinds of conditions that existed then.

Riess: Did you find that there was a kind of "like" community of people who had left where they were and had come to Orinda?

Miller: Yes, I think so. I think if you call the United States a nation of immigrants, why Orinda was certainly a village, at that time, of immigrants. There were lots of young children here, young families, and it was just a delightful area because of all this open space.

Across the street from our lot there was a space of about five acres that was completely open. There had been a little hill there that had been bulldozed down. It was owned by a man by the name of Bones Remmer, and Bones Remmer was known as the local gambling boss. He ran a gaming house down at the Orinda Crossroads. When he had this property up here and bulldozed off the knoll it was for a home site. The neighbors, or the people around in the greater Orinda area, learned about it and they protested, because they felt he was going to turn it into a casino of sorts. So it lay dormant for several years. Finally the IRS came in, the US government came in, to confiscate it because of back payment of taxes. They couldn't do it, because evidently a sister owned a fraction, one or two percent of the property, so they couldn't foreclose it.

As a result, we had this marvelous open space around for many, many years. It was great for flying kites. In fact, for our youngest daughter Dana, we bought a quarter horse for her and kept it in our back yard here where our garden is now. She used to go out there and ride with her horse. The horse was pregnant when we bought it, so eventually we had two of them out there riding around. It was just great fun. This was a lovely, idyllic world that doesn't seem to exist anymore, at least to my knowledge.

Riess: Well, you think of it as the world of the fifties, also.

Miller: And that's what I captured, I think to a degree, in my book *The World is Young*. I photographed that; that was a slice of that time.

Working from a California Base

Riess: You had to jumpstart yourself as a photographer. Was it hard?

Miller: No, not really. I had assignments. That first year out here, the first six months we spent here in California, I did a lot of *Life* assignments. Now an assignment doesn't mean a great big essay, it may be one day or two days, or a week or two weeks. But in 1949, in six months I did nineteen stories for *Life*. And '50, '51, '52, '53, I did a total of 150 stories for them. So there was a lot of activity for me, plus other things I was doing, see, for other magazines.

Riess: You said that originally the magazines really didn't cover the West Coast, there wasn't a "story" out here. But when you got yourself out here, you found that there was?

Miller: In looking for other work to do, I found that there were no magazines out here. *Sunset* magazine was here. All the other magazines were back in New York. So it meant that I had to have contacts back there in order to keep in touch with them.

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Miller: I didn't want to be that dependant on *Life*. That's why I did not accept a staff position with *Life*, I didn't want to be on the end of their string. I wanted to be related to them, and I was highly appreciative of that relationship. But I wanted to be able to have more freedom to do whatever might come up I'd like to do.

But the point I'm trying to make here, and I think I said it before, is that once a staff photographer bought a home, he was transferred to another location. For example, I remember the story about Peter Stackpole. He was out here, he was born and raised in the Bay Area. He was working for *Life*, he was one of first *Life* photographers. He eventually moved to the Los Angeles area and became one of the stalwarts down there. He was very, very interested in sailing and boats. I think that Peter had two little sailboats--little, I mean you can't make them too little. They were pretty good size, actually. They wanted to move him back to New York. He said, "I can't do that, I've got all these things here. I can't leave my boats." They said, "We'll move them." Well, anyway, *Life* magazine moved those two sailboats back to the East Coast for Peter in order to get him back there for a while.

Riess: Not deliberately, but that was often the case?

Miller: I think deliberately, that was the understanding. It wasn't written out, but among the staff they felt that there was a conscious or a knowing desire to keep their people on edge. To keep them alert and realize they're dependent on *Life* so they would do as the boss said it should be done. Now, whether that was true or not, I don't know, but that was the common understanding. So, I wanted to be more secure by being able to say no.

Riess: You made your own contacts here?

Miller: Yes. You see, previously in Chicago I had worked for many different magazines. So I did have contacts. And it worked out, I did some other things for other magazines. But it was still hard, because I'm not interested in selling things or keeping in touch with people to keep the pot boiling, with relationships with other magazines. So I'd become lazy.

Also, you see, I'd received a monthly retainer from *Life*, whether I worked or not. If they printed more stories page-wise than my retainer amounted to, I would be paid up and above that. My retainer was modest, it was four hundred dollars a month, but that was enough to keep you going if you had some other things going, you see. Plus the pages, and I had quite a

few published pages in those times. So, it worked out all right. But having to work that hard on things you weren't particularly interested in was where the discontent began to build, you know.

Riess: What's an example of something that would be particularly uninteresting?

Miller: [getting up] Well, here in my files, here's one. I had to photograph an Episcopal convention, which was photographing formalities and people getting together and talking from platforms.

Riess: And they were not interested in an ironic view of the event?

Miller: No. Well, let's put it this way. I didn't come up with the idea of doing something like that. They may have been interested in it if I had suggested it or provided some interesting way of treating it, but I wasn't interested in that sort of thing. Their interest and my interest weren't compatible.

Here's another one, a fellow by the name of Rudolph Skarda, a researcher at the University of California Medical School. And he was able to inject solutions into the circulatory system of cadavers so that he could remove from the body the circulatory system so it came out as a network--beautiful things, really. Preservation of the circulatory system so that they could be hung up like spider webs. It was just beautiful.

This sort of thing, that's interesting, sure. And I could get involved and interested in that. But after I get done with it, what have I done? It didn't seem to be meaningful to me other than just a nice exercise and kind of fun doing it for a while. But I wasn't going anywhere with this. It wasn't in a field of photography or area of interest that I could pursue further.

As I look at [the list of] these things, they all look pretty interesting. Here's an unemployment story in Pasco, Washington. That was fabulous, I had some nice pictures out of that. That was 1950. Here's another one about the "war scare"--I'm using the titles of the assignments. A marine unit is being called up, this is 1950, and people are buying things off the shelves, worried that there may be shortages. This kind of thing. Some of these things are like newspaper assignments, where all they wanted was a one shot deal. The subject didn't merit more than one shot. You know when you're doing it.

Assignments: Loyalty Oath, Science, Sally Stanford

Miller: Here's one I thought was pretty thin, but by golly, it worked out quite well. The California Loyalty Oath, and this was in 1950.

Riess: That was a big story!

Miller: A big story, and it was a little hard to get hold of it. I came up with the idea of finding one of these professors to use as a vehicle.

This loyalty oath was such that you can understand that the faculty just kept dancing around it. They didn't want to come out publicly and take a stand because they were insecure.

Everybody avoided being up and front. There was nobody up on the speaker's platform, so to speak.

Well, I attended the Board of Regents meeting, and I attended the faculty meetings. I'd show up with my camera, and these people, well they didn't rush up to be in front of the camera. I finally found one person, Professor [Edward Chace] Tolman I think it was, and I went to a meeting at the [William and Catherine Bauer] Wurster home where some of these people were meeting and talking about what to do about this. And they had their wives with them, because this decision was going to affect the future of these people's acceptance in the community.

Riess: You were following more the non-signers?

Miller: Non-signers, that's correct, you're right. They had this meeting and I knew this professor was going to be there, so I went there to talk to him. I talked to him at that meeting in the home, and I said in order to make a statement that can be understood we need to have a person of impeccable credentials to make that statement, and I hoped that he would allow me to photograph him and use his positions to make the statement. I really put the arm on him, and he finally agreed.

Before I left that home, his wife came out and said, "You know what you've done, you can't do this to him. You can't. It'll expose him to pressures that are unfair," and so forth. She was really very upset. Well, I didn't really answer her, I couldn't answer her, and I went ahead and did the story. And there's one picture I made of him walking off the center of campus down through this arch going on the way over to the Faculty Club. And the story ran, and that one picture was there, plus others. Later I got a call from her and she said that she wanted to be able to use that picture for a Christmas card. I was forgiven.

So I liked that kind of a story, where I could get involved with something that was important and needed telling. And if I didn't do it, maybe it wouldn't get done. This is the sort of thing I was drawn to, rather than just something which might be a little thing, politics or something, which is neither here nor there.

Here's one on the taking of the census, following a census taker around in San Francisco and being sure to get the hills in the picture or the bridge in the picture. Well, you know, that's not much of a story, but these are the kinds of things that I had to do. I liked doing them, it kept me busy.

Riess: A lot of stories are pot boilers, but somebody has to do it, sort of.

Miller: Well, that's understandable, and I shouldn't be fussy if they're offered to me, but I didn't want them to become a way of life so that's all my life was, boiling pots.

Riess: Did you go down to Hollywood? There was a *Life* L.A. office?

Miller: Oh, that was a big office. I told you the story about Philippe Halsman going down there, coming from New York to photograph the pretty girls for the covers?

I did go down there once in a while, but seldom. They had four or five staff photographers down there who were very busy, I'm sure. But on the science end, while I was out here I ended

up photographing all the Nobel Laureates here in California. And I got involved in the peace conference in '51, the Japanese peace conference.

[continuing to refer to list] I photographed Sally Stanford. She was a madam who had a home on Pine Street [1144 Pine] to which she invited delegates to this peace conference. She offered them discounts if they patronized her house. Then I photographed her when she became mayor of Sausalito, and she had a bar there. Later I met her back at her home on Pine Street when she had married Bob Gump?

Riess: One of the Gump's store Gumps?

Miller: Yes, not the father, but one of the sons of the family. The understanding was that she resented the establishment so much she wanted to give them a poke in the nose.

Anyway, I met them back at that apartment the morning they had just driven back from Reno. There she was, big flamboyant gown and wearing an orchid on her shoulder. She was kind of a short, chunky woman to begin with, so it didn't quite fit. Here's--I guess his name was Bob Gump--and I asked them if they wanted to have a wedding photograph.

I said how nice it would be if we could move the chair over here and Sally could sit down there and Bob could stand behind her with a arm on the chair. Behind them was a marvelous mirror and kind of candelabra stuff. It was a nice 1890 picture, I felt. I made the picture, and *Life* used it, a full half page picture and a half page text, vertical.

I didn't see them again for some years until one time I took some visiting *Life* magazine or *Time* magazine people for dinner over to Valhalla, Sally Stanford's restaurant in Sausalito. We were all seated at a round table. Sally was there and Bob Gump was on the far side of me at this big circular table, and other people were scattered around. We're sitting there drinking and eating food and all. Towards the end of the dinner, all of a sudden Gump stands up and points his finger at me and reaches across the table and says, "Now I remember you, you're that soft-con man who made that picture!" It had evidently been eating on him all those years. Soft-con man.

Riess: It seems to me there was a story in California itself. You could sell a magazine with California on the cover the way you could sell *Time* magazine or *People* magazine with Princess Diana on the cover. Wasn't California an object of curiosity to much of the country?

Miller: Well, it might be that I was too close to it to see it.

I see also here several mentions of war stories I was doing.[15] Here's one on the Korean War dead coming home ["The first dead from the Korean War, San Francisco, 1951"], and here's another of an army sergeant returning. "First marine division homecoming." And MacArthur returning ["General MacArthur on his return from Korea, San Francisco, 1951"]. So there was that sort of thing. I think I understand your point, this bigger story you're talking about, but it's a little hard to compete with MacArthur returning, or some of these newsy things, you see. And I got some good pictures out of some of these things, I was very pleased with some things I was able to get out of it.

15.*The Fifties, Photographs of America,* Magnum Photos, Pantheon, 1985. See examples.

Assignments: Farmer's Wife, Jayne Mansfield, John Wayne

Riess: You know this book?

Miller: Yes, *The Fifties*.

Riess: I put post-its on all your work in here. There's such a variety, and it's not just California, of course.

Miller: Well, this one ["Saying Grace, Lebo, Kansas, 1950"], I wanted to do a story on the farmer's wife. I always thought it would be nice to show the woman who's behind these core values of the United States, or our way of life. Because I remember my great-aunt, I'd go to spend some time with her in Casey, Illinois, central Illinois, on a farm. And she'd be up at four o'clock in the morning or so and by the time breakfast came along at 5:30 you'd smell that new bread and everything was going. She was just always there, and doing all the things, feeding the chickens and all.

And during the day my great uncle would be out in the fields. They only had a couple hundred acres, but I remember him coming home at noon to eat and after lunch he'd lie on the bare floor to straighten his back out. He didn't have a tractor, he had a team of mules. All this goes on, and the work she would do sitting on the porch snapping the beans and shelling the peas and all this. In fact, behind the wood stove there was a box of corn cobs, soft corn cobs. On the way out to the privy you'd reach in and get a soft corn cob. The slick pages of Sears and Roebuck are one thing, but a soft corn cob is much better.

Well, I had that memory, and I talked to *Life* and said I wanted to do a story on a farmer's wife. They though it was great. Then it kind of cooled off and everybody had forgotten about it until one day I got a telegram saying, "Wayne, we just found your farmer's wife." I was no longer thinking about this, I'd cooled. But I went back to Lebo, Kansas to photograph the farmer's wife. They had found a farmer's wife for me.

This farmer's wife lived in a very nice modern home. And by nine o'clock she was all dressed up with her fine dress and hat and sparkling glasses, driving off to the first of a couple of meetings that she was having with women, or community activities. It was true that she did some of the farm chores around the place that I'd remembered, but she was not <u>my</u> farmer's wife. It was a real fiasco. I did my best, but I couldn't get that toothpaste through the keyhole, it just wouldn't go.

This picture here, "Saying Grace," was one of those from that take. And I believe this one also is from "The Farmer's Wife." This is a community activity, with a little child there singing, flag in the background. And here is one ["Flag Day Ceremony, Orinda, 1956"] from my children's book effort, *The World Is Young*.

[paging through the book] This sort of thing, here's one. You see this is 1959, this is making a movie in New York City. Living here and going to New York City to make a movie, covering that. This is downstairs here, the boy ["Backyard, Orinda, 1954"]. Here's Berkeley, the installation of Clark Kerr as president [1958].

Riess: Covering the campus, you probably had some ruckuses to cover.

Miller: Well, this wasn't an assignment, I just went over there to do it. And they have an interesting picture, if you want to be maybe nasty, a picture of the nuclear physicist who was the father of the hydrogen bomb, the Hungarian, Teller. I've got a picture of him kind of crouched down and looking very sinister.

Then these pictures of Jayne Mansfield. Did I tell you about Jayne Mansfield? Nice woman. She was married to this guy Mickey Hargitay. He was a body builder. Each of them were so proud of their bodies--only in Hollywood could those people be. In one part of her home, Jayne Mansfield's home, the wall was just covered in magazine covers showing her in every possible state of undress.

I went down there to photograph her getting ready for her wedding. And I went to the dressmaker's where she was being fitted for a gown. As you know, at some of these things they use a cheesecloth [muslin] kind of thing you put on first to get the fittings and to rough it out. She had put this thing on and came out to the little fitting room--big fitting room actually.

She came out, and on the way out she looked into a mirror and gasped, and she turned and immediately went back into the dressing room. And she called, "Wayne, do you have a handkerchief?" I pulled a handkerchief out and gave it to her. She came out again, and here it was covering her crotch when she came out. I don't know if she was worried about the pubic hair being brunette or what it was, but anyway. [laughter]

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Miller: Before the wedding I was photographing in her home with her mother packing her suitcase. Jayne and Mickey were going to go off for a honeymoon someplace. I walked into this bedroom where they had everything, like a normal bedroom, you get the stuff all messed up trying to get stuff into a suitcase, or sorting things out. She had the scantiest costume on you could imagine, and I said, "Well, Jayne, do you want to put on some clothes or something, a dress, so I can make some pictures?" "Oh," she said, "Oh, yes." So with her mother I stepped outside, and when I came back in she had on something that was even more exposed! Kind of funny things you run into in this sort of work.

And then here's one of John Wayne [on the set of "The Alamo," 1959].

Riess: Yes, now why were you doing John Wayne?

Miller: He was making a movie called "The Alamo."

Riess: Did you go to Texas for that?

Miller: Yes, Breckinridge, Texas. Movie companies would hire photographers like myself, pay us a substantial amount of money, to come down and photograph anything we wanted to photograph. We had contacts with the magazines, and we could produce things that the magazines might run, but if their [film industry] public relations people did it they wouldn't run them.

On this particular case, here it is, it was going to be out in the middle of the Texas range. So while I was down there I called home and had our son David, who was about thirteen or fourteen years old then, come down. He spent about a week with me on the set, and I got some

nice pictures with him. He loved working with the special effects people. They'd go out and together they'd put bags of smoky gunpowder in the mouths of the cannon, so when they'd go off they'd make a big thing. And they'd plant explosives here and there to go off. I have one picture of him with this make-believe horse, this papier maché horse, he's got it on his back. Being around these men and their Texas costumes and all, he loved it.

Riess: Then did you have to market the pictures?

Miller: Well, I'd send them back to Magnum, and they would make the contacts.

In some cases for these things they would make suggestions, they'd like to see something on certain people in the cast, they were interested in that person, so I'd, maybe, spend a little time focusing on them.

Riess: You mean the magazine?

Miller: The magazine, yes. They would say, "We understand you're photographing this movie, and we're interested in some pictures of Fred Astaire or Ave Gardner," or something of that nature. So, I did several of those things.

Assignments: Korean War, Migrant Workers, Thoughts on News and Privacy

Miller: [looking at the book] "Recruiting," that's another one of those war situations, 1950. "Swearing-in ceremonies." And here's where the returning marines--this was a young guy ["Returned Korea veteran in bar, San Francisco, 1951"] that I was following around. I followed him around to a bar and made this picture which I kind of like, the way it worked out. But that's a grab shot. It's so well-lit it looks phony.

It kind of goes back to that early photojournalism imagery which is maybe too well lit, I guess.

Riess: What do you mean, the "early photojournalism imagery?"

Miller: Where we would use flash in synchro sunlight to fill in the shadows. In hindsight, this was too slick. That particular picture is a little slick. If that had been made using existing light from the bar and all--well, let's put it this way, everything just seems to be right. The guy's hair is combed, he's too neat.

Riess: Yes, yes. So that's suspect?

Miller: I did a story for *Life* on the bugs up in the lake up there, Clear Lake. They had a great infestation of gnats, and it kind of shut down all the activity there. It was just too much. So I went up there to photograph it, and I photographed the chemical people with their drums of chemicals in the back of these boats, taking it out and putting it into the water. I got an airplane, they took the door off of it, I strapped myself in and they took me around so I could photograph it. And I got some very nice pictures of it, I did a pretty good bang-up job on it.

Life didn't use it, and I was a little disappointed. I learned that they felt that it looked too pat, too good, it didn't look real. That's my point. Sometimes things are too good from some editors' points of view, they don't look right.

Here's "Caskets coming back, war dead from the Korean war," more Korean war, yes.

I like news stories, I just love them. Because you don't know what's going to happen, and as a photographer, if you're doing a story, you have to have a beginning and you have to have an end. You don't know what the end is going to be. And you don't know what's happening, you have to develop it as you're there, and looking at the subject and feeling it, and hearing it, being pushed around and all. You have to find out, what is the common thread here? What is it that I could say? To me, I find it exciting as can be. The test is just immense. You know you've got to pull it off.

An example of this is, and it's during the fifties, here he is, "Marine from the Fifth Regiment coming home, 1951." I went to San Francisco, down to the piers where the ship was coming in. In fact, I'd gone out the night before to this marine ship. I went out to the pilot boat, the Aviso, spent the night on it. Next morning I woke up, and you know the water between Golden Gate Bridge and the Farallon Islands is known as the Potato Patch? It's very rough. I woke up on this Aviso, and I had been all night in this Potato Patch, just waiting for the ship to come in. The first thing that greets me in the morning is breakfast, pork chops and fried potatoes and black, black coffee. Ugh. I'm not a sailor when it comes to that sort of thing. My stomach and I are enemies.

In some cases, with other photographers you're being pushed and pulled, and you've got to fight even for a camera space, and you think to yourself, "Is this where I should be or should I be someplace else to tell this story?" And if I'm making pictures from this point of view, I'm making the same pictures that other people are.

Well, on this Aviso is the pilot.

Riess: What is an Aviso?

Miller: I think that's the name of pilot boats, the little red pilot boats.

Riess: Yes, okay.

