My Life and Times in Rochester

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MY LIFE
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ROCHESTER

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Dr. R. H. Johnston, Dean
I came to Rochester, New York on Sunday, August 20, 1972 with my husband in our 1967 red Camaro convertible with white top and white pin stripes running from the front to the trunk along the sides. We wanted to enter the city via a street rather than an expressway so we could get some kind of feeling for it. To do this we got off the Western Expressway at an exit labeled 'Chili.' We thought that 'Chili' was pronounced 'chili' (as with saltines) and asked of the attendant at the first service station we ran across: Are we in Chili (chili)? How can we get to Chili (chili) Avenue? He laughed, told us it was Chīlī and let us know how to get to town. It was early Sunday morning and we were very hungry, having driven from Buffalo that morning with no breakfast. Our first problem in Rochester was finding a place to eat. We looked
for quite a while before we ran across Gitsis Texas Hots on Monroe Avenue near the Monroe Fine Arts movie theater. I don't remember exactly what we had, but it probably doesn't matter. Everything about the place, both inside and out, turned out to be grease molded into different forms.

After our experience with Gitsis, we found that Rochester held a good deal more to be displeased with, aesthetically. There was trash lying about on the streets, a general dilapidation of the commercial buildings and convincing evidence of squalor in the private dwellings (especially around what we were to learn is known as the Bull's Head area). We were a bit disappointed. We had come from the Midwest of Minnesota and Wisconsin to seek our careers in The East and had chosen Rochester to begin that search on the strength--primarily--of what was said about it in various publications, particularly the Time-Life book on New York. Instead of moving on, however, we decided that we must have been misled by what we had at first seen--how could Time-Life be wrong? We knew, too, that we would have to work fast. We had only a few days (four altogether--two of which were not full days, but half of which had to be spent on travel) to find an apartment. That was another reason we couldn't afford to
challenge the Time-Life account: we had already made up our minds, and a schedule, for moving here.

Those few days were spent poring over want ads under the trees to the east of Cobb's Hill Reservoir, making telephone calls from corner booths and restaurant telephones set in beige, hole-punched, supposedly sound-absorbing board, getting told that it was just rented the day before last, talking with redfaced landlords and redfaced superintendents, burning up with the heat and trying to find a cheaper, cleaner air-conditioned motel. We took out, put away, folded and refolded our map so often that there were holes where the creases crossed each other. We spent our first anniversary at Don & Bob's on Monroe Avenue, eating a hamburger, licking an ice-cream cone and wondering where to go next.

When we were nearly at the end of our want ads, money, time and rope we happened to be turning around in a parking lot after passing our intended address. A crude red-crayon sign was taped to the door frame of the converted house-storefront in whose lot we were turning around: '4-RENT--1-BEDROOM APT.' We decided that our intended destination could wait another twenty minutes while we stopped at this crudely-advertized one.

When we came to the door a small, powerfully-built
man answered the door. Small pieces of cabinet and paint were stuck in his hair and to his clothes. He showed us the apartment. It was the best (for the rent) we had seen. One bedroom, with fairly large closets, a living room and a kitchenette made up the apartment. Attic storage was also included. But, he informed us apologetically, the place had already been rented—or, at any rate, almost rented. A woman had been by earlier in the week and would be back with the first and last month's rent as soon as she could raise it ($320). He said he would hold it for her until the next day at noon.

We decided, after a short and mostly tacit conference, to give him the hard sell. We spent much of the afternoon and evening talking with him, trying to convince him that not only were we tremendously likable "young marrieds," not only people who genuinely liked him, but we also would be ideal tenants. We discovered that he lived in Florida with his wife and children, where he carpentered for a living. They had moved to Florida a couple of years before and he was in Rochester trying to rent the apartment and sell the building. He had been a hairdresser formerly, and had done quite well. In fact, he had owned three shops, at one time. But, he said, it wasn't worth the headaches. He spun out story after story. The stories
themselves ranged from the mundane to the odd. They were not as remarkable as the way in which he told them. And no transcription of what he said could capture their content. He had dark brown Italian eyes. They were restless, quite literally, and stayed upon each object only long enough to focus and adjust for light. His hands were a bit less mobile. They were not always animated with broad gestures, but when they were, they were totally engaged.