Miller: And this is the pilot who is going to step off this Aviso and mount the ship to direct them in, to avoid any bad spots in the entrance. It was marvelous, just beautiful. I wish I could have photographed it, but I didn't. This man has a long black coat, and he has a black top hat. Here we are in this little boat, coming alongside this great big troop transport bringing all these marines in from Korea, and the transport's going up and down, and our little boat is all over the place.

Well, they've got a rope ladder, a Jacob's ladder hanging over the side. And this pilot stands up as though he was a butterfly somehow, and just grabs hold of this rope ladder and just kind of flits up the ladder effortlessly!

Riess: I bet you wish you'd photographed that!

Miller: My stomach and I were still at odds. I look at this ladder, and I've got my camera bag on my shoulder. I wanted to get up there and photograph these guys coming in, these marines coming in. Things are bouncing back and forth and I throw myself at that rope ladder and scramble up to the top. I don't know how I got there, frankly, without losing my camera equipment or smashing it up, but I did get there. And I photographed the marines approaching the San Francisco harbor.

Then, because my assignment was to photograph the return of these fellows, and I didn't know what this return was going to be, I had to find it. So, when we docked I was one of the first off down the gangplank so I could get down there and photograph these fellows, these marines, coming down the gangway. And I got down there and here we are inside this pier structure, whatever it is, filled with relatives, friends, wanting to greet these soldiers, or marines.

I spotted one young woman who was just all wound up. Her man was coming home, and she was waiting for him. So I turned my back on the guys coming down the gangways, and spent time photographing her. Because I felt that something's going to happen here. And sure enough, with the help of a girlfriend she jumps over the fence onto the area where these fellows are walking out. She runs up to her man, and they embrace, and it was just lovely.

I photographed some more of the fellows coming down. And at this point a fellow who was with me, a reporter, said, "Wayne, let's go, it's all over with." Because you know, the ship was pretty well empty, no activity around, the crowds had thinned, disappeared. I said, "I just want to hang on here for a while." Milt's his name, Milt Orshefsky, very talented reporter.

I said, "No, you go on, I want to stay here for a while." He said, "Okay." So I stayed there. There was absolutely no one around, except a middle-aged woman standing there, looking at this ship. I walked over to her, and I said, "Can I help you?" She said "No, I just wanted to see the ship and the men coming home that would be with my son if he was coming home." I said, "Would you like to go aboard and look at the ship?" She said, "That would be nice." So I took her up, I introduced her to the officer on the quarter deck, explained the situation, he took over and gave her a tour. I left her there.

I walked down the gangplank, gangway we called it. And then she eventually shows up and starts walking down this gangway by herself, and that was my picture. It's a nice picture. Well, this is an example of the evolution and the development of a thing like this, you never know until you have it. But, oh, it's such a good feeling when you do have it, you know.

Riess: Yes, that's a great example. Milt, the reporter you were with, didn't determine what you were doing, you were free agents? He was off doing other things.

Miller: Well, he was there to help me in any way he could. Maybe with names or something else. What I did and how I did it was entirely up to me.

Milt communicated immediately with New York about what we'd done and he said, "I'm sorry, I guess we don't have a story." He didn't see it, you see, he didn't understand. He thought that what I was doing, evidently, didn't make a story that he could understand. And he got a telegram back, "Milt, you've never been so wrong." They ran it as a lead story, a news story, you see.

Riess: Oh, that's great.

Miller: That was the frosting on the cake. [laughter]

[riffling through pages] I did many of these returning people stories.

Riess: And here, this camp. You were going to some migrant camps?

Miller: This is a story I did for *Ebony* magazine, one of the first stories ever when they came out--not the first. *Ebony*'s in Chicago, I'd worked for them before, and they'd asked me to do a story on cotton pickers in California ["Migrant workers camp, San Joaquin Valley, 1950"]. I went down to this area, looked around, and I found an area that looked good so I spent about two days, I think, down there. And it was one of those things, kind of like shooting fish in a barrel, everything looks good, it's so easy to photograph.

Riess: Why was that?

Miller: Why was it so easy?

Riess: Yes.

Miller: I don't know. Maybe I say it's so easy because the subject matter is so interesting. That's why it's so easy.

Here's a union meeting, outside a union hall that is still in the process of being built. This is at night, and it's cold. You see the little kids here are cold, they don't have any clothing. And here's a union organizer here. Also, there's a mixture of ethnic groups here. Whites and blacks, and Hispanics, they're all equal in this one. They're all suffering, or sharing the same kind of work. And the father, and child here in the windy day. This was December, I recall, when I made these pictures. Here's more of the same thing with the encampments, with the temporary tents put up.

This picture--I have another picture of a couple on the bed where she's cleaning her fingernails and this man, her husband, is sitting beside her. Sad, sad picture. Sad circumstance in that he's sitting there at the end of the day, he'd been picking cotton and he comes home tired, and he can't do anything at night because he can't afford to buy any glasses. But his wife is, in effect, just tolerating him because she's been with other men during the day, just kind of putting up with him until it's time to go to sleep. And that frustration there I feel, that resignation on his face was just tremendous.

This is an interesting situation. There's probably one acre of land in the middle of these cotton fields, adjacent to a little county road. And there's one little house there, a little tiny frame house, and it represented the realization of a goal that every cotton picker, every migrant worker has, to have a home. This man had a home, but his wife died, and they didn't have any children. So he made his available to other cotton pickers. I think he had something like three or four rooms in it, and he had three or four families there. And I don't think he charged them anything for it.

So I went into this house, I made some pictures, different happenings there. Then I found this one room where I made this picture I described to you. But, in addition, around this house on this one acre, there was room for other activities, which were tents that had been put up. And

shelters, he allowed them to put them on his acre, it was just beautiful. In hindsight, that should have been my story, I could have done a book on that, you know. It was just lovely.

So you run into these things, stories. When you're getting involved with it, you want to cry because of the richness of what you're seeing. The sharing, the suffering, the efforts being made. Sometimes it gets pretty hard to handle that sort of thing and still make pictures. But you know, by god, you've got to do it. Because you can't--the next day, after you feel better, you can't come back and do it. It's happening right then and you've got to do it then.

Riess: And "right then" you think they're almost too exposed?

Miller: Well, not too exposed. Two things. One is that you don't want to invade the privacy, and secondly is that what you're seeing is inside of you, and it just affects you to the point that it's hard to function rationally, because you're affected by these feelings. That's the kind of thing you have to push aside, and kick yourself, and literally say, quit fooling around, this is your job, do it.

And when it comes to invading of privacy, if you act--if one acts with the people you're photographing, it's not an invasion of privacy. But if you act as a spectator, not sharing what they're going through, then I think it is invasion. But I've found that when the subjects realize you're with them, it's okay.

I did a story of a hospital fire in Effingham, Illinois. This was a great loss of life in this small town, of patients who were in this hospital. I got there a day or two after the fire. Made some pictures of the ruins, of people watching, looking at the ruins. Again, how do you photograph the fire? It's already taken place.

So I learned of a family that had--I should look at this story again, tell you--who had lost a daughter who was in there, was going to have a baby. Lost the daughter, and I think another relative. I started photographing this family, I talked to them about it. They believed my desire was to seriously show their sorrow. And I was there for about a day, I guess it was. I was photographing the family, I was in the home of the family, getting ready for the funeral. Here they are in the kitchen, preparing breakfast, and pulling their clothes together. Every once in a while, a moment would happen where people--you'd felt that all of the sudden everything in the kitchen stopped, and you were thinking about the daughter or the sister. Very, very interesting photographs.

And then I got word that this was a community that had, I think, two different Catholic churches in it. And the head of the second Catholic church told the sheriff to get me out of town. He said this was terrible, intruding upon these peoples' lives. And he was really adamant. I had that threat actively in my mind as I continued working with this family. I went into church, and while they were sitting in the pews I photographed them, good pictures, too. And this other priest was still threatening me. But their priest was sympathetic. I photographed them outside their home all lined up with the little empty spot where the daughter would have been standing.

It was a good story. But overt resentment by one party, and acceptance by another--tough conditions to work under, where you are knowingly in sensitive territory. So that ran as a lead story in *Life*, again a news story.

Riess: You've said that sometimes there's a story, and then there's another story, and in hindsight you see there is more there. I wonder if as you got more experienced you got more right on the story?

Miller: You never know until it's over with. You never know until she kisses you. [laughter]

Riess: What has experience counted for? A lot?

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Miller: Experience may not count as much as acuteness or sensitivity for me. And I think the younger I was as a photographer, the more sensitive I was and the more I could quickly react and grab hold of things. Photography is different than writing, in that you have to make that snap decision. In fact, you have to take the picture before you make the decision in order to get it. In my way, in my work, in my approach, I've been trying to photograph the emotions, and they're so fleeting. So the sensitivities, the greater they are, the better I'm able to react.

That doesn't mean that maturity or experience doesn't fit in, but I think that's a quality of youngness which is very important. If you can learn early on to make use of that--I'm talking about this kind of photography--if you can learn to make use of it early on then you can be more successful at it. Because you don't think twice, you just do it.

Riess: That makes me ask you again why you weren't tempted to teach.

Miller: I was encouraged to teach at the San Francisco Art Institute. And other people were teaching out there. It just wasn't for me. I may be too selfish to be a good teacher, I don't know. Because there are other things I want to do.

Riess: Did you catch, photographically, the beginnings of the Beat Generation?

Miller: Not really. I'd photographed the demonstrations over there at Berkeley, and things of that nature, but I wasn't attracted to that culture, either through music or revolt or rebellion of something of that nature. I didn't ever feel comfortable with it. So, I photographed many of the protests and what not. Some people, some photographers identify with it and do a swell job. But I didn't do that.

Riess: [looking in the book] Now you had gotten to this one, the trailer park in Richland, Washington.

Miller: This trailer park in Richland, this is the way people were living. These were temporary workers for the job. I think there was a downtick in the economy so that they were suffering many problems of that way of life. Here their whole life is in this trailer they might be living in, and when the jobs peter out or slow down, they're trapped.

Assignment: Richard Nixon, Thoughts on Job Tensions

Riess: Dick Nixon, he was a California story.

Miller: Yes, he was. He was a senator, he was running for vice-president at this time [1952]. I think he'd already been nominated and he's visiting his hometown, Whittier, California.

Riess: That one by Cornell Capa? ["Senator Nixon working on campaign speech in hotel room, Upstate New York, 1952"]

Miller: I'd swear--I was going to say that was my picture. I've got the same picture from a different time, when the slush fund blew up. I was with him in Portland.

Riess: Were you with the presidential photo entourage?

Miller: Yes. Well, different times. During the campaigns I would do a take out of sorts, like with Nixon and with Jimmy Roosevelt running for governor here in California. His mother was out here with him. I spent time with them both in Los Angeles and then coming up here on the plane to campaign here in the Bay Area.

Riess: Do you have any impressions of Nixon?

Miller: Yes, I do. He's really a determined man, that's for sure. I think this [time of photograph] is before his slush fund built up. This is up here in Portland, Oregon, I think.

Riess: And this you did in Whittier.

Miller: Whittier, yes, and I was standing on the curbside while motorcades coming by and Nixon was there and all. And a man standing beside me said that Nixon was part of his law firm or group. He said, "I'm sure happy he got this nomination, we wanted to get that son of a bitch out of the office." [laughter]

I remember Nixon coming back to California after he was nominated [in 1956] to be vice-president. He was met at the Oakland Airport. These meetings and all where these things happen, these are politicians' very important points, because the press is there, and these happenings are terribly important to them. So they can be there to be part of the pictures. And I remember riding with Goodie Knight, Goodwin Knight, who was governor of California at the time.

We were seated in the backseat of his limousine going down the highway someplace, and he said, "I've got it made, all my money is in gold and it's in the bank, so I don't have to take anything from these sons of bitches." And he went on to say, referring to Nixon coming back from being nominated and being met at the airport, he explained to me how important it was, these happenings, to be there.

And he said, "You know, I look forward to this, and I get there, and you know that son of a bitch, his people wouldn't even let me be close to him, I couldn't get in, I couldn't be there. The Governor of the State of California!" He went on to say, "You know, he'd cut his mother's throat and throw it aside if it helped him." He was bitter, bitter. Later I made a picture of Nixon, Goodie Knight, and Knowland, who was the senator, and Earl Warren, who I guess was on the Supreme Court at this time. All four of them, each one of them hating Nixon and some of the others more than you could describe. And here they are, standing there with their arms, like four old alums, posing for the magazine. Just smiling and all!

Riess: Yes, it's interesting, isn't it. They're professional politicians, they're good at it. But opening the paper in the morning, seeing a picture of Bush, Putin, Sharon, you really want to look into the picture to get some sense of the individuals, and how they can be in the same room together.

Miller: You want to know what to know what's really going on. Well, the camera fails there. Or at least, I don't know how it might otherwise be handled.

Riess: This book about the fifties includes an essay by John Chancellor and he says, about the fifties, "The country felt young, full of promise, you knew where things stood and who you were. There were children everywhere." And, "Sexually, Americans were drawn as tight as strings on a crossbow."

Miller: Well, that's a good phrase. And in hindsight, yes, but it's a little hard to get these things at the time.

Riess: "Cities were starting to fall apart and suburbs were filling up." "The youth culture was on its way."

Miller: Yes, well, I think Chancellor does this in hindsight. Nice man, though.

Riess: Okay. In an article I read, Richard Pollard, then bureau chief of *Life* out here, says he remembers working with you on news stories and said, "Wayne may be high-strung emotionally, but on a news story he's sure composed and aggressive."[16]

What's the "high-strung emotionally?" Is he referring to what you've just exemplified about getting so involved in your story? Why does he say that?

Miller: I think he may be talking about how I may act in the presence of some of these stories, but inside I'm functioning in a rational manner. I think that's probably what he's referring to. Because I can, well, be very active and aggressive but still be responsible for being able to work.

I remember one time in New Delhi, we'd been with Eisenhower on his trip he made through North Africa and France and even to Afghanistan and India. This was in India, and following the press. The White House press group had an Air Force Two. They would be flying in that plane. And there would be a pool photographer flying with the president in Air Force One. But all of us were there in the other plane. We'd have to be up early to be ready for the job, and then we'd work hard all day long pushing and pulling with crowds, struggling to get some--[interruption from outside].

And we would have to take care of our equipment and write our captions and organize things for the next day. So, invariably we would have about two hours sleep every night. And during the day we'd be running alongside the president's car, so physically terribly exhausting. Other times we'd be riding in the back of a big truck, a three or five ton truck which looks like a great big construction truck. So we have to run back and get there in time to be ready to precede him to the next stop. It's exhausting, and in this case it's very hot.

16."Focus on Wayne Miller" by Carol Schwalberg, *Popular Photography*, March 1967.

Well, I remember this one time I got back there--and we'd all been working together, photographers, we help each other out, you have to. And for some of these choice places you'll swap off now and then. I get back there, and I find there's two fresh *Life* photographers who haven't been on this trip before, that have been shipped in by *Life*, sitting there in those choice spots. And behind them, inside the truck, standing on the same bed of the truck, is the bureau chief, or a senior reporter, I think from Washington or New York, who had brought these fellows out. He hadn't been on this trip before. The photographers would be all plugged into that, lowered into there, and would precede the president so that we could photograph his motorcade. In a truck like this, there are a few places that are more advantageous than others, for a photographer. So you fight for those places. I've ridden in a lot of those trucks.

Anyway, here we are in New Delhi, and invariably when the president lands in a new country, he's received by the hometown king or president. In this case, he was in this headquarters, or whatever it is, in New Delhi. He was in there, paying his respects, and we were there photographing him. Then we have to run back after this, we have to run back to our trucks while he just walks out the front door and gets into his limousine there.

I got back there first, one of the first to get back there, and I immediately sized up what had happened. I had three cameras around my neck, I think, one with a telephoto lens on it. And I took this camera off of my neck, with this long lens on it, grabbed hold of the front of this guy's shirt with my camera in my other hand. I said, "You get these guys out of here or I'm going to smash this right in your face." They got out. But our tensions on this sort of a thing are real. This may be an example of what Dick Pollard's talking about, I get excited. These tensions can become very real.

Riess: Photographers are sometimes perceived as being pushy and all over the place. And that must be a hard perception to live with, too.

Miller: Well, we were in Morocco, and Eisenhower, the president, was in there visiting with the king or president of Morocco, whoever it was. And then we were invited in to make our pictures. We kind of come in like a mass of people, and this one fellow from *Life*, a young, aggressive photographer, very good, but his personality when he gets under pressure gets a little much, he was using a wide-angle lens, which means you can't stand in the back of the room and do a close-up of these people sitting on a couch.

So what he does--we were all fighting for space around what limited space we had, and he gets out in front of all of us, in order to make use of his wide-angle lens up close. After that was over, outside I said, "Paul, if you do this once more, I'll put my foot right in the middle of your back and you're going to be sitting in Eisenhower's lap." He didn't do that again. Because I could do that and nobody would see it, it could happen. But the point is, you talk about the pushing and pulling, yes, it gets to be pretty physical at times.

Other Bay Area Photographers

Riess: New subject, Wayne. Who did you find sympathetic in the photography world here? I've got a bunch of names, Morley Baer, John Gutmann, Jack Welpott, Wynn Bullock, Pirkle Jones, Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham?

Miller: I can give you squibs on each of them, I suppose. Welpott I didn't know. Pirkle I knew through Dorothea Lange, when he did lab work for her. Very nice man and his wife, Ruth-Marion Baruch Jones.

Photographers are, I don't know, maybe some photographers have close relationships with other photographers. But in a working photographer group I don't believe we do. We know each other's work, we may see them on assignments, we share assignments sometimes. But to be relaxed and carry on a social relationship, I don't know, in my world that didn't take place.

Henri Cartier-Bresson mentioned one time that photographers are kind of like ships that pass in the night and they go, "toot, toot, toot" as they go by. That doesn't mean that we don't know each other well. I've met photographers face to face that I've never met before, and we throw our arms around each other in mutual respect. We feel close, and have been good friends even though we haven't met. That's happened to me many times.

Riess: So among any of these out here?

Miller: Well, in relationship to that, I'm saying that I didn't spend time with any of these people. I'd met them. Like Ansel, I've been with him maybe three or four or five times. Maybe more, but I don't remember them. With Ansel, I don't share those warm relationships. Professional, yes. He's a different world, different concerns, or interests. He's not interested in photojournalism. I suppose he might think that it was sacrilegious to use these good photographic materials on such subject matter as photojournalism. He was a very sweet man and a very generous man, but it's just a different field of activity.

Minor White falls in the same category, Imogen also. These people out here are by and large of a different world than my world of photojournalism.

Riess: You refer to yourself as a working photographer. These are not working photographers?

Miller: Not in my terminology, no. Who else?

Riess: John Gutmann?

Miller: I knew John very slightly. Met him a couple times, one time was on a street corner on San Francisco. Another time was on the telephone, I congratulated him on an exhibit, and I think we were involved and would meet periodically. Exceptional photographer, but I never got to know him, no.

You see, in San Francisco, the Bay Area, there weren't many out here concerned with photojournalism. Or they would be teaching. Most every one of those people you mentioned had been teachers. That was their fallback position, including Morley Baer. Morley Baer, before he'd been teaching, was a very successful architectural photographer, very good. But

out here, and I'm talking about the Bay Area, photography has been--call it the fine arts, or architecture, or food photography, but people to do assignments other than in those fields, they didn't seem to be out here. I know that there used to be some in advertising. Fred Lyon, exceptional in advertising work, illustrator.

Riess: How about anybody at the *Chronicle* who was good?

Miller: I don't know, I didn't keep in touch with those people. Except on assignments I'd see them once in a while, you know. But even that, you see, so many of my assignments were not local.

Riess: And did you stay in touch with Dorothea?

Miller: Oh yes. Dorothea was so gracious, she invited us into her family. We would be invited to some of her Thanksgiving parties and festivals and Christmases. She was a very warm, concerned woman. I say concerned, and obviously about her subject matter in photography, but also concerned with her family. I don't know what else I can say about her. If we get Joan to involve me to trigger something here I could put it into words--there have been gifts to Joan and our children from Paul and Dorothea's East Asian trip. But more doesn't come to me right now.

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[Interview 5: October 10, 2001]##

World Trade Center Bombing, 9/11, and Photographing War

Miller: [responding to question about where he was on September 11, 2001, to learn about the bombing of the World Trade Center] I was in a sidewalk café in Arles, France, and a waiter came over to our table and told Joan and me that we ought to go look at television. He didn't speak English more than that. So we went back to the hotel, which was just a block away, and watched it on television, together with a tour group that had been going down a river, or someplace, on a barge, and they came ashore to watch this. We joined them, and watched those incredible photographs of the Trade Center collapsing. And also being hit by the second plane.

It's fascinating that cameras were focused on this area at the time. As I think you've probably heard, the first one was photographed because somebody was in that area photographing that immediate area. And they just moved their camera up when they saw this plane coming. And caught it.

Well, it was a horrifying experience seeing that, just unbelievable. It was hard to comprehend what was taking place; we could see it with our eyes, but to comprehend it was something else. It was devastating to the dozen or so people, and Joan and me, watching it. But I must say, it was so unreal that it didn't have much impact for me. On me. And it made me think of other situations I've been exposed to, during World War II, and--it happens, those things happen. It wasn't the end of the world, it just happened, and you go on. The loss of life was terrible, but there have been greater losses of life in tragedies. Maybe not as immediate as that.

The surreal quality was where the impact came in my mind. Also that they had breached the security, the cocoon that most of us walk with; we no longer had that security. I've been thinking about it since then and realize that the 5,000 people or 6,000 people that were killed in that that every year we drive our automobiles that 40,000 or more people are killed in automobiles. And we don't register that, and it doesn't have an impact on us. I remember during World War II, you knew you could be injured or killed, but somehow because you're not killed you've kind of dodged the bullet. In peacetime, if we call this peacetime, we dodge the bullet every time we drive an automobile. Or cross the street.

Riess: Or fly a plane.

Miller: That's right. And so I don't know. It's a tragedy. I must say I have a great respect, if I can say that, for this guy bin Laden to have pulled this off. It's fantastic to have figured out how to do this and to make use of the very tools of his enemy to destroy his enemy. That to me is a masterful approach to this whole thing. It makes him more dangerous because of this devious

quality of his way of thinking. It's frightening. Frightening. But we'll go on, our life will go on. Interesting to see how fast this is cooling down, as far as public reaction goes. This will cool down, and it will be supplanted by another problem. I think that younger people who haven't had the experiences that an older person has, the impact on them will be much greater.

Riess: Your children, your grandchildren, are they more frightened? Terrorized, in other words?

Miller: Well, we were traveling, Joan and I, with our granddaughter, twenty-six-year-old granddaughter. And her father, David, was in touch with her by email, and he kept telling her to be careful how she was reacting, not to bring any additional attention to herself as being an American--this was in Paris when we were going back and forth with email. Just to be careful. But I must say that she was really flipped out, you might say, she was close to the edge of panic by thinking that her world was coming to an end, or our world was coming to an end. That the value of the dollar would sink and we wouldn't have any economic ability to leave France because we wouldn't have any money. All the airplanes would go down. She hit the panic button. Now I don't think that she is necessarily representative of that age American girl, but she was strongly influenced by this.

Riess: In your photography, in your life, had you any experience with radical fundamentalism? Given that this is a kind of religious war.

Miller: In a manner of speaking, yes, I think That's what the Japanese kamikaze bombers were. It's a direct overlay on this immediate situation, this story. They were dressed in ceremonial robes that their loved ones, mothers, sisters, wives, had stitched with prayers on the sashes they wore.

I remember one time, I forget what carrier it was, maybe it was the *U.S.S. Saratoga*, a kamikaze came in--a bright sunny day--came in riding with the sun behind him. And he missed the carrier and hit the water behind the carrier. A beautiful blue sky like a cruise ship situation, and here this fellow plopped into the water, and his body kind of exploded from the water. Maybe it was a seat ejection or something, I don't know. Anyway, fully clothed in his ceremonial gown, he popped up out of the plane and went back into the water when it exploded. It was eerie, a surreal situation.

I was exposed to kamikaze planes in and around different battle actions in the Philippine Island invasions. But these things are so aberrant, at least in my mind and my experiences, it's hard to grasp the reality. So the fear is not there. Fear is there, sure, but it's a different kind of thing than somebody walking up to you with a gun in their hand. Because this is unreal. That's what I'm trying to say.

Riess: You mentioned the videotape. I wonder if being able to see it instantly on television almost contributes to its being unreal? Because it's so much like a movie.

Miller: Yes, and it was so well done. It could have been done as a commercial on these t.v. replays.

Riess: Your wartime assignment was to bring home to America the look of war, and now, It's really different now, isn't it?

Miller: Yes, it is different. If I had been there, I don't know what I could have photographed or would have wanted to photograph. I could have photographed the reaction of the people to the

happening. That's all I could photograph, really. Because t.v. was doing such a splendid job. I mean, you have the movie camera doing such a splendid job of photographing. But to show the individual reactions to it, I don't see how I could have made pictures that would have been unique to that moment. It would have been no different than an earthquake, or a hurricane, or something coming through, or any other kind of a frightening thing. I don't know how photographs could have described or captured those qualities that were peculiar to that moment. It's baffling to me.

Riess: There have been so many photographs of groups of people at the funerals of the victimes since then. They try to photograph the emotions.

Miller: Well, it becomes the same picture. I just don't know how it can do other than just repeat the same moment. And I think part of it is that we just can't understand what happened. I mean, if we could better understand it, then we could better photograph it. But, for me, I'm at a loss as to how to do it.

It isn't the loss of life, *per se,* that I think is the terrifying thing. I think that the terrifying thing is that all of the sudden we're vulnerable. That sense of vulnerability is the frightening aspect of it. I ran across some figures the other day that during the Civil War, the Battle of Antietam, more people were killed in one day than were killed in seven years of the Vietnam War. So when it comes to tragedy, that's hard to top that one. But we're now involved in the old FDR phrase, "all we have to fear is fear itself." Anyway.

A Conversation about Intentions

Riess: One of the things I sent you, I'll just take that as a little segue, was the article by Greil Marcus that I Xeroxed from the *New York Times* about a photographer named John Cohen.[17] Have you heard of him?

Miller: I've heard the name, but I don't identify with him one way or another.

Riess: Well, in the article, it makes a point about how we look at New York City through the eyes of Helen Levitt, and at other towns through Walker Evans's eyes. We look at the highway and so on through the eyes of Robert Frank. And the article says that those photographers, "whatever their claims of artlessness, knew what they were looking for." [18]

Miller: I can't relate to that kind of a thing, that they knew what they were looking for. You don't know what you're looking for until you see it. That's the fun of photography, is to be continuously surprised or excited by whatever you might see again, new things. And to be able to see new things is the thrill of photography. I think photography encourages that kind of thinking.

Riess: It's contrasting those people with John Cohen, who argues that the picture exists "outside of the photographer's intentions." I guess it's that talkiness about photography that you probably

17.Insert from Interview 7.
18.*New York Times*, November 18, 2001.

get a little tired of and Greil Marcus is somebody who might be guilty of that. Anyway, "the photographer will only ever capture part of the picture that he or she thinks he or she has found." It goes on to say that "the photographer's best, most fully-realized pictures are also his or her most inscrutable," and that photography "helplessly records but cannot translate," that "pictures mock the one who took them."

Miller: Well, I don't know what that last phrase means, but inscrutable, I can understand that. I make a photograph in trying to better understand what is going on, trying to capture something that's new that I feel there.

Riess: And then when you actually look back into it, when you actually see the photograph, do you find it raises more questions?

Miller: Sometimes I feel that I missed it completely. But once in a while I'd say, I got some of that in there. I think about some of the Chicago black pictures--one comes to my mind of a young woman sitting at a bar, waiting for her man to show up. The loneliness there, I felt that and I got some of it in that picture.

Well, this photograph [in newspaper article] is good, it's excellent in the fact that it's not so literal, it's good in that regard, it lets the viewer fill in those meanings that add to its weight. It's swell in that regard.

I find that talking about photographs, I don't enjoy doing that.

Riess: Talking about your own photographs?

Miller: Or anybody else's. Just talking about photography I don't particularly enjoy. I don't know why. And talking about the meaning in a photograph, or how well it captured this, or what's it trying to say? God, almighty! As far as I'm concerned, I don't know what it is, I just don't. Some people can talk a photograph to death, or talk a situation to death. In my mind it destroys it. You can't ever revisit that subject or that moment without feeling, "Well, I've been there." It's just destroyed that opportunity, for one. Some people just enjoy that sort of--I don't know how to express it, they just talk it to death. That doesn't mean it doesn't have a value, but for me and the way I look at things, it throws cold water on it.

Riess: It does. That's what critics seem to do, inadvertently.

Miller: And an extreme of that is where I'd have photographs published, maybe in a photography magazine or something, and the editors would make up a caption for it, as to what I was trying to photograph, how well I had "captured" these feelings. I don't know that editor, he doesn't know me, he has no idea, just pure spin on his part to say something like that. To me it's just insulting, and it degrades the whole concept of one's effort, for somebody else to have to explain what was in that, why I took that picture.

Riess: Ideally, there would be no caption?

Miller: Well, it could have a caption to say that it was made in Hoboken or something.

I think I showed you some captions I had for the birth pictures that appeared in *US Camera Annual*. Didn't I show that to you? This was the series I'd done of Joan going through labor.

US Camera Annual insisted on having a caption. They'd telephone me and send me telegrams: "We have to have a caption."

[tape interruption]

Miller: [looking at notes] I tried to start writing day by day, something that took place, and these are some of those drafts. Some are my meanderings, others Joan had written down of what I'd expose. These are 1946, 1947. These are actually done during that period. These were not for any purpose other than just a log, in effect, of what was taking place.

Riess: Joan has been your collaborator in more ways than I know.

Miller: She was always desirous and willing to help any time I wanted help. Part of my problem was that I had difficulty wanting to be helped, or knowing how to ask for help. When she did offer help, I'm sure I was hyper-critical of it, that's who I was and am. It made it difficult to work along, I was always kind of a lone operator, a lone wolf or call it what you will. It was difficult for me to know how to work with someone else.

Riess: Hyper-critical of yourself as well?

Miller: Oh yes, very much so. I couldn't tolerate when I would make mistakes and screw up, it was hard for me. I did my best to keep sharp and not make mistakes. She's been very helpful. I guess in hindsight, when I get along better with myself, she's most helpful. I can take photographs and show them to her and ask what she thinks about this or that, and she will, I think, be able to say, I don't see anything here, or this one I like, or these two work together. Of course it's hard to know what I have in mind when I ask her a question like that. It's a minefield for anybody trying to react to a question like that, a request. When it comes to my writing something, asking her to critique it, she's exceptionally good on that, and can get me to think more clearly and to find better ways of expressing things.

9/11 Images

Riess: Wayne, I have been sending you a lot of stuff from the *New York Times*. Originally we were going to meet in November when you were just back from Chicago, and then you were ill. Meanwhile the world has been overwhelmed with photographs from September 11th. For instance, the exhibition, "Here is New York." One of the newspaper articles pointed out that Magnum photographers were all over the place because on September 11th they had just been in New York for their annual meeting.

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Miller: Yes, they were there for one reason or another. In some ways, when something like that happens it's kind of like being a conditioned fire-horse, you begin to move and think, "I've got to go and be a part of this sort of thing." In hindsight, I think I'm sort of glad I wasn't there. Because it was an impossible kind of subject to photograph I think.

I've seen a good number of those pictures, I saw the ["Here is New York"] exhibit at the University [in the School of Journalism]. Have you been to see that?

Riess: Yes.

Miller: Yet I'd be hard-put to find six pictures that really told the story of that.

Riess: "Really told the story." What are you asking of that picture?

Miller: I don't know, I just don't know. The airplanes hitting the towers, that's--but in human terms, what photographs express it in human terms, the horror of it? The surprise. I didn't see them. I saw lots of pictures, obviously, but I can't find--there were a couple of pictures there that were good. I remember one picture of a man standing in the middle of all this chaos, holding up a picture, in front of him. Obviously, he'd lost that person, that person was missing in this happening. Somehow or other that was closer to expressing the horror of it than any of the other pictures that I saw.

This is a very personal reaction on my part, and evaluation. You see all this stuff, sure, lots of grief, well not grief, lots of activity and dirt and chaos, people with stretchers and carrying people and all this and that. But none of them seemed to reach in there and grab hold of what happened. I missed that. If I'd been there with my camera I would have been looking for that. What can I photograph that says the horror or the magnitude of all of this. I would have been stressed out, certainly, trying to find that, but not just recording what we saw, that kind of thing of smoke and debris and people pushing and people crying.

Riess: It seems like the emotion they were trying to capture was of the triumph of the spirit. A picture like this [a woman feeding her baby on a rooftop terrace with the smoking towers of the World Trade Center in the background], what's that picture saying?

Miller: Well, factually, let's see. There's this smoke and stuff in the background and here's a woman on the rooftop, and her child there. She's nicely dressed and all, and the baby looks fine and all. She might be feeding it or something. A photograph should say more than it does, the photograph is mumbling rather than saying, This is a fact.

Riess: This series [shows Miller]--the cameraman [Evan Fairbanks], who did the first video.

Miller: Well, these are interesting photographs, but again, they didn't capture that nerve end and say, "This is what it's all about, this is what it is."

Riess: Let's go back to another disaster. When you think of World War II, what one or two pictures totally capture it and say, "This is what it was about."

Miller: Well, that's why the Rosenfeld [Joe Rosenthal] picture is so well accepted, raising the flag on Iwo Jima. I can't think right off hand of other things--the pictures that Gene Smith made of a GI taking a small baby out of a cave, lifting it, raising it up to another soldier. I just don't know. I missed an awful lot of those photographs because I was--.

Riess: It sounds like what you're looking for *is* something about the human spirit.

Miller: Well, its meaning in relationship not to tons of debris or to amounts of ammunition, but its meaning to fellow humans, yes. I remember having almost the same conversation with Edward Steichen years and years ago. He said, "Wayne, you just are asking too much of a photograph. You're hoping to get more than maybe it's possible to get in a photograph." That might be the case. My own work, for example, I think that maybe the baby being born comes closer to it than anything else. It just says it.

Riess: How about the figure walking across the plaza in Hiroshima?

Miller: That wasn't a plaza, it was a city street.

Riess: Well, it looks like a plaza.

Miller: Because everything was gone. I think that was close to it, but you have to know that it's Hiroshima, and you have to know that's a Japanese soldier. That fails there. In other words, you have to know that, and the picture doesn't say it. To be really good, that should be in the picture.

Too Good to be True

Riess: [rustles papers]. This is interesting [*New York Times* November 14, 2001, "The Assignment is to Get the Story"].

Miller: This is a classic, almost posing. Sometimes a picture is so right it's unbelievable. It can be too good. You become suspicious, and if you're suspicious of it you've lost much of the meaning of it. People are diverted from embracing it. This picture I think might have been better in black and white than in color.

Riess: It is captioned, "Albanian women mourning a fallen youth resonates with the power of classical painting."

Miller: This picture has been reproduced--well, versions of this picture, not the same picture. The Greeks are great for it, and the Italians. When someone dies, they throw themselves on the coffin, or they throw themselves on the gravestone or the body. Gene Smith has done it several times. This is exceptionally nice, there's no question about it.

Riess: I'm getting from this conversation a sense of how hard you were on yourself over the years.

Miller: I think that's true, in that I had great difficulty being happy with anything that I did, and being satisfied. Also I think that it may be a measure of the ego that I have, and the pictures don't go with the ego. [laughs]

Riess: It sounds like there's an incredibly fine line between the right-on picture and the cliche.

Miller: Right. I think that's why *The Family of Man* exhibition was so good. Steichen pulled back just a spit from the cliche, or from the saccharine, or being overdone. Of course it has to be judged in light of the tenor of the mass feelings at that time rather than today. Because I think

that then it was exceptionally successful. I agree with you, that picture of Eugene Smith's, the two children walking out from underneath the bushes, that's about as corny as you can get, but it isn't quite corny. It's very good.

Riess: This is a remarkable picture, for other reasons, for pictorial reasons. [*New York Times* December 11, 2001]

Miller: The caption says, "a mother and her ten day-old girl in a refugee camp." Now where is the mother and where is the girl?

Riess: There's the baby's face, and there is the mother.

Miller: Oh! Way down in there! Maybe it's not photographed well enough. I'd like to see a greater emphasis on--I can't tell it's a mother. I see a little baby's face way down there. But I don't see it. If all of this was dark, and that became the bright spot in the picture, then I could see it. But here's a case when color is--it's a fantastic setting and all, no question about it, it's just unbelievable somehow.

Riess: As a photographer, you'd have wanted to move closer in.

Miller: Yes, I'd like to. But then you'd lose this whole big thing, which is I guess water-proofing over the mud house. I don't know if that would emphasize it some, getting rid of some of that. Now that you've pointed it out, I can see it very well. But that mother you talk about, to me could be just a week's laundry. [laughs] I know what you're saying, but talking as a photographer, it doesn't say it to me.[19]

The Idea of *The Family of Man*

Riess: Let's talk about *The Family of Man's* view of the world of humankind.

Miller: Well, I think that Steichen had a keen appreciation, probably a Walt Whitman-like appreciation of the dignity and the heroic qualities of mankind. And let's remember that Steichen began it in his mind in '51, '52. This is after the war when there was a desire in his mind, I think, and I think the subsequent acceptance by the general public--they wanted a sense of security, a sense of knowing that things are going to be all right. And that down deep there is something in all of us that is going to make it all right. We all share common hopes, loves, and even some hate and frustrations, but we're among friends in this world. That is a quality that I feel September 11 has ruptured, that sense of security.

I think it's only temporary, because it'll repair itself. And we'll go on again, and those same qualities that we had in *The Family of Man* prevail today. I don't see any difference in the world, as far as the overlay of *The Family of Man*. We can, maybe, question today some of the premises that Steichen had that he made the world, maybe, seem a little too good. I think today we realize that the world is not that stable, and perhaps one of the reasons for it is that

19. End Insert from Interview 7.

today we have a greater sense of communication and faster knowledge about what is going on. In any one evening, a newscast, we can see and hear about violence and frustrations in a dozen different places in the world. In the early fifties maybe we could come up with one, maybe two of those things.

Today it's commonplace to feel that instability is almost becoming the norm. How that relates to *The Family of Man*, I don't know. Except I believe that going back to Steichen's premise down deep we all want stability, we all want love, and to have family to take care of each other. I don't see much difference, really, in the application of *The Family of Man* concept as we did it in the fifties as it might relate now to 2001.

Riess: What bank of photographs of the Muslim third of the world could you go to in the fifties?

Miller: My guess is *National Geographic*, because I don't know of any source, *per se*, other than looking through the files of photo agencies and what not, like we did, and looking for that sort of thing. But we weren't focusing on that, we weren't sensitive to it, so it wouldn't have been photographed to any degree. The Muslim world is a very dignified world and a fine world, but we were not talking about that. We were not talking about September 11 or about aberrant practices.

I guess it goes back to--you wouldn't call them tribal, but religious wars in India. They had those when I was a child. They had fantastic things there where they killed all Christians, you know, just anybody. But source of photographs, I just don't know.

Riess: You've said some of the early meetings to plan *The Family of Man* took place here?

Miller: Yes. Backing off a bit, Steichen made a trip to Europe, I think, in '51 and '52. And I guess Robert Frank went with him as an interpreter as well as a guide. Steichen was trying to understand whether or not enough photographs might exist to accomplish this concept he had in mind. He made many good contacts on those trips. Then when he decided that it was worth pursuing further, he did come out here to Orinda and spent time with Joan and me, talking about the concept.