He told us about the horses he had partial interest in, he told us about the Brighton town government, he told us of his sly and self-serving neighbors, business partners and tenants. He even told us a little about his former wife (who was— at the time anyway— still living in Rochester). The bits of cabinet that clung to him when he answered the door were bits of her cabinets— cabinets that he was making. Later, in September, we were to see what we took to be his former wife, driving him around in a station wagon. He told us he was staying with friends. We concluded that friendship can flourish after divorce.

The following day we were very selfishly (and very foolishly, it turned out) happy when the woman was unable to come up with $320. We found a bank that would cash our checks, gave the man his deposit and he gave us the
keys to the apartment. It was late in the afternoon and we asked if he would mind us sleeping in the apartment that night. He didn't mind, and that is where we spent the last night of our first visit to Rochester. The next morning we were on our way out of Rochester, out of New York and back to the Midwest.

It was with a touch of nostalgia--but a crush of relief--that we began to pack our things in our Milwaukee apartment. We were leaving behind much more than America's beer capital. We were leaving behind our apartment managers, our neighbors and our neighborhood. The managers were a couple in their late forties who looked twenty years older and who acted thirty years younger vis a vis their jobs, their son and us. Jane and Barney--that was who our managers were. Barney didn't mop, sweep or in any way clean the floors from November to May. He claimed that as soon as he did it would surely snow, people would track in dirt, mud and water, and all his work would be for naught. Jane had much the same attitude. Once, when I went to pay the rent, she pointed to a small pile of peanut shells in the corner and said, "I could clean that up. But it would only be dirty again next week." Jane and Barney were not paragons of intellect, either of them. But Jane was at least brighter than Barney, and she was
the one who ran things. She put up a note in the hall once before she and Barney were to take a weekend vacation. It read: "Do what you like. You would anyway." Barney and Jane, I'm afraid, could never operate a Sunoco franchise. They would be screened out at that point where it is determined whether or not the candidate "can be very friendly."

I suppose they couldn't be blamed for not liking their son, Kurt. Kurt was a lot of trouble to them. He was ten years old, had the vocabulary of a thirty-month-old baby, and was very messy. It wasn't their fault that Kurt was so intractably dull. Barney and Jane were not responsible for very much, and certainly Kurt's congenital limitations were not among those few things they could handle.

Not everyone who lived in our building was like Barney and Jane. Some of them were older and most were not married. One of them was pleasant, young, entertaining and interesting. He moved out. Jane played a large part in that decision. She and one of his neighbors, Riva, collaborated in harassing him right out of the building. He couldn't find a place to park his bicycle that wasn't complained about. He couldn't listen to his radio, leave his apartment or talk when he wanted to, either.

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Of course, the people who lived in the building weren't the only people around, and our building wasn't the only building. Those other people and other buildings in our neighborhood didn't make saying au revoir to Milwaukee any worse than did Barney, Jane and Riva. There were four bars and two liquor stores, for example, within one block of the corner our building was on. They all did pretty well, as I recall. There was a tape store advertising cartridges and cassettes across the street from us that was only open six hours a week. We never discovered what that place was a front for, but we were convinced that it was. There was a second-hand furniture store that decorated for Christmas with strings of tree lamps around the edges of their windows in the middle of October. Apparently the management decided that the lamps were so good for business that they decided to make them a permanent addition. As we finished loading the truck for New York in the 90° August twilight, those decorations were visible and still providing a shopping incentive for passers-by (although we seldom saw anyone enter or leave the place).