And also he had arranged for Joan to talk to Dorothea Lange, to get Dorothea, together with Joan and Christina Page, to put together a gathering here at this home, my home. Fifty or sixty people showed up, photographers, leading photographers that were available at that time to gather here. Steichen wanted to explain to them what he had in mind and to ask their help in supplying pictures, photographs for this exhibition. His way of operating is to throw ideas out and get reactions from people. When he was talking to a group like this, he was really testing the concepts, always testing.

I must say it was fascinating to listen to him talk to this group. These people included everybody like Imogen Cunningham, and I don't know, a whole list of photographers. And he talked to them in our hallway down below, saying he wanted pictures that showed the deeper feelings of the human being, love, frustrations, striving, hate, and so forth, longing. He went on talking this way and I could see these photographers' eyes glaze over, because as they heard him they were wondering where did they have any photographs that they'd made that showed these things. And I can't help but believe that they were thinking, "I don't have any pictures like that," and what the devil is this guy talking about.

Actually, as a result of that meeting out here, Dorothea Lange continued to try to gather photographs from this group to send to us in New York when we finally had started on this. I don't think we received many pictures at all. Dorothea seemed--as I recall she felt that she had sent in quite a few, but I don't remember them coming in.[20] From that particular group that were here, I don't remember more than a couple of pictures ultimately in *The Family of Man* exhibition that came from this group.

Gathering and Choosing the Photographs

Riess: These were supposed to be stock pictures; they weren't supposed to go out and shoot, correct?

Miller: Well, Dorothea was encouraging people to go out and shoot. But we never asked people to make a picture. No pictures that I know of were made after Steichen requested pictures. I don't know of anybody who made pictures and sent them in. The pictures we used in the exhibition, they were all pictures that been previously made. Because he was interested in showing how the art of photography could say something that couldn't be said any other way, to talk about mankind. That was one of his major themes.

Riess: The people you gathered here were doing abstractions or architectural photography or what?

Miller: You make a good point, because these people were not a good group to expect pictures from. Their subject matter was not Steichen's *Family of Man* subject matter, by and large. They were interested in "scapes," landscapes and that sort of thing, seascapes, and advertising, some magazine illustration, but not documentary. Dorothea Lange was the only documentary photographer in the group.

Riess: Who were the photojournalists out here? You and who else?

Miller: Well, right after the war, the magazines using photojournalism, their offices were in New York. We had a couple of offices out here. *Time-Life* had an office, *Collier's* magazine had an office. Pierre Salinger, he was out here working for *Collier's*. And that's about it, I think. I think maybe *Look* had a partial office, I don't know. But practically speaking, photography in the Bay Area was built around food. It was Del Monte and others out here. And architecture. *Sunset* magazine was big in the photography world as far as use of photographers and having us being able to get assignments. The other magazines, very few assignments for photographers. As a result, we hadn't yet developed a group of photojournalists.

Riess: And Farm Security, did you say you had access to those photographs?

Miller: Yes, well we knew of those things, we knew those pictures. But that sort of thing, you can only use a few of them to have them fall in where they might be.

Riess: Ansel Adams, did he come to the meeting here?

20.See Dorothea Lange, *The Making of a Documentary Photographer*, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, 1968.

Miller: No, he did not come to this meeting. Minor White came.

Riess: Robert Frank was not based out here, was he?

Miller: No, he was in New York.

Riess: How did Steichen convince you to come back to New York?

Miller: Well, during the trip he made out here for that meeting he asked me if I'd be interested in working with him on this. And I thought that this was the most marvelous opportunity in the world because this is my subject, my subject matter. In effect my approach to the subject matter I had practiced during World War II. And then after the war at the Institute of Design in Chicago. I was telling you how in effect I taught this concept, about human emotion, the way we express it photographically and in everyday life. So I was primed for it. I had been out here four years, I had been working with *Life* magazine, and I guess I was ready for a change. I was not unhappy to leave what I was doing.

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Miller: We packed up our four children, rented this house, then moved to an apartment on 101st and Riverside in New York City.

Riess: From the outset, you were the team, you and Steichen?

Miller: Just the two of us, yes. Later we added an architect to design the show. That was Paul Rudolph. And we had another man, I can't remember his name, who was a model maker, so he could build a model to scale of our exhibit space and we could hang the show in miniature to get an idea of scale of the images, and traffic patterns and that sort of thing. And from the very beginning we had one or two young women helping us as far as cataloguing the material, coming in and pinning up the material on these little 4'x4' and 4'x8' Homosote panels [fibreboard panels] just so we could look at them.

Riess: It sounds like a really huge job. How did the two of you back off and get feedback about whether you were going in the right direction? Was there any question in one's mind?

Miller: That was a continuous worry on Steichen's part. He encouraged some people to come to our work space and look at what were doing. He was very interested in their reactions. One young man, young guy, was a curator of anthropology, I guess, at the Metropolitan Museum. And Steichen was interested in Dorothea. She came there several times. They could talk to one another straight. She certainly, in a manner of speaking, loved Steichen, and he had the highest respect for her and he was very interested in her reactions.

Riess: Did the anthropologist have a smart response to it?

Miller: Well, I don't remember in specific. But whatever he said, I'm sure Steichen listened to carefully. I remember the anthropologist came up there with his wife and a small child and sat there for some time.

Steichen was interested, always, in talking about it. We talked about it constantly during the day. We'd question the picture. "What does this picture really say?" "Is it meaningful, or is it

just interesting?" "What is its value?" Then at the end of the day, during the week, we'd leave this loft which was over between Fifth and Sixth in New York City--we didn't leave there until seven or eight o'clock at night--and go have some dinner and he'd go with us and spend the night with us in our apartment.

Riess: That sounds awkward.

Miller: Awkward? It wasn't awkward, but after a while it began to be such a cloying quality, you just wanted to go take a shower and wash it all off of you. Because it was so intense. And then on weekends we'd go with him to his home in Connecticut.

We were always questioning these different aspects of it. "Was this important?" or "Is that important?" It was pretty heavy-duty.

Riess: What were the ambitions for the exhibition? You were going to change people's perceptions of the family of man?

Miller: I don't think we ever talked about that.

Riess: But it was more than just a show at the museum, right?

Miller: That's correct. In fact, Steichen was ready to pull the plug on this at any time if he felt it wasn't going to work. He was really quite down deep worried that he may be just kidding himself. He didn't know if this was really going to communicate, or make contact with the viewer. I remember the day before the opening he was just really very, very worried. "Are people going to get this or are they just going to laugh at it?"

He was selecting photographs and relating them one to another in sequences which could be--well, if he had pushed a little bit further it would have been maudlin, it would have been saccharine. But he pulled back from that. And I think that was masterful, to be able to knowingly do that. I remember the look on his face, and I have a photograph that somebody made at that time, during the opening of the exhibit in New York City. And his face is just so open, he was just so pleased because the reception was much greater than he had ever hoped for.

Riess: The critical reception?

Miller: The critical reception was very good. The immediate critical reception was very good, the press. After a few months some negative criticisms started to pop up. And I must say that from my unsophisticated point of view, they were not meaningful. Because these were people--the critics, in my mind, were not the common man. They were outside of it looking down their noses at this approach to communication, and taking cheap shots at it.

Now I'm sure some of it was merited, but my god, the public reception was so great that I think it just swamped those other points of view. I never talked to Steichen about these critical reviews. I know some reviewers years later missed the point, they didn't put it into context as far as the times, the political times and the emotional times. It's easy to take something out of context and to find fault with it.

Legitimizing the Snapshot

Riess: One of the articles I read said it was the first major black and white photographic exhibit produced in the mid-twentieth century. "It endowed documentary photography as a legitimate journalistic, commercial, and artistic visual form. It was the forerunner of essays and books like 'A day in the life of, etc.' that document people, their lives, and how they pursue them."

Miller: I think that's valid. Up until that time these photographs had been considered snapshots, and you couldn't even get in the back door of a museum with snapshots. It was the first recognition of documentary photography by a leading museum. And that was only possible because of the faith and recognition of the director of the Museum of Modern Art, René d'Harnoncourt, and also of the approval within the museum by this fine man in charge of painting--his name slips my mind. But his acceptance of this made it respectable, or acceptable. And, of course, the support by Nelson Rockefeller and the Rockefeller money didn't hurt, because he put up the money for the exhibition.

Riess: Did Steichen go to him?

Miller: I don't know how that came about. But Steichen knew Nelson Rockefeller, and it may have been through René d'Harnoncourt, I don't know.

Also it's worth noting that up until this point in time the advertising world had ignored this kind of photography. And after *The Family of Man*, almost overnight they began using this informal kind of photography, these snapshots, and it's continued until today. Up until that time it was a very stilted, almost a German school of photography that was used in advertising.

Riess: Snapshots is really how you would characterize it?

Miller: That's what these critics called them, snapshots. Because we had pictures in the exhibit that came out of family photo albums, and they were snapshots.

Riess: And who found them?

Miller: They came in over the transom--I mean they were sent to us by mail. We literally had mail bags that stood at least three feet high and eighteen inches across that came filled with submissions from all over the world. We had a couple of those every day for months.

Riess: They were responding to ads?

Miller: Well, to stories that Steichen had, interviews and what not. And requests by the museum for material for this work. It's amazing how they came in. I have an envelope from an early submission that came from Austria, I guess it was. And it was decorated with postage stamps, plastered willy-nilly all over the outside of this envelope. Somebody evidently felt very strong and lovingly about their submission so they really decorated it well before they sent it in. I have that in my collection, I had to hang on to that. So they were literally snapshots. I'm not applying that to all the pictures, because many of them were fine photographs. But this was a representation by more than a select group of professionals. These pictures came from families from all parts of the world, and from all levels of understanding.

Riess: What did you do with the rejected family photographs?

Miller: They were all returned.

Riess: You said you had a registrar.

Miller: I'm trying to remember the name of this one woman--Kathleen Haven. She was a fine artist in her own right, and she was the number one worker for us. Then we had other women who came in and worked with her handling paperwork and helping us send the photographs. Joan did secretarial work for Steichen while she was there, and eventually she left Steichen's Museum of Modern Art office and came over and worked with us in the selection of the final show.

The Millers, and Steichen

Miller: That was another thing. Joan provided another quality that was important to Steichen. She provided a family glue that was important to him. Because when I was with him, Joan was quite close by. If not working on the job, in our apartment or on weekends. And Steichen enjoyed young women. The best way I can describe it, he enjoyed that sense of fertility and richness of raising, having children. He loved being with our children, and Joan became a kind of an earth goddess to him. That created an ambience that is important in this thing. I have photographs made during this period of Steichen relating to our children and to Joan. It gave him another comfort.

Riess: She was used to also make some decisions.

Miller: Definitely.

When we had gathered together a working collection of about 10,000 photographs then we started putting together a show. We finally got it down to about 1,000 photographs, and Steichen said this is much too many, we've got to get it down further. He thought about 400 would probably be about right, that a museum audience couldn't look at more than that. So we worked very hard and finally got it down to about 750. But we felt that we just couldn't drop any of these pictures, because by this time each of these pictures had become members of the family, we felt very close to them and couldn't imagine dropping any of them.

He said we have to go further and drop some of these. I remember he said, "Let's do it this way. Joan, you look at these panels that have to do with lovers, and pregnancy, and motherhood, birth and motherhood, and that sort of thing, mother-child relationships, and you make the decision on which we should drop. And Wayne, you take care of this other area, young men, workers, and so forth." He said, "I'll take care of the rest of it."

Well, that was a great idea, made good sense, and we worked very hard for probably twenty-four hours on this level before we were all back in it together.

Riess: Then would he second guess you?

Miller: Each of us would second-guess the other. We'd all be back together and he would say, "Well, you can't take that one out." We struggled. And you realized that in a practical sense you have to make decisions. So we dropped many fine photographs, no question. But this was not an exhibit of fine photographs. This was an exhibit of a concept, a display of "how photography, as an art form, could express qualities of mankind." So the pictures we used were not necessarily the finest photographs.

Riess: They were sharp? They were good in black and white?

Miller: No, not necessarily. But they might work against another picture to say something that one picture could not, alone. And it helped--some of these pictures were used as connecting links to the next theme.

Riess: In the last cut might you wish to apply a judgement that went to more aesthetic issues? Where did the aesthetic enter in the decision-making?

Miller: The aesthetics took care of themselves, in that to be a picture that's really meaningful the aesthetics are there, the composition is there. You don't have to worry about that. I remember a statement Steichen made at one time. He said, "There's not much you can do to hurt a good picture. There's not much you can do to help a bad one." I'm talking about in the way of printing it, cropping it, and so forth. So a good picture works. And it has the composition, it has the aesthetics, they all go with it. And it's able to stand alone.

Paul Rudolph, Designing the Exhibition

Riess: You talk about one picture leading to the next, as if there is a verbal statement that underlies the whole thing. What about the text, the little divisions and themes, did they get tweaked a lot?

Miller: Oh, yes, continuously. I think it's fair to say that the pictures made the exhibition. They, in effect, selected themselves. And the categories we ended up with were really selected by the pictures.

It wasn't a case of starting out with a list of categories and finding the pictures to illustrate them, that wasn't the case at all. We gathered these photographs together and started putting those pictures that were related to one another in different categories. And if we found in some cases these categories didn't make sense, we'd break it up. A very crude example is that one time we had a category of laughing faces, and another of crying faces pictures. And I remember coming in one morning and looking at them, and I thought, "My god, this is asinine. The two panels look alike!" Crying pictures and laughing pictures, they both looked alike. And also, laughing and crying are part of life, not separate from it. So we moved those things to where they more appropriately fit in.

Riess: Decisions about what size to print, was that ongoing, or was that the final decision? They're all different sizes, aren't they?

Miller: Yes, that was a decision made by Steichen together with Paul Rudolph, the architect. Paul, I don't know if he was at the time, but he became eventually head of the architecture school at Yale.

It was fascinating dealing with Paul. He was a very young man, schooled in architecture, and his first efforts, the sketches he made, looked like a clothesline. He hung these things on a clothesline, that was his way of exhibiting the pictures. I remember Steichen's real wonderment about that, and he met with Paul and talked with him about these things, and Paul went back to the drawing board and came back with another treatment. This one was juxtaposing pictures by color--I'm talking about the amount of blacks in one group, the number of whites in another. And it completely missed the point. So Steichen had to go back and wrestle more with Paul. He spent a lot of time working with Paul on this, because Paul was not thinking about what was in the picture, he was thinking about the picture as a graphic thing itself, devoid of subject matter. So size and all was a joint effort. I think probably 99 percent Steichen and one percent Paul. But Paul did a fine job. When he finally got the swing of it all, it worked fine.

Riess: Was Steichen influenced by that graphic, aesthetic take?

Miller: I think so. I don't remember how it came about--the display of the family pictures, family groups we had, they were quite large, and they were hung from the ceiling. And they were in a group, in the center of the exhibition--separate panels hanging, and different juxtapositions. So no matter where you stood, you could see more than one family. This really worked very, very well.

And it was interesting, during the exhibition itself I became aware that in front of an Asian group, Asian spectators were standing. And in front of the Middle Western family group, Middle Westerners were standing there looking at themselves. It was fascinating. I imagine that Paul had something to do with that hanging, because that was the core, you see. This is the family, this is the core of the exhibition. And you had to walk around this to see the other things.

Paul also, from a design point of view, used some white quartz rock, small pebbles, along the edges of the walls in some cases, primarily in the center area where the family was and under the family presentation he had also this gravel there.

Riess: So that you walked on it?

Miller: Well, it was not intended for walking on it. It had a little block around the edges, and a little area filled in inside of it. I remember at the opening of the exhibition I was standing at one side with Paul. We were watching the people move through it. It was quite jammed. He said, "You know, I never visualized this with people in it." [laughter] And as a result, we found that people were walking on this gravel, and it was getting kicked around, so we got the gravel out of there. I think the gravel remained under the family pictures, but it didn't work the way--it looked beautiful, it just was exquisite, but it didn't quite make it.

Riess: Off tape you talked about the Gene Smith image of the children on the sunlit path. Would you tell me about that on tape.

Miller: The last picture we had in the exhibition was Gene Smith's quite famous picture now called "A Walk in Paradise Garden," or something of that nature. And, it shows his children, the backs of them, walking out from what could be a cave, walking out into the sunlight. Anyway, they're surrounded by foliage. It's a very lovely picture.[21]

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21. Story continues p. 128.

[Interview 6: October 24, 2001]##

Photography in Museums

Riess: Let's talk briefly about demise of the Friends of Photography and the Ansel Adams Center [October 2001] and about photography museums and photography in museums.

Miller: I'm ill-equipped to talk about that sort of thing, Suzanne. I've sort of shied away from any effort to be shown in museums. I mean, I just don't pursue that. Once in a while if I'm asked to do it, and it's convenient, I'll do it. But I don't seek it out. Now, that doesn't mean that it isn't important, it's just that for me, I don't feel that need somehow. It's not a lack of respect, I don't think, but a lack of interest, maybe. I just can't explain it, I never thought about it, really. It might be that I enjoy the making of the picture rather than the seeing of it.

Riess: You go to the exhibitions, the openings at the San Francisco Museum, the Oakland Museum? Is it showing the flag or something?

Miller: It's showing the flag more than anything else. It's going to see the people who show up.

Riess: You have a closer relationship with the Oakland Museum than the San Francisco Museum, don't you?

Miller: No, not necessarily, no. I don't know what you mean by that. I'm closer physically to the Oakland Museum than San Francisco, but as far as the curator goes, I only know the man in Oakland, Drew Johnson, casually. Sandra Phillips in San Francisco, I know her personally. I understand Sandra better than I do Drew Johnson.

Riess: What do you mean "understand?"

Miller: Her involvement with photography and concerns for aspects of it I'm more understanding of than I am Drew Johnson's. I'm not knowledgeable about, or I don't feel close to his treatment of photography. I don't feel he has as pointed a direction in photography as does Sandra, so it's just hard to know. But I don't have as close a relationship as I might with either of them.

A relationship with someone of that nature can be social. And I can certainly enjoy that with Sandra, and I have enjoyed it with her and have great respect for her. But that's about it. I haven't worked with either of them in the preparation of an exhibit, exhibits, or in any aspect of things. I have been with Sandra a couple of times in this [SFMoma] photographic auxiliary, I guess you'd call it, called the Foto Forum, I've attended a couple of those. In fact I gave a presentation before Foto Forum. They're a group of people who are supportive of the photography department at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. They're collectors,

many of them, and others are just aficionados or concerned with photography. And they help support the department by making either gifts of money or photographs that may be of interest to Sandra.

Riess: There are so many approaches to this business. I shouldn't assume that the goal for a photographer is to be shown at a museum, that that is the highest point?

Miller: The highest? To know I've done a good job, that's the highest point I can reach. Whether it be in a magazine or a show.

You know, it's a funny thing, I may be embarrassing myself, but many people who show up at these exhibitions I don't think really look at the pictures. They make all these remarks about, "This is great, that is great," and I don't have much respect for them. I feel kind of embarrassed, and maybe even a little dirty, by having those people pawing over my images and making remarks about how they like this or how they like that when in some cases I can't help but doubt their sincerity, or the words they use. I just don't feel comfortable. Some of these exhibitions, the same people show up at these different exhibitions, and I don't know if they particularly like the pictures or if they like the fact that the room is warm, I don't know. I don't have as much respect for some museumgoers as I might.

Riess: One of the comments in the article about closing the Ansel Adams Center was from Jeffrey Frankel. He says, "When the Friends of Photography was founded thirty-five years ago, photography needed friends. Now that photography has entered the mainstream, the pressing need of such an organization is not as great as it was then."

Miller: I'm sure that's true. Especially at the beginning. Because museums turned their backs on photography, the Museum of Modern Art, for example. When they got involved with *The Family of Man* exhibition, as I understand it there was a struggle for Steichen to get this concept accepted or supported by the Museum of Modern Art. Because so much of that group in the museum didn't consider photography worth--it should not be "contaminating" art by being shown in the same building. The idea of giving it this kind of a platform was unprecedented. It was only because I think René d'Harnoncourt and Nelson Rockefeller supported it. And for photography to come into a museum, that is in the front door rather than the back door, that was most unusual, that kind of acceptance.

The Ansel Adams Center was a good example of that, where he provided the platform to make it acceptable.

Riess: Down there in Carmel.

Miller: Yes. And he was a big booster of photography as an art form. Not photojournalism, which he couldn't stand. But fine art, yes. So he was straddling that transition to museum acceptance, and he was able to handle that by the way he treated his photographs, and the respect and dignity he gave them. Others, of course, that came along at the same time, Weston and others, provided this respectability or a status that photography hadn't had. So this was a period where--early photography, early images were imitating paintings, and little by little they started moving away from that and became the photographs we know today.

But, as far as Ansel's, I don't know, I think it was a tough job. I think the Ansel Adams Center was a creature of its time, and when it began to compete with other platforms for viewing

images, then it got in trouble. Also I understand they had some managerial or personality problems there that probably contributed to it. But that's too bad that that happened. I think the people who were trying to make money out of Adams's heritage--that probably contributed to its demise.

Riess: If you're going to have galleries you have to be creating a market, you have to be creating collectors. It's not like a museum, where you go and wander around. It's a shop.

Miller: Well, your gallery begins to pander to the client, and it's a lost cause when you do that. Because you're always trying to excite the clients, and I think that's an impossible business to be in. As you know, there are so many exhibits today, I think the curators are competing with other curators. So, it's a tough business.

Shirley Burden

Riess: You have a friend, Shirley Burden, who's a photography collector. Maybe that's a way to approach this matter of museums and collectors and so on.

Miller: Yes. Shirley was an exceptional man. He was very concerned with photography. I remember having lunch with him one day at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and he was about forty-three then--I don't know why I remember his age--and he said that he wanted to become a photographer, and he didn't know how to do it. I think I probably said, "Just go out and take pictures."

He had this strong feeling of wanting to be involved in photography, and he spent time photographing Lourdes, in France. It was because his wife was a Catholic. I don't remember why she was especially involved with Lourdes, but he became Catholic because he loved Flo-Bee. Her name was Florence, I guess, Flo-Bee. He just adored her, so he took up Catholicism and spent time at Lourdes making photographs. I think he did about two different books on Lourdes, sensitive, lovely books. And this commitment of his was really quite loving. I think it represented a desire on his part to be involved in something that was his. He came from a very wealthy background, and I think it was--who was the old commodore in the years?

Riess: Vanderbilt?

Miller: Vanderbilt. He did a photo essay on the settling of an estate of a Vanderbilt. He shows his mother or aunt at the docks at Le Havre in France waiting there to board the ship together with all the documents she had gathered in France to come back to New York. Then he also photographs in the vaults of a bank in New York: a man, an employee of the bank obviously, dressed in a cut-away kind of suit, is pulling a little cart that's heaped with documents, bonds, I guess, and securities. He goes through this story in a series of photographs, and it was such a personal thing, I asked him, "Are you going to be able to publish this?" He said, "I don't think so." But he wanted to, because this was the settlement of an estate of I forget how many millions of dollars. And he felt, and he expressed it to me, that he was kind of the bottom of the line, and these people were dying off, and all the money was coming to him. Millions and millions of dollars.

He was a very good businessman. I could tell you some of the funny little stories about him. His brother Bill, older brother, was very much a businessman. He became president of the Museum of Modern Art. And I was told that Shirley was a better businessman than Bill but he kind of gave it up. He wanted to do other things. I remember one time he told me that--he apologized for being late for a meeting. He sold some real estate in New Jersey, I think it was Trenton, New Jersey or something. And it came out that it was twenty-three acres of downtown Trenton he had just sold!

He was charming all the way along. He expressed the desire to finance an institution just for photography. And he wanted to have it do this and do that. I listened to it, this great enthusiasm he had, and I said, "Do you have someone in mind to handle this, put it together?" "No," he said, "I just have this idea." I just felt that was maybe not the best way to go about it and I said, "Shirley, I think you ought to figure out who you want to have run this before you start putting it together." Nothing ever happened as a result of it. But he did have that desire to participate in any way he could. In fact, he was the angel behind *Aperture* magazine as I understand it. So, he was involved.

One time talking with him he said, "Wayne, what would you like to do in photography? Do you have any ideas of some story you'd like to do?" And I said, "Yes, I'd like to do a story of the Hudson River Valley. Just go from the very top where the waters first start gathering to make the river, and ending up down below New York City." About twenty years later the phone rings and there's Shirley on the phone. He said, "Wayne, that story you wanted to do on the Hudson River, I'd like to have you do it for *Aperture.*" I said, "Shirley, I did it that about ten years ago for *National Geographic*." Anyway, he had remembered that and he had pursued it.

There are so many nice little stories about Shirley. He had his home, apartment, in New York City, 72nd Street between Park and Lexington, I think it was. Or between Fifth Avenue and Lexington. The apartment was two stories. They had created an access from one story to another by putting a staircase inside going up through the ceiling. It was very lovely. Also he had a darkroom in the basement, and I printed much of my book *The World is Young* in his darkroom. I worked with the publisher to learn, among other things, what quality print would be best for the reproduction, the printing of the book. And I learned that they wanted a flat--in my mind muddy--print in order to match the printing press capabilities. The prints I had in hand were too snappy for that printing press, so I had to reprint them, and I reprinted them in Shirley's darkroom. In fact, I have some of those early prints that were sent to the printer, I have some of them here, and they look really muddy, really terrible. But it was for a reason.

He was such a sweet, charming man. Dorothea Lange may have told you about going to a wedding of one of his children or grandchildren in Beverly Hills. She talked about how magnificent it was. It was built in the slope of a hill. And they had this large swimming pool there, and down below it had a second swimming pool. It was grand beyond belief and she enjoyed being able to say that in order to find a proper gown to wear to this she went to the Salvation Army or some place, a thrift shop, and bought the gown that she wore to this wedding! And I'm sure she looked grand in it. She liked Shirley a great deal.

Riess: You said Shirley Burden founded *Aperture* with Minor White?

Miller: I don't know about the founding of it, I just think he funded it. He wasn't interested in his name being on things as much as seeing them take place.

Another little thing about Shirley. Again, I was having lunch at the Museum of Modern Art, at the restaurant up there with Shirley and with Robert Frank. Robert was saying he had just been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, and how pleased he was with it and all this money. He said he was going to be able to take off and do all kinds of things. And it came out that--Robert said he had gotten $10,000. Shirley said, "My god, I can't move out of New York City to go to my home in California for $10,000!" [laughter]

Darkrooms and Papers and So On

Riess: This printing in his darkroom, aren't darkrooms very personal? Wouldn't it be difficult to find your way around someone else's darkroom?

Miller: No. It's strange, of course, but I think that within minutes you can locate yourself and adjust yourself. A darkroom is a darkroom, it's not anything special. It is personalized, but it's--at least I can adjust without any trouble at all. I'm sure everybody else can do the same way.

Riess: So, is that a kind of courtesy thing among photographers? Robert Frank printed out here in your darkroom, didn't he?

Miller: He didn't print. Much of his Guggenheim work on *The Americans* he developed in my darkroom, just the negatives. And he edited them. Interestingly, he edited them by holding the negatives up and looking at the images and then took a pair of scissors and cut out those that he wanted to save and he discarded the rest without making any contact prints. I thought it was quite courageous to do that. But he made his decisions and just went on.

Riess: And these were 35mm negatives? I mean, it's so clumsy to deal with these little things.

Miller: Well, not really. *Life* magazine up until, I believe, close to the end of the war did not make contact prints, as I recall. The picture editor would look at the negatives and make a half-circle punch on the edge of the 35mm negatives, so that the fellows in the darkroom could run their hands along them and find which one was to be printed. He read the negatives and in effect edited them in that form.

Riess: I thought you were saying that Robert Frank actually cut them up.

Miller: Well, he separated them so he ended up with a bunch of separate little pieces. But he--some of them were strips and some were--as I recall, that's the way it was. I know he ended up with an awful lot of scrap negatives there, but I don't remember the ones he saved, whether they were separate frames or whether they were strips, I don't know. He threw an awful lot of it away.

Riess: How did you maintain your darkroom? Did you buy your chemicals locally, and your papers and all that?

Miller: I just went down to the local camera supply store, really, a professional store. In Chicago I did that. And I'd buy my chemicals. My hypo for fixing the film and the paper, I used to buy that in fifty pound bags, and I'd buy a gallon of acetic acid and other to mix with it. But no, I never was a chemist. I used the standard packaged developers. Some photographers love the

chemistry aspect of it, and that's one of the nice things about photography, that there are so many variable ways to enjoy it. The chemistry of the darkroom, that's where Ansel Adams was a wizard. And others like equipment, they have to have all this special equipment. There are so many ways to enjoy photography. Others just enjoy the print. Some enjoy all of it. So, there's a place for everybody in the field of photography.

Riess: Did you experiment with selenium toning and stuff?

Miller: No, I never did that. I should have, I guess, because it seemed to preserve the print, give it longer life than it might otherwise have. And there are special washers you can buy for black and white, for your prints. It gives them an archival quality and so forth. But you know what, recently I've been digging out prints that I made back in the late '40s, and they're of subject matter that I've been reprinting for my exhibitions now in the year 2000, and the prints look almost the same. The quality held up, and is consistent. I don't know how much better they would be today, those older prints, if they had gone through a selenium toning. I'm sure they would be different, but practically speaking, the old ones held up pretty well.

Riess: And papers, did you fix on papers that you preferred early?

Miller: Yes, I certainly did. In Chicago--that was back in the late '40s when I was working on this Guggenheim and also free-lance work--I had a nice little darkroom in the basement of my home that used to be a coal-bin. I got rid of the coal-bin and cleaned it up and we turned our furnace over to gas. So that became my darkroom.

The paper I used--I was skimping along, didn't have much money, gosh, we had three kids at that time and I worked as hard as I could at so many different jobs in order to get along. And *Life* magazine in Chicago had a darkroom, and Bob Johnson who ran it, a very good printer and all, we became good friends because I worked out of that *Life* office as well. And once the paper approached expiration date, Bob Johnson would throw the paper out. So that's what I had. I printed all my work on out-of-date *Life* magazine photographic paper. Johnson said, "Gee," he wondered what I did to get such good quality prints. And I said, "Well, out-of-date paper does it." [laughter]

Riess: And were these graded papers?

Miller: No, these were standard Eastman papers.

Riess: I mean, they were not a contrast paper?

Miller: Oh, pardon me, they were graded papers, one, two, three, and four.

Riess: So that made a difference. You paid attention to that.

Miller: Oh yes, certainly, you have to. But we didn't have polycontrast; polycontrast meant that one paper with filters would give you different grades. But part of that time we just had the graded, as you called it, the graded papers.

Riess: And then the resin-coated papers came along?

Miller: I guess so. I don't even know what resin-coated papers are. You mean, the ones that are kind of plastic? That's recent, very recent.

Riess: When you were working on a job for *Life* you submitted the contact sheet, didn't you? Or the print?

Miller: Well, both. It depends on the timeliness of the subject. Several times I did the assignment, returned to my home, went to the basement, developed the film, made prints and with the wet prints, riding in the back of a taxicab--I laid them out on the seats so they'd dry by the time I delivered them.

Riess: Did you have darkroom disasters? Or do only amateurs have disasters?

Miller: Well, I don't remember disasters. No, I don't think so.

Riess: Did you use the darkroom to make up for exposure disasters? Or does a professional not have these disasters?

Miller: Oh, you have disasters. Maybe a true professional is able to forget those things very quickly.

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Miller: I've had disasters, not in the darkroom as much. But, I do remember more than once finding in my 35mm camera that I had not hooked the film up to the take-up spool. I thought I had film going through the camera, but it hadn't been, I hadn't made any photographs. That happened once or twice or more. But disasters, why I don't really remember any of those.

Riess: Perhaps in this day and age, "disaster" is not the word to use.

Miller: Or where you've blown it. I have had problems where I'd get on a job where my flash equipment was not functioning due to a bad cord of some sort. And a couple of times when I was using strobes would--early strobes would drive us up the wall because they would short out and they would start flashing the lights without your touching anything. But, not really, no problems.

Riess: Darkroom expertise, is that something you like to help students with?

Miller: Not really, and I must say that kids today--I've had some show up and I'd like to have them do some darkroom work for me and they get so interested in the chemistry. They call it "chemistry," and that was kind of a new term for me, but I kind of like the term now, it makes good sense. But they are so involved with the details of making prints and all that, it becomes an end in itself and I must say, the final results aren't very good. The straight print is pretty good, rather than fiddling around, "being creative," in quotes, in the darkroom.

Riess: It seems that one of the things about being a photographer is you can't do it in isolation. It's a fairly social undertaking. A lot of conversations with people, a lot of business with people.

Miller: Well, it is, it is. Sometimes your conversations about ideas bear fruit, and sometimes they don't. I told you about talking to *Life* magazine about wanting to do a picture story on the farmer's wife. I bring that up because when you talk to people about stories and it finally comes to pass, times have changed, years have passed, your own thoughts about it have changed, and somebody else's involvement has thrown in another variable.

Now, there are other photographers who will have an idea, and they will take it to a magazine or a publisher, or somebody who is going to finance it, to help them on it. And they won't deviate from that. Gene Smith is a fantastically good example of that, where he does his thing. And there are other photographers that do that, where they have this idea firmly in their mind, and they're going to do it, and hands off, everybody. But there are not many sponsors who will go along with you on that sort of thing.

So this isn't an Ansel Adams approach to photography, where you do your own thing. But Ansel also got involved in this sort of thing. He's done commercial things. Napa Valley, for example, he did a big story there, a big essay. And I imagine that some of the images he photographed were not necessarily high on his list that he'd like to photograph. But in order to satisfy some of the interests of the clients, he may have included them. But we're talking about photographers who do their own thing and to hell with the rest of the world, like say a painter, versus some like myself, who use photography as a way of life and to make an income.

Riess: The Guggenheim supports both kinds, I suppose.

Miller: That's correct. The Guggenheim was a good example of pure photography. They didn't say anything about what they wanted. And, in fact, I also kept that concept private from myself. [laughter] I didn't know what I wanted, I just explored the area. Other people who have worked on Guggenheims I think have done the same thing.

Gene Smith's "Paradise Garden"

Riess: About Gene Smith, can I ask you to repeat the story that I lost last time about asking Gene Smith for a print of that image in *The Family of Man?*

Miller: Oh yes. In *The Family of Man*, after we had made our final selections of what pictures we wanted to have in the exhibition we asked some local photographers if they'd like to make the print for us, or would they give us the negative and we'll have the print made by Compo Photocolor in New York. Actually we wanted Compo Photocolor to make all of them so the prints would have a commonality and they would match the other prints quality-wise. And they were very good technicians.

But in this case, because of Gene--he wanted to make the prints, he didn't feel anybody could make the print as well as he could. And he invariably spent not only hours but days in the darkroom. In fact, in a *Life* story he would disappear in the darkroom and return, and you

almost--here he was seemingly weeks or months afterwards with a beard and other things and with the final prints. And it would drive the *Life* people mad.

In this case we had a print that I'd found in the *Life* morgue of what he [Smith] called "A Walk in Paradise Garden," something like that, of two children walking out from underneath this frame of bushes. A nice picture and we wanted to use it at the end of the exhibition. It was going to be about, maybe 30" x 40".

I told Gene we wanted to do this and asked him if he'd like to make the print, and yes, he certainly wanted to make the print. So I arranged for him to get the necessary paper and chemicals to do this, because his wife Carmen said, "Don't give Gene the money for it because he'll spend it on other things." So after he told me what he wanted I did get the materials for him. And I gave him a deadline, knowing that he was often not able to meet a deadline, of about three weeks early. So he took this material.

Now the print we had that I'd gotten out of the files had been handled a great deal and it had some cracks in it. It was dog-eared, and it wasn't a fine print at this point. So at the same time I gave these materials to Gene I sent the print from the *Life* files over to Compo Photocolor and asked them to make a copy of it, make a negative and make a print to size. Just so we wouldn't get stuck in case he didn't come up with the print. Later, when he did do it, we could always replace it. And sure enough, the deadline came and went and we had to put this copy print up on the wall. Because Gene hadn't shown up with his.

A couple of weeks later Gene shows up with these photographs rolled up under his arm. We went up to the museum exhibition space in the morning because the museum didn't open to the public until noon. And I took this print that we had down off the wall, and he unrolled his prints. He had half a dozen of them there, different qualities, and he laid them out beside this print. I was worried about this because I know how he struggles and works so hard on it. He will darken this or lighten that, and he'll use ferro cyanide to bleach little bits. And the delicacies with which he treats a print are just great, they're very great. So I was interested in seeing how it would work.

He laid his out, and he stood back there and looked at these prints. And he walked around a little bit and looked at them some more. Finally, he said, "You know, I think the print you have on the wall is the best one. Let's use that one." [laughter] So he rolled his up and went along. That I think points out the fact, I believe, that when you make a photograph, a print of a photograph of larger than normal size, it picks up a new quality other than one of maybe an 11"x14" or something. But one like this, maybe 30"x40", it has a new quality to it.

Riess: Weren't you implying that one of the problems he was having was that he was maybe working with two negatives anyway so that he wasn't sure he was getting what he had gotten the first time.

Miller: No, I didn't say that because I don't know that--that this image was made from two negatives. That was a remark that I heard forty years later, that the original negative has never been found.

Riess: For all those images in the show, I would hope you didn't have to do that much handholding.

Miller: Well, it's interesting. In the exhibition we had a panel of three photographs, one above the other. One was an 8"x10" by Edward Weston, and the second was by--gee whiz, a 2 1/4", from a 2 1/4" negative. And the third was a 35mm negative that had been overdeveloped--had to be overdeveloped because it had been shot in room lighting during World War II, of a soldier coming back on leave and having a party there in the room. And these three images, 8"x10", 2 1/4" negative, and then a 35mm mounted one above the other--they all seemed to be of equal quality.

Riess: They were all printed the same size?

Miller: All the same size. There was a difference, of course, but negligible to the viewer. So when you get to a larger size like this it becomes something different.

March 1955, The Show Closes and Wayne Moves On

Riess: Another story we lost, you told me you were asked by René d'Harnoncourt if you wanted a job.

Miller: Well, this was in the spring of 1955. *The Family of Man* exhibition had closed in March of 1955. There was much cleaning up after the exhibition, returning prints and taking care of this and taking care of that. And so I was still in the museum area, maybe in May or June. René d'Harnoncourt, the director of the museum, asked to see me, and I went up to see him. And in the conversation he asked me whether I'd be interested--at this point it was understood that Steichen was going to move on, he had done his thing and he wanted to move on, at least he was planning to--René asked me if I would be interested in staying on and taking on that job as director of the department of photography.

I was complimented, highly complimented, and realized then that I hadn't thought about anything like that. I also realized that I certainly wasn't the man for that job, because if I were to stay on I'd be known just as a poor copy of Edward Steichen, and I couldn't begin to fill his shoes. Also I had other things I wanted to do that I'd been having in my mind. So I very graciously thanked him and then said no. And I must say, it was the same day or the next day Steichen asked me, "Well, what did you say to René?" I told Steichen, I said, "Captain , that job's not for me." I said, "Thank you, but it's not for me."

Riess: "Captain?"

Miller: That's what I called him. That seemed comfortable, rather than "E.J." which is what his contemporaries called him who knew him before the war, people like Grace Mayer at the museum and so on. Captain was his highest ranking. He so wanted to be an admiral, but he didn't make it.

Anyway, "Good," he said I think he was worried that I might have taken it. He was, I think, being protective of me in that case, because a job like that is not just doing a job as director of photography, it's knowing how to swim with those other fish that fill this museum. And they are really a special breed of people.

Riess: Are you talking about the other curators?

Miller: Yes, the other curators. And the politics in a museum like that are just immense. Plus you need the ability to raise money for your own department. I couldn't have handled that, I felt like a fish out of water--using that analogy--in the museum. Because these people, I don't know what it is, they're strange people.

Riess: Had Steichen stopped doing any of his own photography?