The out-of-the-building neighbors, though we never knew any of their names, were a significant part of the Milwaukee we were leaving. The adieu we were bidding them was not fond, although it was heartfelt. There was the
colony of motorcyclists that settled across the alley that our bedroom window overlooked. They took over a two-and-a-half story house about halfway through our stay in that apartment. The house was attractive and well-kept before they moved in. At least, the fact that they lived there guaranteed us a policeman within stone's throw at all times—even though they might be busy frisking the cyclists, looking for contraband substances or stolen items. Also, there was the couple who regularly staged pitched battles in their apartment and occasionally down the alley on Saturday nights. They sounded angry enough, but one wondered how serious they were when one noticed their silhouettes on the shades of their apartment—thrown by a single strong light source. And, of course, there were the "extras" (a la' Cecille B. DeMille): the kids just in and just out of high school with their overpowered cars who thought that the Beach Boys had the right idea with their songs of dragstrips, cars and girls, and who still thought that surfing movies were the culmination of 10,000 years of aesthetic and technological history; the bedraggled, frowzy, frumpy, dirty, grumpy women of all ages at the laundromat with their scruffy urchins who unfolded their hands to the world like the leaves of some dangerous and powerful weed that had developed its brute
ability to survive against all odds of insects, defoliants and herbivores, but which lost its beauty in the bargain; the drunks (never seen, but sometimes heard) who regularly mistook the numerals on the door of our building for letters; etc.

From this assortment of humanity, or rather from this melange, we "packed up all our cares and woe." We were about to swing low through Illinois, across Indiana and Ohio and up the New York shore of Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, saying good-bye to the blackbird all along the way. We were to find that although we definitely left the melange in Milwaukee, the cares and woe all followed us to Rochester. But first the story of how we arrived "a little late at night."

We left Milwaukee before 4 a.m. on Friday, September 1, 1972. The rented truck had been loaded the previous afternoon but we decided to make a fresh start of it in the morning. Everything in the truck was in good working order except for the speedometer. It had broken the day we picked up the truck, and could not be fixed before we needed it. So I was forced to drive our car while my husband drove the truck. Driving the pace car at Indianapolis may be fun, but driving the pace car from Milwaukee to Rochester on the Friday that starts the Labor Day weekend
is more like work, simpliciter. Fortunately, the heat had subsided and the temperature was no higher than the mid-70's all across that stretch of America's mid-section. It was dusty, monotonous, and I often had to signal my husband to go faster or slower in the truck, whose sense of speed was apparently forgotten on the kitchen counter when we left our old apartment. We hit Chicago at about 7 a.m., Cleveland near 5 p.m. and collapsed, exhausted, on the floor of our Rochester apartment at midnight, twenty hours after setting out. Those are the high points of our one-day trek. There were also a couple of low points.

The lowest came just south of Chicago. We had to get off I-94 for I-90 across Indiana. I was following the truck closely, making sure that no other cars could squeeze between the truck and me. I was following too closely, for the truck screened the exit sign from my view. The next thing I knew the truck had exited and I was on my way to Kankakee rather than Indiana and Ohio. I was panic-stricken. I missed the first exit from the freeway and spilled my morose story to the first service-station full of blacks off the second exit. They thought it was all rather amusing, but gave me the directions to get back to the proper expressway. When I did I was
praying, shouting and crying. I hoped that my husband wouldn't exit somewhere. For how would I know where? Finally, after what seemed like a very long time, I saw the yellow truck stopped on the shoulder of the roadway. My husband saw me pull up behind the truck, but neither of us dared to get out of our vehicles in that traffic (it was about 8 a.m.). There was a small break in the traffic and the truck pulled out. The next two vehicles were semi-trailer trucks, breaking all speed limits and rolling down the two-lane expressway side-by-side. The underpowered rental truck couldn't accelerate nearly fast enough for these trucks and I thought I had found my husband only to have him squeezed off the road, one way or another, before me. Fortunately, the semi-trucks swerved off the destructive paths they were on, braking and running on the center shoulder. By the time the next wave of traffic came, my husband's truck had reached a safe speed. We made an exit at the next opportunity and drew several long sighs of relief.

Another low spot came on the New York State Thruway, thirty miles on the Erie side of Buffalo. It was night, we had been driving for more than fifteen hours, stopping only for food and gasoline. I thought I couldn't go on, that I couldn't leave the service area we were parked at.
But my husband told me that I must, that we had a time limit to be on the Thruway. I was as angry with him as he was with me, and that gave us the impetus to get to the City of Rochester.