Miller: Oh, he hadn't been doing any professional photography. He often made little snapshots, and we have many snapshots here that he made of our family. I think that after the war he didn't make any other photographs.

Riess: Steichen stayed on, didn't he?

Miller: He stayed on until he could find a replacement. And I think the replacement was a very good choice, John Szarkowski, who was not like Steichen in any way. John was an accomplished photographer, but his work was in architecture primarily. And he was an academic in many ways, he looked at photography differently than Steichen, which was great, to have that change. I think that worked out.

On to *The World is Young*

Riess: Was it also that spring that you had your conversation with Jerry Mason?

Miller: Oh, yes. After this exhibition was over and things began to quiet down I began to reflect on what I had seen and what I had experienced in looking for photographs to be considered for the exhibition. And I realized that I didn't find collections or groups of photographs where a photographer spent any real length of time photographing childhood.

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Miller: Margaret Bourke-White, I remember seeing one essay she had done in the *Time-Life* morgue, and it was in a steel file case, a four-drawer steel file case. In fact, there were two of these steel file cases, side by side, filled with 11"x14" prints standing on edge and organized that Margaret Bourke-White had made on one assignment in this small town. And it was a fantastic job. She had been sent there to do a story on education, grammar school education, so she photographed the children, the school, and all. Then she photographed the lives of the teachers. And then the lives of the children, and then the lives of the family, and then the family, what they did, the man at the factory, and the mother at woman's club, or what she did, she photographed them.

And this factory, the large engine this man had worked on, she photographed it, she made pictures from a tripod, 4"x5", walking all the way around this engine. Then she raised the tripod, and looked down on it, and made it all the way around again. And then down low with the same thing. She had done it, she did the hospital, she did the city hall, and the city government. This was an education assignment! The only other person I can think of that

spent any length of time on a subject like that was Dorothea Lange, and of course Dorie spent her time on the farm workers.

But, I didn't find anyone who had spent any length of time on children. So I thought that by golly, I'll do it. I'd like to do it for as long as I can before I can't see it any longer, and can't be effective. I called Jerry Mason, who was the publisher of *The Family of Man* book. I had gotten to know Jerry by this time, charming guy. I said, "Jerry, I'm going to be leaving town in a couple days, and I hope that you might have an opportunity--I hope that we can get together and talk. I've got an idea." He said, "Well, Wayne, I'm leaving town tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, and today I'm just jammed up. In fact, I'm leaving for lunch in about fifteen minutes." And I said, "Where are you going to lunch, Jerry?" He had an office on Fifth Avenue, I think about 47th Street. He said, "I'm going up to Michael's." That, I believe, is on 54th Street.

I said, "Jerry, let me come down and meet you and walk with you up to Michael's, because I've got an idea I'd like to share with you." Which I did, as we walked up Fifth Avenue. I told him about my desires, and that I wanted to work using my own family. We had four children at this time, two boys, two girls, and I wanted to photograph each of them and then their playmates and schoolmates up to puberty. Because they were now from three, four, years old until about ten or twelve. And I said I'd like to have Erik Erikson, the child psychologist who had done that fabulous book called *Childhood and Society*, I'd like to have him write the book. And because he's quite an academic, and sometimes a little hard to read because of that, I'd like to get Ben Spock, who's a more popular writer, to rewrite Erik's words. I said, "I don't know how long it's going to take, but I'd like to work on it until it gets done."

Well, before we got to Michael's, Jerry had offered me a $10,000 guarantee to do it. So, in fact I--in hindsight it was great. I proceeded on it, I went back to California, I got started on this, and I worked for a period of three years on it. And the only reason I quit was because I couldn't see the subject any more, I lost my sensitivities to it, I'd become too familiar with it. After about two years I'd made up some prints and taken them to show to Erik Erikson. Actually, Jerry Mason set up a meeting and we went to Ben Spock's home in Cleveland, I guess, where he was teaching. Erik Erickson came with his wife Joan, and Ben was there and I think his wife Jane, and my wife Joan and I were there.

And we looked at the photographs. I lined them all up against the couch and the cushions and the floor and all. We looked at them and everybody was happy, thought that's a great idea, we're on the road, we're going to do this thing. And Erik--you know it took a lot of chutzpah on my part to assume that this was going to work out. I'd gotten to know Ben Spock because he had written a book together with a doctor by the name of Rhinehart around some photographs I'd done for the *Ladies' Home Journal* called *Baby's First Year,* and during that time I'd gotten to know Ben, and he's a charming man. And when I had mentioned this idea to Ben Spock he said, "Great, I've always wanted to work with Erik." And Erik made a similar remark, he said, "Gee that'd be fine, I like Ben." So just by chance this young pushy photographer had come up smelling like roses.

They conferred during this meeting, and everything was fine. I finally finished the job and I took some more photographs with me up to Stockbridge, Massachusetts where Erik Erikson was teaching in a clinic up there, and I showed him these photographs. And at that time he was working on a book of Martin Luther as a young man, *Young Man Luther.* And he looked at these photographs, and he said, "Wayne, I don't know what I could write. You've said

everything there is to be said about these kids in your pictures. I can't add anything to that." I can't help but feel that he was influenced by the fact that he was in the middle of writing a book and didn't want to get involved in something else. Anyway, I thanked him and picked up my pictures and went back to New York City.

Riess: Were you a little dashed?

Miller: I was really upset, devastated. I met Jerry Mason, and his face brightened, and he said, "Great, I was worried about this thing. I'm happy." I was surprised and I said, "Fine, Jerry, but who's going to write the book?" And he said, "You are." Well, I'm no writer, but with Jerry's help we cobbled this book together. And it seemed to come out all right.

Riess: Well, it didn't just "come out all right," it was a great success.

Miller: It was a great success. It's interesting because I know that doing this book I experienced childhood for the first time. I learned things I didn't know about childhood. And I think that maybe that was one of the reasons it was so popular on college campuses, strangely enough. At the Berkeley campus, on Telegraph Avenue, there were several bookstores--one in particular down around Bancroft had a sign that used to hang out over the street that they would advertise books on. And they advertised *The World is Young*, the name of my book, on that. It was a great seller on college campuses, it seemed to strike a nerve, I think because it talked about these experiences that children would go through. I think the college students maybe still felt some of those things or wonderments about them.

Also in San Francisco, right in the heart of the financial district, Newbegin's had a bookstore. I think that was the name. The window was taken over completely with my book laid out and opened to different pages, and I just was bowled over to see it there, it was just marvelous. So it was well received, and it sold about 70,000 soft covers and about 10,000 hard covers. And it was talked about on a television show, I did a Linkletter show, I think. And some of the pictures, when I was working on the magazine *Ladies' Home Journal*--no, I'm mixed up here because I was on a Dave Garroway show in Chicago one time with my photographs. I can't remember what that was about.

Riess: It's interesting how those images have had such a life, that the book was picked up in 1999 by a Japanese photo magazine. Is it because of the content, or what do you think?

Miller: I don't know. I must say I think the Japanese photo bugs, they're interested in everything. So I got a good reception there. There was an exhibition in Tokyo, and we went to Kyoto, and we went someplace else, and I gave talks in each one of those cities.

Riess: Do you think it's the curiosity about this intimate document of life in this country?

Miller: I don't know. This book was a--the subject matter was kind of a unique slice of time about a culture that no longer exists. This was the happy, suburban life. It was an age of innocence. It would be hard--to redo some of this I think would be hard to do today. Much like the blacks in Chicago. That is a moment of time that has come and gone.

Riess: Much like the farmer's wife, too.

Miller: In my mind, yes.

So there was a timeliness to it. That's one of the great values of photography. Once you make that picture, you've created history. That picture is the past. You can't reproduce that same picture with that same quality. It's an amazing quality, a beautiful aspect of it that's just to me breathless and mind-boggling. The beauty of photography is that you have an unexposed roll of film and you put it in your camera, and you have the opportunity to make images that no one has ever seen before. The opportunity to capture understandings that the world's waiting for. And, it's--I guess an artist looking at a blank canvas must feel the same way, but it's--I'm forever impressed by this.

Riess: In the late 1950s, besides the book you must have had all kinds of assignments.

Miller: Magazines, I worked for every magazine. Magazine assignments were coming in faster than I could do them. I think it's because somehow or other people couldn't do magazine stories.

American Society of Magazine Photographers

Riess: On top of assignments and the personal project that became *The World is Young*, you were also involved in the American Society of Magazine Photographers. You joined in 1947, you were chairman in 1955. You've referred to it elsewhere as a time of revolution. What were the issues?

Miller: It was a revolution, I guess. There was a disagreement, and I don't know what the disagreement was, between the president, who was Philippe Halsman, and someone else who was challenging Philippe on some subject. Both of these men were adamant and it threatened to break up ASMP.

Riess: What does ASMP do?

Miller: It started as an organization to represent photographers' common needs. Not an agency, but an association. Because as freelance photographers we didn't have any kind of institutional structure to support ourselves, of course, and we needed help. I suppose you could say we pooled our ignorance as well as our assets to find ways to improve our lot, because otherwise the magazines with their assignments and all, they were controlling our lives and we didn't have any recourse. So we made an effort to bring some structure to these relationships.

In fact *Collier's* magazine, I forget the details of it but we came to an impasse with them as far as working conditions and relationships, the amount of money they would pay us as well as ownership of all the materials. And so we came out with an ultimatum that we wanted such and such. Well, we found that if we did that we were going to be considered by the IRS, I guess it was, as a union. We couldn't do that under our existing conditions. And photographers, we all considered ourselves mavericks, and not wanting to be told what to do by anybody. The idea of being part of a union where we would no longer have control, the freedom that we would have as individuals, that became a problem. So this was part of the fuel that was heating up our problems in early ASMP days.

I forget what happened, we had to back off from being this union deal. That meant we didn't have--we couldn't call a strike, for example. So we had to work around that. In later years

Magnum Photos, in the late '50s, we took similar positions. We refused to work for *Life* at one time, *National Geographic* another, until they agreed that the images we had photographed belonged to the photographer and they had publication rights. We held out and we won in each of these cases. But ASMP had some other aspects to it that I don't remember.

Anyway, I was on the board of directors of ASMP at that time. I was asked to be president, and I felt that that would be not circumspect. Knowing Philippe Halsman's personality, he wouldn't like to be replaced. So I came up with the idea, "Let's call me Chairman of the Board instead of President," and that made everybody happy. So, I was Chairman of the Board for two years, I guess, or a year. I don't know what it was.

Riess: What photographers did you represent? Did everyone join ASMP?

Miller: No, I don't know how many.

Riess: But, most magazine photographers?

Miller: Many, many, yes. I remember my membership number was 222.

Riess: It began in '44, and you joined in '47, so that's a lot of photographers.

Miller: Yes, I don't know, they've got many thousands now.

Riess: How did they communicate at the time?

Miller: Poorly.

Riess: Was there a magazine or newsletter?

Miller: We had a newsletter, that was about it.

It was primarily a New York organization because that's where all the publishers were, and the editors, and the photographers. Living out here on the West Coast, it was about as far away as Zamboanga, or other places. I didn't actively participate, I don't remember when I did get involved with being a member of the board of directors of ASMP. It must have been 1953 or so.

Riess: I see names listed here in the *ASMP Picture Annual* like Richard Avedon, Dorothea Lange, Edward Weston, Cartier-Bresson.

Miller: It was very inclusive. We were doing our best to get as many members as possible, for two reasons. One is for membership fees, and second to control the market, as far as establishing business practices. Until this group came along there was no structure to the magazine world and business practices. So it was important to have as large a membership as possible.

Riess: The photojournalists out here--you mentioned Peter Stackpole, Fred Lyons, and Joe Munroe.

Miller: And Jon Brenneis.

Riess: Were you competing with each other for jobs?

Miller: No. In fact, frequently it'd be a case of if we'd get an assignment and couldn't do it, we'd get hold of the other one and have them take care of it. You see, I was under contract with *Life* and they were not. Stackpole was, but in the 1950s, why Stackpole was in Los Angeles.

Magnum Picture Agency

Riess: Then you were elected in 1958 to Magnum, "prestigious international photographers cooperative founded by George Rodger."

Miller: George Rodger, Capa, Bresson, and David Seymour. Four of them.

Riess: Why did they found Magnum?

Miller: Well, again, to represent the interests of themselves.

Riess: But ASMP?

Miller: No, it's separate from ASMP. Magnum is a picture agency representing us, finding assignments for us and taking care of our individual needs.

Riess: That's nice, I guess. Sounds paternalistic.

Miller: Very much so. In fact, in trying to bring a little order, doing a little housecleaning when I became president, I found that we were taking care of the laundry for some of these photographers and paying alimony to some of their wives, and all kind of personal things! So we were doing more than just representing them to clients and taking care of professional needs.

Riess: How did one become a member of Magnum?

Miller: You were asked to become a member. Initially I was invited to become a member in 1947, soon after they were put together. And I didn't accept the invitation because I had other things I was doing. I was back in Chicago doing my own thing, and I didn't feel the need for this. Also, I was in Chicago and this was a New York based outfit. New York and Paris, really. So, I felt out of the loop. And then came along *The Family of Man*, and I wanted to do this *The World is Young* on children out here. So again, I put off joining. Normally you are asked to become an associate for a year or two. Then if it works out, then you're asked to become a member.

Well, in 1958 I guess it was, I decided that it made sense for me to be directly related to Magnum, and it came up again and I said I'd like to do that. I skipped the associate business and became a member directly. I think it was somewhat unusual for them to do it that way, but we knew each other well and they had been handling some of my work anyway. Some of the stories I'd done for further distribution, they would take care of it, even though it was informal, you see. I have things in my files, photographs that were stamped on the back in the late forties and early fifties that are Magnum. They had been informally distributing my work.

Riess: It must have a huge structure. This is a big administrative thing.

Miller: It is, it has developed into somewhat of a monster. We now have four offices, we have New York, Paris, London, and Tokyo. I think probably thirty, maybe forty photographers are involved in it and working out of these different offices. And the work is distributed internationally.

Riess: How are they "involved"? Do you mean taking pictures, or printing and so on?

Miller: I'm talking about photographers out making pictures.

And we have large staffs. In Paris, we have a staff of about twenty-eight people and a budget of over a million dollars.

Riess: The photographers are out making pictures?

Miller: For magazines, for advertising. Not for advertising, but for annual reports, per se. In the last few years, our work has started changing. It started out as being purely photojournalism, but then as new markets showed up we started moving into those. Then some of the photojournalism has begun drying up on the vine.

There are very few pure photojournalism opportunities today. So there's a struggle today for photographers. Most of us have photojournalistic training, on the job training, and talents of that nature. What we've done is try to adapt those to other photographic opportunities, which are books. And for a while there we were doing a log of annual reports for corporations, which paid very well.

I did, and others did, work for on-site movie making where we would be hired by the movie company--I told you about photographing John Wayne--at a good daily rate, maybe a thousand or fifteen hundred dollars a day, to be there to make any photographs we would like to make, not to work for the company but because we had entree to magazines and publications and we would be doing stories that we thought we should do that would be of interest to editors. And then we would be paid by the magazines, as well. So we adapt our talents to these other circumstances. Today still some of us are working for *National Geographic,* but only a few because *National Geographic* can't handle too much. And let's see, what else?

Riess: Corporate reports, still?

Miller: They're not as prominent as they used to be. They used to be big, slick productions. But anyway, corporate yes, still corporate.

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Miller: [looking at reports] Here is the report of Magnum's annual meeting in New York. Here's the Tokyo report, here's the Paris report, here's one of the financial results. Another one--I don't see a London report here, I'm sure it's here someplace. Anyway, these give you an idea of how things have changed.

Riess: I see they talk about the "team."

Miller: Well, if you attended one of these meetings and heard what a struggle we have to get those jobs and all, you'd realize that you're in the kennels fighting during feeding time. But I looked for this to give you an idea. Here is how it is broken down to stock sales, things out of the files that we resell. And then first sales, which are based on assignments. And then exhibition and print sales. And editorial assignments, that's another one. And advertising corporation assignments. So these are broad categories.

Riess: "Priorities for next year: To be more project-oriented."

Miller: Yes, well, those things are probably the same as they've been for every year.

Riess: "To think big."

Miller: Now here's income from New York, 1.9 million. Just income from New York. And then expenditures--this is a peculiarity we have at Magnum, income is 1.9 million and expenditures are 2.2 million. Somehow or other we do that all the time.

And you see, the photographers own the association.

Riess: So you're the stockholders, when it says, "Annual Meeting of Stockholders."

Miller: Right. And the money we have to spend is the money the photographers brought in. And times have been a little tough lately, so now photographers are asked to leave in Magnum a cash balance and that becomes our working capital. At one time Magnum would take 40 percent of our income for expenses, and the photographer would get 60. Now, I understand, it's reversed, Magnum gets 60, we get 40. But overhead, costs go up, that's a way of looking at it.

Photographers by definition are terrible businessmen. And yet we ask of ourselves the talents to run an association of this magnitude. Now I'm just talking about the New York office. Paris and others are similar budgets, maybe even larger, I don't know. So it ain't small potatoes when you think we're asked to come up with maybe three million dollars a year to pay for our own overhead, and maybe there's only thirty photographers producing.

Riess: And you're still an active member?

Miller: No, I'm known as a contributor, a contributing member. That means I don't take any assignments, they resell my work from the files.

Riess: With the same percentage?

Miller: Whatever, I don't know what the percentage is.

Riess: As far as the files go, do they create the prints? Or do they refer back to you?

Miller: It varies, it varies. In many cases, they create the prints. We are now putting everything on computers. They have a big staff there. In New York there are five people, I think, doing nothing but handling computerization of the prints. My book, *Chicago's South Side*, is now on a disk. They can service requests for prints by transmitting that over the telephone or the lines

or whatever it is, and the publisher gets this disk at the other end of the line, and he's able to make prints of fantastic quality. Color as well as black and white.

Riess: You don't have to think about anything.

Miller: That's right, they just do it. New York has a set of those disks, Paris has a set.

Riess: And royalty checks come rolling in?

Miller: Oh, every couple years I get a royalty check of $6.95.

Riess: No

Miller: Very little, very little.

Riess: Really, for *Chicago's South Side*?

Miller: I don't know if anything has shown up in my account for that. Some photographers, their work is more conducive to developing income from the quality of the work they have than maybe I do. So, I don't know.

Riess: You were president of Magnum from '62 to '66, four years. You said in an interview for the American Society of Magazine Photographers magazine that there were problems during that year with personalities like Henri Cartier-Bresson, Ernst Hass, and others who were "swinging wild." "Some people wanted to break the whole thing up so I got involved and tried to pull the whole thing together."

Miller: I was asked to do it, so anyway.

Riess: What were the problems?

Miller: Just personality, egos. And as I say, we're not trained or qualified to think in business terms, and so when we have to make decisions in those areas it's difficult. One of the reasons in a thing like this is you have, for example in New York City, a staff who is hired by us to do our bidding, and in some cases photographers who are there start leaning on the staff to encourage them to find more jobs for them. I remember a case where one photographer was so upset that he fired the bureau chief. You know, he didn't have any authority to do that. This is the kind of thing that's demoralizing. Also the staff doesn't know--they know the photographers are their bosses, but who is really their bosses? Is it the bureau chief?

The business of setting it up so that the staff doesn't have to take any guff from the photographers in order to do a good job for the photographers is sometimes tough. Especially if the photographers are living in New York and they're inevitably able to get more attention to themselves than some guy living in California or in Delhi, India. So there was this kind of push-pull.

Another thing that Henri would especially be concerned with--he was concerned, and he always has been, bless his heart, with quality. He felt that if the quality was beginning to become shoddy that wasn't right and we shouldn't put up with it. We shouldn't work for this kind of a publication, we shouldn't take these kinds of assignments. These were bases for

dissension. Understandable and reasonable. Magnum Photos is a most unusual group because they will fight to the death to maintain quality. They have great respect for that and are embarrassed and unhappy when they can't do that. Sometimes we can't do it because we have to survive. So, these are the points of friction.

Riess: How about Black Star, is that an equivalent agency?