When we arrived at the city limits we reached another low point. This time my husband refused to continue. He had caught something in his eye half way between Buffalo and Rochester and claimed he could neither see nor stand the pain. More coaxings and proddings followed. Finally we started off again. This happened in a Chili Avenue parking lot. We had become lost and had stopped for directions at a pizza place. No one there knew where Monroe Avenue was (they all must have had their driver's education courses scheduled for the next year of their high school careers). I had no idea where we were, either. So I had to convince my husband that he not only could continue, but that he could remember how to get there. He did remember, but he remembered the long way around. We took Chili to Main, went right at Culver to Monroe and left past Twelve Corners to our apartment. We had indeed arrived "a little late at night," but no one was waiting for us, "sugar sweet" or not. We had arrived in Rochester.

After a couple of weeks of unpacking, settling, learning where the supermarkets, post offices, drugstores,
discount department stores and parks were, the crucial confrontation came between Rochester Institute of Technology and me. I knew that fall quarter was about to start, but had not started yet. I had not formally applied for several reasons. My undergraduate portfolio slides were not especially good (despite a couple of sessions with a 'professional' photographer—it was after those incidents that I lost my faith in 'professional' photography). My undergraduate alma mater is unknown to anyone east of the Mississippi River, west of Minneapolis, north of 46° N. or south of 44° N. I had spent a most unpleasant year in the starkly real world of Milwaukee's near South Side and my confidence had been at least marginally eroded. Finally, I was worried that I might not get in, if I applied formally, but I was confident that I would be able to get in and perform successfully if I applied informally.

But that was before I had seen the campus. I was more than impressed. I was overwhelmed. There was a massive, powerful aura around all those bricks in all those angles, corners, walkways and driveways. I felt rather insignificant. Later this initial feeling would become a critical assessment of the architectural success of the project. But at that time it was most closely
linked with fear. If there had been a way to turn back perhaps I would have. But all our things were here, we had a new one-year lease in hand and we were out of money. There was no way out of it. I made an appointment with the Assistant Dean, Neil Hoffman.

Mr. Hoffman's office was small, but very business-like, with many official-looking papers. At first he said there would be no way that I could possibly attend during the fall. I almost agreed, and rather wanted to melt out into the secretaries' office, through the gallery, and fade away into one of those expanses of brick that seemed to stretch everywhere. But I didn't. Instead, I tried to convince him that I should be allowed--provisionally--to take a course or two. Then, depending on my performance (in which I was fairly confident), I could be admitted on a regular basis or dropped. I felt very much that I was trying to move Gibraltar to Helsinki, but in retrospect Mr. Hoffman was very fair, open and interested. He said that all of the programs were filled for the fall and that space had run out. But the hard line that attendance would be impossible began to soften. He agreed to arrange an appointment for me with Professor Meyer, to whom further and final action concerning my fall attendance would be deferred. Mr. Hoffman said of Professor Meyer

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that "He is really too kind-hearted and generous, and I'm afraid he might accept people even when there is no room left."

My appointment was for the next afternoon. I knocked at Professor Meyer's office door. He opened it, letting me into an austere, spartan office, almost sterile in its near-emptiness. There was only a desk, a chair behind it, a goose-necked lamp on the desk and a rocking chair. Professor Meyer himself appeared right at home in this environment. It seemed to me at once amusing and a bit alarming that this man was taken to be "too kind."

The rocker was the only place for me to sit. It made me even more distressed than I already was (although I had calmed a bit from the day before, my anxiety level still looked like an elevation profile of the Rockies). There was no way to sit erect in that chair and be comfortable, and I certainly couldn't sit back in that chair and be comfortable while my future was at stake. Professor Meyer asked me why I was interested in graduate work--specifically at R.I.T. I answered as straightforwardly and honestly as I could, and that apparently was satisfactory. I showed some of my slides. The most positive remark they elicited was, "Well, you don't seem to have any major problems with color." Through the entire interview
I tried to follow expressions of approval or disapproval on Professor Meyer's face, but he sat in front of a window with only partially-opened blinds, and I found it impossible to see, even with the most conscious attempts to adjust the aperture of my irises. The closest I came was when he was looking at the slides, holding them to the turned-up goose-neck lamp, and even that didn't seem overwhelmingly successful.

By the end of the interview he had agreed to let me attend the painting course for graduate students who were minoring in it. It was to be a provisional admission, with no degree credit. I felt relieved and agreed to those terms. Yet on leaving that office I was not entirely satisfied. For I was only to be with the minors, and that was a bit of an insult, but I knew that given this chance I would be with the majors before long. Thus I began at R.I.T.