Miller: Black Star is a commercial operation. They hire photographers--not hire, but they--. Black Star is an exceptional group. Oh, god, I can't remember the man's name. The man I'm trying to think of is no longer alive, he died in the last several years. Black Star was made up by some German immigrants, German Jews, I believe, who developed this agency to supply the needs of clients. And they hired good people, and they hired good staff. This fellow, the one they hired, they kind of adopted him. These other men were older and he was young. But anyway, the three of them, the older three died off and he ended up owning the company. What's his name? Howard Chapnick.

Black Star will take photographers--they're not concerned particularly with quality but with ability to turn out some pictures. It doesn't have the stricture or measuring stick built into it. They did a fine job, very above board, and the quality of dealing with their photographers is impeccable. Not all photo agencies are that way. Some of them will cut corners and cheat the photographers.

Riess: Is Magnum sort of a guys' thing, or have you had women photographers?

Miller: Oh, my, a lot of women. We've had Eve Arnold and Inge Morath. Susan Meiselas.

Riess: Would fashion photographers turn up there?

Miller: No, we'll have photographers who have done some fashion, but no.

We've had people come in and leave, you know. Sebastião Salgado, he was with us. And after a while he outgrew us. In other words, he found what he wanted to do and what Magnum could do for him weren't a good match. So he moved on. Gene Smith was with us at one time. We had a lot of people. Let me see if I can find a list. Women, yes, and some who have left. We have Martine Franck. We'd be the first to embrace a talent, whether they've got two heads or what they might be.

Disaffection Sets In

Riess: In 1967 you were interviewed for *Popular Photography* and you talked about creating a National Center of Photography to encourage and support young photographers. You had been talking about that with Paul Taylor?

Miller: Yes, this was Dorothea Lange's idea. And 1967--when did Dorie die? I think 1965. Some of these ideas about helping photographers and doing this and doing that is a dated concept, I believe. It's premised on a time when there were markets, some way to support photographers. Now there's little market for photographers. For example, photographers are

being taught in many schools to be photojournalists. But where are they going to practice that? It's like becoming an expert in making buggy whips. [laughter]

In my mind, my orientation to photography, I can't go out and just make pictures unless I have a purpose for making them, a reason for doing it. Any reason. Do you want to put it on exhibit? Do you want to make some money from it? Do you want to hide them in your closet and look at them with a flashlight at night and just enjoy them? What is the purpose of your making the pictures? If you stop and think about that, it begins to delineate the size of your ballpark and why you're involved there. I think it's unfair to hold dreams out for people when there's no chance of their being realized. I don't know what you should teach photographers, what you should teach them in photographic schools. Maybe to make ads. But the Dorothea Lange concept, the school that Paul Taylor was discussing, is based on photography of the '50s, you know, and before. And to perpetuate that sort of thing--it's great to perpetuate it, but who's going to support it? And why should people?

Riess: This was interesting that you were talking with Paul Taylor about such a center and at the same time, in the mid-60's, deciding you had almost taken enough pictures. Unless I misinterpret this.

Miller: Well, that's true, that's true. In 1967 I moved from here to Washington D.C. to work for the Department of Interior, the Park Service. I had fallen out of love with photojournalism, let's put it that way. I think that's a pretty apt description. I didn't have to do it anymore. My juices, my drives had become cold. It wasn't fun anymore. And I think in order to do a good job it has to be fun, you have to be excited by it. Now that's just very personal, but I think that many photographers might share some of these thoughts. In fact I may have mentioned it earlier, I don't know, I wanted to be more a part of what was going on around me. I no longer wanted to be a fly on the wall watching the world around me. I wanted to be part of it. I remember mentioning this one time to Eve Arnold and she said, "I know exactly what you mean."

You see, to do a photojournalism job we're not participating, we're observing, and we're doing our best to record what's happening. We're trying to be inconspicuous, we're trying to be "not there," but there. So it's a pretty lonely life. I think of the image of the traveling salesman in his hotel room at night with his suitcase on his lap. He's playing solitaire in bed. Well, much of that is part of the condition of the photojournalist. You are alone, you don't want to interrupt the happening. You're not choreographing, you're not directing what's going on. Anyway, I wanted to be part of this world I was photographing. I was wanting to move--not consciously, but subconsciously I guess I was beginning to move away from it.

Riess: That's interesting. There's an illusion that you're part of the party when you're there with your camera.

Miller: Yes, and frequently when we take a picture of a group of people eating in a dinner setting, there's one space that isn't filled. It's empty, because you're taking the pictures. It's something we learn to look out for, trying to fill up that space until we finish our pictures. Then we can sit down and eat with them.

Riess: You were working up to this? Or was there some crucial moment when you decided?

Miller: Well, I became aware that because I was no longer excited by my work, my work was not as good. Thinking about an athlete, after a while you don't run as fast, and you don't hit as many baseballs as you used to hit. The time comes to hang it up.

But I had to keep making an income, so I kept plodding away. I should have stopped in the mid-60's, instead it was the mid-70's.

Did I tell you my story about the dogs? I got a call from *People* magazine asking me to photograph these Shar-Pei dogs, Chinese dogs, that belonged to a man who lived a few miles from Orinda, in a subdivision in Concord. He'd been successfully raising these very rare and expensive dogs in his backyard. It was a rainy day when I went out, and as I entered his little ranch house you could smell the dogs. The walls were covered with blue ribbons. He took me to the backyard to see the dogs and there was no grass, just mud and dogs.

Now, how to photograph at eye level was a problem. I found some cardboard to put on the mud to get down there with the dogs, and lay out flat and twisted my neck around and looked them in the eye and made quite a few photographs. But while I was there on the ground I said to myself, "Why is a grown man doing this?" I began to wonder, should I continue as a photojournalist if it means doing this sort of thing? Anyway, I shipped the photographs off to *People* in New York, and they in turn shipped it off to *People* in Paris. I later received a telegram from Paris, after their publication, to say, "This is the most popular story we've ever run"--which told me something about the French, too.

But in hindsight, this really was the beginning of my decision to pack it in, and this was in mid-1975. That was when I realized, you know, get out of here. It's a strange thing when you've been doing something all your life--or professionally, all your professional life--and you decide to step aside from it. You feel that somehow you're failing. You shouldn't do that, it's not the proper thing to do, you should hang in there. But there's more to life than taking pictures.

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[Interview 7: December 17, 2001]##

Steichen and the Millers

Riess: I want to talk about the Steichen relationship a bit more. How did you and he continue to relate, or did you continue to relate after you left New York?

Miller: Oh sure, because he continued to come out here. After he left New York, his second wife, Dana, died, and he called within hours of when she died to talk to us about it. How he held her in his arms till she died.

He didn't have family per se, in my mind. Or he didn't have family where he could just call and schmooze with his family and kick things around. Their relationship, I don't believe, had as many of those qualities as he'd like for it to have. I think that Joan and I filled in some of those needs that he may have had there. Then he would come out here and spend time with us, during the summer months.

Riess: Was he evolving into just being a friend, rather than a mentor or a father figure?

Miller: He was a friend, rather than the others. And we had photography in common, as a subject matter. But I didn't have a list of things that I wanted to talk to him about regarding photography, never that. It might come up in conversation. It was talking about life in general that was our common interest. He loved our children. I don't know if I showed you pictures of him and our family. He loved it when we'd go on a picnic, or to the ocean, or to go up to our forest land on the Ten Mile River in Mendocino County and spend time with us there.

Riess: Maybe it was harder for him than it was for you, that you left New York.

Miller: Well, I did not feel any second thoughts about leaving New York, I was happy to get out, and be in control of my own life. And Joan I think felt the same way. He--I remember when he went to Japan for some reason, I guess to receive an award or something. Then he came back, and he always brought photographs back with him, snapshots. This one picture, this trip he had pictures of himself with this group of men, and in the middle of it he's holding this attractive young geisha girl in his arms. He said, "I really liked her." He said, "Do you think I could ever marry a girl like this?" Because he was serious, you know, he was a lonely guy. Dana had died.

Riess: He had children didn't he?

Miller: He had two children. One was Mary Calderone and the other was Kate Steichen. Mary Calderone had married a former medical director at the UN, and that was her second marriage.

She was a very active professional woman in her program--she established a group called SIECUS, about teaching sex to teenagers. She's very active in that and wrote a book or two. And she's very active in Planned Parenthood. She was very much like Steichen himself, and wanted a closer relationship I think with him than what seemed to work out.

Riess: Did Steichen ever consider moving out here?

Miller: Well, not really. He did think about buying some timberland one time, and actually made an inquiry about it, up close to ourselves. But it wouldn't have worked out, just as well it didn't. Knowing him as I do, I'm sure he considered it, like he considers everything. An exceptional man.

But as far as our relationship goes, it lasted up until he died. In fact, I got a telephone call from Joanna, his third wife, saying he was in bad shape, and so I went to his home, outside of Ridgefield, Connecticut, and was with him when he did die. In fact--when I closed his eyes I felt that this was truly the end of him, of that aspect of him. It was really saying goodbye to him.

Becoming Forest Landowner

Riess: Now let's turn to forestry. What inspired that purchase in 1958?

Miller: I did a story for *Life* magazine in 1951 or 1952, an overnight job for Crown Zellerbach up in Washington State, and I saw these young trees and I just thought they were beautiful. I came back and I talked to Joan about it and I said, maybe this is a way for us to be involved in California agriculture. She always wanted to be involved in agriculture here, because Joan had a background in small town, Urbana, Illinois, and she had some farmland there. And for some reason or another, I felt very close to farmland, and we'd been thinking about how to get involved with farming.

We'd learned early on that farming in California is like going to Reno, it's not for city folks. We put it out of our minds until I came back with this idea of trees, and we thought about that, and Joan took to it immediately. So we spent the next six years researching the subject at the University of California at Berkeley. And during that time we learned how to read aerial photographs, and we learned about soils, learned where trees grew fastest, and problems of raising trees. We began looking for timberland, and considering all these variables, we found that the Sierras is not the place to be. You had fire problems, you had people problems, insect problems. Also the trees there were not doing as well as they might. So we looked at the north coast. At that time people just didn't go to the north coast, they all went to the Sierras; that's where people had their second homes, and it was not very attractive, socially, to be in the north coast.

Anyway, we found out that considering all the variables, the best place to be would be around Fort Bragg. It was a redwood region, and redwood trees grow best where there's fog, because they get a lot of their moisture from fog. We learned that people and trees don't go together, and it was recommended by somebody to find an ownership that's surrounded by a big timber

company, and they'll provide a heat shield for you for keeping people out. Also they'll fight your fires for you, to protect themselves.

Riess: What's the people issue?

Miller: Well, people don't like to see the trees that they can see, cut down. We were interested not in trees per se, we wanted to think about it as a business. Also, trespass--they can inadvertently set fire to something, they can be injured.

Riess: So trees were already quite political?

Miller: No, not really at all at that point in time, it seemed like the alphabet hadn't been invented. Since then it certainly has been changed.

We started looking for land and we finally located a piece. It just met everything we wanted. It had the best soils and all the qualities, just couldn't be better. It was twelve hundred acres, and we bid on this. We found a realtor that was offering it for sale. The reason it was being offered for sale was that industry in the area, the Union Lumber Company in that area, and others, didn't want land where the virgin trees had been cut off. They didn't see any value in the second growth trees. Actually, there's more than enough value in the second growth trees to pay for it. But they considered it brush land, so we didn't have any competition in buying it, thank god.

So we bought that, and then we didn't do anything with it for fourteen years, something like that. And then we began to add to it. We found an adjacent piece that was in the middle of this property that we added to it, and we kept buying other pieces. Now we have 1850 acres, and we're still interested in adding to it. We're bidding on another piece. I hope it works out, it could add another 450 acres to it. But I'm getting ahead of my story here. We bought it originally because it was just so damn beautiful, and that's about all I can say about it.

Riess: Does it have a terrain?

Miller: Oh yes, it's hilly as can be. Up and down, has a little pond on it, which is an old mill pond from earlier logging. We're a mile and a half from the ocean. Some parts of it really looked like a war-zone, just nothing there. Since then it's grown back, and I can show you some photographs that give you an idea of what I'm talking about.

Riess: Did you inter-plant trees?

Miller: Well, if you cut a redwood tree down, the redwood tree sprouts from its stump, and if you wanted to get rid of redwoods, you couldn't.

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Miller: [looking at photo] This is what the property looked like in 1958. That's Edward Steichen. Here's the old mill site, here.

Riess: And the logging roads churning right up through it.

Miller: Right. And down in the bite of this bend, you can't see it, there's a little brushy area, and it's a redwood clump. That was in 1958. I measured it a couple of years ago and that tree's now a hundred and twenty feet high and thirty inches through. And that's what it looks like in 1978, you see? It gives you an idea of what can happen in a redwood area in just twenty years. So you see these same trees here.

Riess: Did you eliminate the roads?

Miller: No, we're still using them. Most of them are skid-roads, but there's a main road that goes up through there, a truck road.

Riess: You did a lot of research. I think that's interesting.

Miller: Oh, my yes. To a reasonable degree, we know forestry, as far as California, redwood forestry. we're committed to this forest land. We will do anything to help that soil grow better trees. Whether that means planting some other trees, or pruning trees, or protecting it from destructive erosion, or giving better spacing to these trees so they can grow better. Whatever it might take, we will do that in order to enhance the productivity of that soil. That means maybe leaving some trees that otherwise would be marketable, but we know that if they get bigger they will be putting on greater wood per year than they would if they were smaller. The diameter. So we're careful, we're not greedy when it comes to the forest. Using a Ben Spock idea, we're "permissive foresters." We'll do anything we can to help those trees grow.

I don't know if I ever showed you our management plan, did I? [goes to get plan]

When we plant five or ten thousand trees a year it's not because we're trying to get our money back, we're really thinking long term.

Riess: Five or ten thousand trees?

Miller: Yes. If we were to plant five to ten thousand trees per year, it's not because there's a lack of trees, it might be that we have pockets where we have a need for more conifers. Earlier logging practices, and maybe fires, have left some open spots where hardwoods have come in. As a result they're taking over, and a hardwood had a branchier configuration, so it consumes too much canopy or sky. So we want to remove some of those and get the balance back to a more normal balance. Because of the history of logging in our area we have probably a twenty-five percent hardwood component, and a natural, normal one would be about twelve percent. So we'd like to restore that normal balance.

Riess: The climax forest in that area would be what?

Miller: Redwoods.

Riess: But you wouldn't want that?

Miller: We'd like to have the mix. I mean, climax forest, God almighty, I'd like to live that long, but that might be five hundred years.

Anyway, we have pockets there where we'd like to have more trees, so we'll plant a mixture of Doug Firs and redwoods. The normal mix in our area is about 70 percent redwood, and 30

percent Doug Fir. So when we replant, we replant more or less those same proportions. We're replanting areas where these hardwoods have been taking over. So we have these open spots. This is a plan for our timberland.

Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan

Riess: [reads] "Miller Tree Farm, Mendocino County, non-industrial timber management plan." And this name?

Miller: Craig Blencowe. Happens to be our son-in-law.

Riess: A registered professional forester.

Miller: He was our daughter's junior high or high school sweetheart. They grew up together here in Orinda.

Riess: And he got into this all on his own?

Miller: Yes. And we're one of his clients. He's an outstanding forester in California.

Riess: I wondered whether you were doing the timber surveys and cruises and all that.

Miller: No, we're managers, rather than dirt farmers, in that regard. The property is divided into different units, and this is what each unit--I don't know, what's this say here?

Riess: It says, "Total tree farm saw log volume, by species and management unit."

Miller: Okay, well this is I believe what they have now on the property, for each unit--let me take a quick look. Then how many acres in that unit, and what's the redwood component, Doug Fir, and white woods. The white woods might be hemlock and white fir. We divided the property into these units. We have ten or fifteen units.

Riess: The units have names.

Miller: Yes, we had to come up with names. And they have a commonality to them, for the way the land lies, or the mixture of trees, and so forth.

Riess: Wheats the need to have units?

Miller: So that we can go in and harvest. We harvest every year.

Riess: So you harvest by unit, rather than the whole.

Miller: Every year we'll harvest. Like this year, 2002, we'll be harvesting up here in Unit Eight. This plan started as of 1990, I believe. We've been over the whole property, we've been at each of those units already. But what we do is we cut about two thirds of the growth, or one third of the growth in each of the units every ten years.

Riess: Is that very conservative?

Miller: Very conservative, very conservative. It depends, but more or less that. But if we'd take you up there and you could drive through it you wouldn't realize that harvesting had taken place.

Riess: Do you have other techniques for harvesting, for felling the trees?

Miller: No, it's a chain saw is what does it. And then removing it, it depends on the lay of the land. If it's flat land, we'll use a tractor. We're beginning to use more and more--

Riess: Helicopters?

Miller: No, not helicopters, but cable. You hook it from one hillside to another hillside and take it out.

Riess: "Non-industrial" on this plan means what?

Miller: We don't have a sawmill.

A "Non-industrial General Management Plan"--let me skip ahead a little here. We had a new Forest Practice Act in California in 1974, and then it was up to the Board of Forestry to develop rules and regulations to implement it, which took place in 1975. At that point landowners like myself and Joan found that for the Board of Forestry, our interests weren't being represented. The environmentalists were very active at that point. They were fighting industry, saying that these rules had to be stringent in order to control industry, which I think was merited in many cases, but in other cases, not. The environmentalists were looking at forest practices which were no longer being practiced by the industry, so they were over-reacting.

But anyway, these regulations being formed to control our future, as to how we could log our private land; decisions were being made by compromises between industry and the environmentalists. Now industry, by our definition, is somebody who has a sawmill and they have crews of people who maintain their property and equipment and all. We as small landowners, or non-industrial timber landowners, we don't have any equipment, so we can't go out and take a tractor and touch this up here and clean that up there and so forth. So some of these regulations would not apply to small landowners as well as they would to big.

We decided, by god, we had to be represented. So we got together, and created an association, called the Forest Landowners of California. I became the first president. That began a political aspect of my life I'd never experienced before. I spent a lot of time in Sacramento with legislators, before them, giving testimony, and organizing other landowners. I was on the road a great deal for fifteen years.

Riess: So that was from 1975 on?

Miller: Seventy-five on, until, oh, 1992. So that's fifteen, seventeen years.

Riess: Were the other members of this group up in the Humboldt region?

Miller: Lots in the Humboldt region, and the Sierras, and all over the state.

Riess: Did you find that you were kindred? You couldn't have all had the same attitude about it.

Miller: No. Some of us--we found that many landowners, forest landowners, didn't know what they had out there. One of our big efforts was to get people to have their land cruised, to get hold of a forester and really understand what was out there in the woods.

Riess: Were they mostly absentee?

Miller: No, about half of us were absentee. Others lived on the land, and those who lived on the land often were cattlemen. Part of their land was timber land and they didn't know what was there. It was a case of making an effort to educate these people about what values they had there, and the values to the point they should begin to protect them, and join a group like ours to represent them. That's the smaller landowners, down to a couple hundred acres, to others that had thousands of acres. Some of them have big names like--

Riess: Witter, Ann Witter?

Miller: I wish we had the Witters. We don't have them though. But we're talking about some of these here--

Riess: Richard Wilson?

Miller: Richard Wilson is kind of a come-by-lately, in many ways. His father had the land, but he didn't understand what was there, so he had to do a little self-education as well. But that's typical, that people inherit things. The Russ family is up there, I don't know if you know them. I think they owned at one time a major part of Humboldt County. I'm just saying that there are some very large landowners--to very small landowners. Anyhow, I worked very hard on that and learned a great deal about the realities of politics.

Also, we quickly learned that the majority of the legislators are from Los Angeles. In fact, as I heard the story one time, at the beginning of every session they introduce the new legislators from the different part of the state, and they say, "Will the legislators from the Los Angeles area stand up?" Well, damn near the entire body stood up. Those are the people that have an urban imprint, who make the decisions about the natural resources in California. That's a core problem in California of everything from zoning to regulations on the use of water. When it comes to resources, it's too easy for an urban legislator to demagogue and use natural resources as a vehicle to secure his own nest, regardless of facts. So this remains an impossible problem. Impossible, because the people keep changing.

Riess: Did you have lobbyists, or were you the lobbyist?

Miller: I was the lobbyist for some time, if you want to call it that. Those of us that were available would do our doorbell-ringing. But it's not sufficient, we still don't have a proper Sacramento representation.

We found that the regulatory system in California, and really the political world, is such that politicians always are trying to put their stamp on something and win a better position with their constituents, which in urban areas are environmentalists. You're dealing with people who don't know what it's all about. We were exposed to more and more, in effect, new regulations, continuously, that it gets to the point that you can't afford to make these long-term

plans. Why plant that tree if you don't know that you're going to be able to harvest it? Why make other contributions to the land, and other long-term planning, if it's ridiculous? We decided, another fellow and I decided we've got to figure out some way to stop the time-clock on these regulations.

Riess: Who was the other fellow?

Miller: A fellow named Fred Ehlers. A very important man. He was our former executive director. I hired him for our FLC, Forest Landowners of California. He came up with the idea that we needed to figure a better structure somehow so we could make long-term plans. That was the "Non-industrial Timber Management Plan," where in essence once your land has met these criteria, and in effect you could have that kind of information available, a long-term plan, then the regulations in existence at that time would be the guiding criteria for the exercise of that plan. Not subsequent regulations, but regulations that were there at that time. Anyway, we got a bill passed and it became reality.

Riess: So 1992 was the year of everyone's plan?

Miller: No. If you want a plan of your property today, you have to abide by the regulations that exist as of now.

Riess: That would force everyone to be very involved in Sacramento, if they care at all.

Miller: Well, you've got to be careful. These new regulations--every time the legislature convenes they add new regulations to it.

Riess: What if it got better, what if there were regulations that you liked better than 1992, could you have the whole thing re-surveyed and create a new management plan?

Miller: I can't imagine that, it's never happened.

A View of the Environmental Movement

Riess: Environmentalists have been so much in the ascendency?

Miller: Oh god, it's unbelievable.

Riess: But they always sound like they are fighting a last-ditch battle.

Miller: That's fund-raising. The hypocrisy in the environmental movements is just nauseating. The basis for the kind of things they wish to achieve, and the things that get the headlines, it's smoke and mirrors, so much of it. But it sure brings in new members.

Riess: What are their motivations?

Miller: I'm not saying there aren't some true environmentalists, concerned people wanting to do a good thing for the environment. But there are others that couldn't care less about the facts.

Riess: When you went up there, would you have called yourself an environmentalist? When you first got the land in 1967?

Miller: I don't know. I guess so, yes. You see, I had had previous experience in the Park Service. We haven't talked about that.

Riess: We haven't talked about that. We should.

Miller: You ask if I call myself an environmentalist--that word is so slippery. I came up with this program for the National Park Service and George Hartzog, the director of it--and I'm getting ahead of myself here--he didn't even know what the word meant. He'd say, "What's this word environment mean?" So I'm just giving you an idea. I might call myself an environmentalist, but the word is so slippery, and it's so overused, it's become meaningless in many ways. It's gotten to the point now, if you brush your teeth in the morning and the evening before you go to bed, you can say you're an environmentalist, you've taken care of the resources.

Riess: [laughs.] That's so funny! But the way you talk about the land, the trees, it's obvious that it's a nurturing thing. I'd think environmentalists would agree.

Miller: They buy that. They say, "Oh, we're not talking about you, Wayne, we're talking about other people." They're not really talking about other people, they're talking about being in control of the planning department of the county, or getting some more regulations in here.

Riess: This is a tricky thing. You've probably been able to use that impression of being right-minded.

Miller: Well, yes. There was a state senator, out in Marin County, north coast, I can't remember his name right now. He came up to our property on an oversight committee. The former dean of the School of Forestry at Berkeley, Hank Vaux, he was chairman then, and he was host of this affair, brought these people up to our property to give an idea about what forestry was about and how it was practiced. There were about two or three stops and we were one of them. On this trip was this senator from Marin, and I had had an earlier run-in with him

Riess: Was it Peter Behr?

Miller: Yes, Peter Behr. There had been a discussion before this legislature about the use of an in-holding in the Jackson Demonstration State Forest, in-holding because the history of it went back to the Ministry of the Interior having a piece of that. And they'd built some buildings in there, and the buildings were being used by different groups. Peter Behr wanted to remove ownership of the inholding and it's since been moved into the Jackson Demonstration State Forest Organization, so it would be available for logging, like other aspects of it are, controlled logging. Peter Behr was supporting this environmental group that wanted this thing removed from state control and made into a public campground and park as such, all preserved. Not only preserve this land, but also preserve lots of land around it as a buffer.

I'm making a long story out of a short point here. I testified that this had been used over the years by Boy Scouts and other groups, even some religious groups. And Peter Behr was testifying that this has been used by so many people, and the idea of changing its usage by putting it back in the state would jeopardize further usage by these groups and so forth. I'm not telling it as well as I might. Anyway, I was at the microphone describing this before the Ways and Means committee, which is like feeding time at the zoo, it's terrible, people running

around, it's a large committee and nobody pays attention to what's really going on. But I was testifying, doing my best, and all of a sudden I realize that this guy, Peter Behr, is pushing me. He grabs the mike and says, "That's not true!" He went ahead and told out and out lies. All I could do was sit down.

I hadn't seen him again until here we are in this bus driving on to our property north of Fort Bragg. I reminded him of this. I said, "Why did you do this, Senator?" He said, "If I hadn't, you would have told them the truth."

Riess: He said that?

Miller: He did, he said it in just so many words. And he's an ardent environmentalist. So this to me is a description of one kind of environmentalist. "You would have told them the truth."

##

Miller: This non-industrial timber management plan we call NTMP has been so successful that the Board of Forestry and the California Department of Forestry are looking for ways to expand this concept to cover more and more land in California, not just non-industrial, but other management plans, because they've found that the cost of supervising these regulations has become unmanageable. It takes too many people to watch-dog these regulations.

Also they're aware that these regulations are counter-productive as far as growing trees. Towns are suffering the loss of economy and the forests aren't being well-managed. In some areas it's increasing fire and what not, existing regulations. So they're doing their best to find ways to adapt this to larger acreage in California. It's proven to be a very successful package.

Riess: Were most non-industrial timber lands in California surveyed as of 1992?

Miller: No. It's expensive to do this. It costs a lot of money. And somebody who's going to harvest their land, they're not going to be able to harvest it more than maybe once or twice in their lifetime, so why should they put out this kind of money before the fact, you see? It's damned if you do, damned if you don't.

Riess: Does the organization help small growers?

Miller: I wish we could, I wish we could, but we don't have the ability. We can help them as far as encouraging them to be involved, to find foresters for them and all. Actually, we've gotten some help from the state to subsidize some of these costs that a landowner might have. Some of this money from the state can go toward relieving some of this pressure.

A View of Wayne

Riess: Now we're looking at "You Fine-Haired Sons of Bitches," an undated diatribe from the *Anderson Valley Advertiser.* Who was Pete Passof?

Miller: A cooperative ag extension forester in Mendocino County. He's a very important man as far as helping those of us in forestry in California, an exceptionally talented guy, and he just hangs in there, and is helpful.

Riess: In this article you are lumped together with Congressman [Douglas H.] Bosco.

Miller: Bosco was assistant to one of our congressmen here, the federal congressman in California, and he took positions separate from--anybody who disagrees with this man automatically becomes a beast of sorts.

Riess: [reading] "There they were, slick and confident: Congressman Bosco, Shep Tucker of Louisiana-Pacific, and Wayne Miller and Pete Passof, big timber's old faithful, standing like bookends at either end of the ten-person panel."

Miller: Well, what happens is, both Pete and I were arguing that all forestry isn't bad forestry, and there's good ways of doing things. That automatically made us supporters of the negative industry world.

Riess: "Local industry's ideological cop, Wayne Miller."

Miller: These people come out of the woodwork, and no matter what--you know, if all you did was manufacture American flags they'd find some way to say that you're un-American for not doing it another way.

Riess: [Miller is looking in papers] Now what are you looking for, Wayne?

Miller: I'm looking for something in here which is a letter from the county that was done in 1975 or something, or earlier, saying that the Miller Tree Farm and the Jackson Demonstration State Forest are the only examples of sustained-yield forestry in Mendocino County. We were the only ones who were practicing it. Which is kind of interesting. No one else was doing it. To give you an idea, we showed up there for a hearing before the Board of Supervisors, sitting as the Board of Equalization, I guess. They can wear different hats in order to represent the Board of Equalization; they can do it locally that way.

In one year they changed our taxes on our property from something like three or four thousand dollars to seventy thousand dollars. That's because of the previous law which says that trees can be kept off the tax rolls until they are forty years of age, or of merchantable size. The assessors from Mendocino County came up one day and gave our property what we call a "windshield cruise," where you sit in an automobile and drive through it, and he determined that our property was all mature timber, forty years of age and older. So now it was to be taxed at its merchantable value, whether we cut it or not.

Well, you see, in effect, historically that's what's created a lot of these clear-cuts, because people can't afford to leave the trees standing there and pay taxes on them when you don't have any income. So you clear-cut your property to reduce it, till seventy percent of it is below forty years of age.

I took this argument to the Board of Supervisors, and that was to be about a fifteen or twenty minute hearing, and my god, we spent something like four or five hours. They were intrigued. Here this Mendocino County Board of Supervisors had never had it explained to them how a

forest functions, how it operates. As a result, they put us back in that three thousand dollar tax level, and declared us to be a sustained-yield forest, the first time it had been done in Mendocino County. So there've been a few fun things happen in our exercise of pursuing this sort of thing.

Riess: What is all this appended to your timber survey?

Miller: It's the history of the property. [looking for papers]

These were kind of ground-breaking or precedent-setting things that happened here, with my getting first involved in timber, and then creating the organization and then this, this is the high point of my forestry career here, this NTMP.

Here is what I was looking for.

Riess: So this is the result of your hearing? [reads] "In 1973, the Millers requested an exemption from the Ad Valorem Tax, in effect under Article Thirteen, Section Twelve and Three Quarters of the Constitution." Then it quotes, "As regards the prudent operator concept, we, i.e. the county, currently do not have any timber owners or operators working toward sustained yield other than Mr. Miller, who are recognizable, with the exception of Jackson State Forest. Mr. Miller has decided at this time to cut over a long period of time with the resultant continued appreciation of his investment by both five percent to six percent growth and the annually increasing stumpage values. I believe his return under sustained yield will be considerably greater than under liquidation type operation, as will the county's."

Miller: You see, this kind of a plan makes money for you.

Riess: A while back you told me that this phasing out of photography, phasing in of land stewardship, you have seen as a very fortunate way to provide for your family.

Miller: Right. It's worked out fabulously well. In hindsight, it's worked fine. To do it in foresight, I think would be very difficult.

Riess: Did you go into it looking to make money?

Miller: No, we weren't very conscious of that, we did it very naively. We assumed that there would be some value there, but we didn't really start jotting on the backs of envelopes about what we could expect in the way of income. Not to my recollection did we ever do that. But we certainly did after we first made our first harvest in 1972, I think it was. We began to realize, my god, this is something here. We can do this every year. So long as you're not greedy. You have to treat it with respect and pamper it and it'll smile back for you.

Riess: And you've gotten your children involved in it?

Miller: Yes. We have a family partnership. Our children all have a proportionate share in everything we own. We have all our assets in this one partnership.

Riess: They have the same values about it?

Miller: To a degree, yes. I say to a degree because they're not as deeply involved in it as Joan and I are. They're aware of the values, and want to continue it. How long that'll last, I don't know. It's a dream that will last only as long as the children want it. Eventually if they don't want it, why then it's up to them to change it.

Special Assistant to the Director of the National Park Service, NEED

Riess: In 1967 you become Special Assistant to the Director of the Park Service?

Miller: It's a funny story. I got a call from Yoichi Okamoto, who was LBJ's White House photographer. Oke is a very fine photographer, and a good friend. He gave me a telephone call one day and said, "I just had a conversation with Stewart Udall," who was Secretary of the Interior. He said, "He's going to call you. I told him you're probably busy with an assignment right now and probably wouldn't be available for a week or ten days. But expect a telephone call from him. If you decide to come to Washington, DC to talk with him further, be sure to ask him who's going to pay for the air ticket." [laughs] I learned later that this conversation that Oke had with him was under very special conditions--they were standing at adjacent urinals.

By gosh, the next morning the telephone rings and Stewart Udall's on the telephone. He said he wanted to talk to me about changing the visual image of the National Park Service and wanted me to come to Washington to talk about it. I made arrangements and went to Washington, DC, and I didn't know what the devil to talk to him about, something like this. In fact, on the telephone I said, "I think you'd be crazy to change the visual image of the Park Service, you've got Ansel Adams there for Christ's sake! Don't rock the boat." At any rate, I came to his office and the fire was burning--

Riess: Was it that Ansel Adams had made it look too formidable and grand and they wanted the Park Service to look--

Miller: It was just a politician wanting to put his stamp on things. I think.

So the fire was burning, and there were a couple of chairs there, and the Director of the National Park Service was there and his assistant was there. The four of us were sitting there in front of the fire and I repeated my statement. I said, "Hang onto this thing." But on the way in on the plane I had been thinking, "I've got to have something here to throw at them." I'd done a story for *Maclean's* magazine, a Canadian magazine, about summer camp for fifth and sixth grade children here in Orinda, which at that time, early 1950s, was kind of an innovative idea. Kids spent a week in the woods together with some teachers and learned some general feelings about the woods and natural balances.

So I recalled that story I'd done, which was quite successful, as a story. I said, "Instead of thinking about me as a photographer coming and doing some things, why don't you think about a program which could work to bring national park values to urban children? That's a winner right there." I talked about how the values in the natural world depend upon balances, and there's no reason why it couldn't be replicated in cities where gangs--not everybody can be

a chief, you have to have other balances within a gang in order to make it successful. You know, a little grass growing between the sidewalk and buildings.

Anyway, I spun this thing off. I got done and Udall said, "Great, I want you to do it." You know, that's pretty heavy stuff. I said,"Well, this conversation's been fun, but give me a couple of weeks." I talked about how we could use radio, television, the schools and this sort of thing. I said, "Give me a couple of weeks and I'll go to New York and I'll get back to you." He said, "Fine." We set a date. I went to New York and talked to people. I talked to Magnum people who know stories and communications. I talked to some publishers.

Riess: The idea was that it would be put across through photography?

Miller: No. This has nothing to do with photography, this is education. I wanted to know about communication.

So I came back to Washington and laid it out and said, "I think it's possible." They said, "Okay, do it." I turned to the director of the National Park Service, George Hartzog--I became Special Assistant to the Director of the National Park Service for Environmental Affairs, I added that to it. That's when he said, "What the hell's 'environmental affairs' Wayne?'"

I said, "George, this is going to be a word that you're going to be just so sick of hearing in the next few years, you're going to want to vomit." And this was before Earth Day, this was before any of those things, you see. This is before the National Environmental Policy Act had been passed.

Anyway, I spent this three years, and I pulled together a group of Park Service personnel to work on this, and a fellow also from Berkeley at the time, Mario Menesini, who was an educator. I got his name from the fellow who ran our Orinda summer camp program. I got hold of Mario, put him under contract, and he set up an office here to design this program. He came up with some ideas, concepts, and we came up with National Environmental Education Development, the NEED Program. That was Mario's idea, that NEED acronym. This was a kindergarten through twelve program. We had it published by Silver, Burdett, and it was used in several states, Pennsylvania being one, I forget who else.

Riess: Silver, Burdett?

Miller: Silver, Burdett. I think it was with Time-Life backing.

Riess: So you created a model? They could take the package and read it and do it?

Miller: This was going to have teacher training programs. Boy oh boy, what a--I've got a whole bunch of stuff here to show you. Teacher training, and then we also needed areas to apply this thing in the city. So we needed national environmental study areas. We got that passed or approved. We could come in and we could condemn--oh shoot, it makes my skin crawl at this point in time--we could go in and condemn some land and make an environmental study area, right in the center of the city. Maybe it'd be part of a lot underneath a freeway or a clover-leaf, or it could be something. Or a section of Central Park we could condemn. [laughs] This was going to be used as a continuous reference point for studying patterns and relationships and dependencies.

Riess: Was everyone reporting to you?

Miller: Just at the development stage. I left when it came to the implementation.

A few years ago I was up in Redwood National Park and learned that they're practicing it there in that park. Also I learned that they made this program part of the indoctrination program for new employees coming into the park.

How much of that stuck, I don't know. I do remember at Yosemite one time I was there and my god, they had all kinds of materials there from this program for people to use, for visitors as well as teachers and whatnot. That was really exciting to have done that. So I had this earlier experience, and then I got involved with this thing here. I had a hell of a lot of fun.

Riess: You liked working with people, getting on the phone, making things come together?

Miller: I guess so. Must have. But it was certainly a shift of gears from photography. A lone guy flying along. So I've had a series of experiences which--it's been like a second lifetime.

Riess: Then you were a founding member of the Yosemite Institute?

Miller: Yes. That was a failure. The Yosemite Institute existed, and it was a little rinky-dink summer camp for kids there in Yosemite. I was asked to be involved in it by the same people there. I had the idea that we'd use Yosemite kind of like an Aspen [Institute], as a place to bring good thinking together, and from there, let these spores go out and find roots someplace. If we wanted to deal with environmental education, which is the way it started, I said, "Okay, we'll do that, but let's make this a showcase of how it should be done. Not bring more kids to the park, god forbid, but let's ship the concepts out so that it could be done in Podunk." We put this together. I got some money from Hartzog. Our relationship was such that I said, "George, I need five thousand dollars," and he said, "Okay." I had a marvelous relationship with him.

When I told him I wanted to leave and go to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, he said, "Why don't you stay? We can just take over this town, just stick around, we can really do it." Because I'd developed some other programs there while I was in the Park Service which showed how I could get other agencies, like the Indian Affairs, and Civil Service, National Endowment for the Arts, I could get them all involved. With their authorities and budgets, we could put together a fantastic snowman, you know, we could just do all kind of great things. I had a lot of success with our initial efforts there, and that's what he was referring to.

I started to say something else here, and then interrupted myself.

Riess: About the Yosemite Institute.

Miller: The Yosemite Institute. So we got this money, we put together a board of directors and all. I was asked to be president. I said, "No, I've done my thing here, get somebody else." So we got another fellow to come in and be president. Well it slipped right away from me, and it developed into nothing. It's still nothing but a summer camp for kids.

##

Miller: When I decided to leave the Park Service we'd been working with Health Education and Welfare, HEW, which at that point included the Department of Education. We'd been working with them to implement some of the concepts of the Park Service educational programs. So when I left the Park Service the Department of Education wanted to continue this thing on a broader level. They worked with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and they were there to help fund it, and they asked me to stay on.

I became executive director of this Public Broadcasting Environment Center which was really just a nine-month contract to explore possibilities of making a bigger thing out of this basic Park Service concept. It would include television and radio, and tying it in with schools and feedback, with a weekly or every two week national program and then weekly local programs--it would feed back and forth. I had a marvelous time with that, but it got too big. I wasn't a good administrator, and the whole thing collapsed, because we just couldn't see a way to make it work.

Riess: Were you doing photographic jobs at all during this time?

Miller: No, nothing in photography. During that period with the Park Service and Public Broadcasting I didn't do any photographic work. That was four years out.

And I think that finishes the story. At least for today.

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Tape Guide--Wayne F. Miller

APPENDICES

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Suzanne Bassett Riess

Grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. She received her B.A. in English from Goucher College in 1957. For several summers she was a feature writer for the *Bethlehem Globe-Times* of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. She did her graduate work in English literature at the University of London, and in art history at the University of California, Berkeley. She has been a senior editor in the Regional Oral History Office since 1960, interviewing in the fields of art and architecture, photography, social and cultural history, anthropology, writing, journalism, horticulture, physics, and University history. Her other interests have included many years of being a natural science docent at the Oakland Museum, that museum's Council on Architecture, free-lance photography, writing, gardening, and travel.