My first experience with registration at R.I.T. was to be all too typical: it made me late for my first painting session. I came into the lounge area of the large painting studio where my fellow "minors-in-painting" students were gathered, listening to Professor Meyer concerning the best places to obtain materials. It seemed somewhat informal, and perhaps the very appearance of infor-
mality made me a bit reluctant to enter that artificial room created by a few portable partitions. The whole incident rather intimidated me, although it would be hard to tell exactly why I felt that way, or who the intimidators were (other, perhaps, than myself).

There was a break in the class when the meeting ended and people began to set up or--if they were already set up--began to work. I decided to go back to the apartment and get my canvas. This was no ordinary canvas. I had moved this canvas many times over more than a thousand miles in a year and a half. This canvas consisted of two quadrants which, when placed together, formed a kind of split hemi-circle, about ten feet long and five feet high. I don't know if I'll ever again care as much for an unpainted canvas as I did for that one. I had wanted to paint on it for a long time but never had the space until that moment. I was finally going to get my chance.

Up to this point my painting had dealt with forms (organic abstractions) existing in containing structures themselves somehow existing in space. In fact, I think that the ambiguity of this relationship was one of the biggest problems with my painting at that time. It was never clear to me how those containing forms could exist
in the open space. If there was no gravity in these paintings, why should the forms be pressurized into such tight compartments? There seemed to be no rationale for such pressurization of forms. I approached my two-quadrant hemi-circle in a new way. My forms were opened up to cover the entire space. I was very much concerned with space as perceived, rendered or conceived on a large scale. This concern for space on a large scale and with forms in that space resulted in paintings that can best be characterized as celestial. The hemi-circle of my large canvas along with this concern with celestial space presented a spherical (or hemispherical) aspect. The shapes and spaces of that canvas made it into something of a celestial sphere. Later I was to find that there is a technical meaning for 'celestial sphere.' It is: "the infinite sphere of the heavens as imagined from the apparent half visible by an observer on earth."  

This technical meaning also reflects what it was that I was trying to accomplish. I wanted to create a Baroque effect, but in less restricted terms. I wanted the same glorious sensations but with forms which could be objective and recognizable or not depending on who looked at them.

The quarter progressed and I was making headway (at least

---1. Webster's New World Dictionary (Cleveland, New York: World Publishing Company, 1961), p. 120.

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I always like to make myself believe I'm making headway) dealing with other ideas for shaped canvas covered with celestial forms.

And so I began my career at R.I.T. I was painting again and I was back in school after a year's absence. My husband had gotten a job ("career" is what his employers called it) at an insurance company selling--however unlikely this sounds--life insurance. We were fairly well settled in our new apartment and were beginning to gain some financial security (i.e., pay off the bills we had been incurring). It seemed that our plans were working out, if only in their opening stages.

But things were not to continue as smoothly as they had begun. The first indicators of trouble surrounded our landlord’s plans to sell the building we were living in. We were apprehensive concerning whoever might be the new landlord. John Gerard had the building on the market in August when we rented the apartment and he stayed in Rochester right through September. But in the first days of October he finally decided to return to Florida. He had been telling himself for weeks that he would stay just one more week, that maybe buyers would walk through the door the very next Monday. But that did not happen and he left, by jet, for Florida's Gulfcoast. The responsi-
bility for selling the building drifted out of Gerard's hands like the white seeds of a dandelion in a strong June wind, scattering everywhere. Various realtors drifted by, all ringing the apartment doorbell and all claiming to represent Mr. Gerard insofar as the sale of the building was concerned. Some of them denounced others as fakes. Gerard had left someone he knew to act as a personal deputy, but it was never clear who he was, either. And often it was impossible to get in touch with anyone at the number Gerard gave us. Several times we called his Florida home, disturbed, upset and confused about the phalanx of strangers demanding to be let into our building. He gave us the name of his attorney, but like the obstetrician in Rosemary's Baby, it was not possible to tell whether he was in fact a friend or foe.

October and November passed in these peculiar circumstances. But by December there appeared three serious-looking prospective buyers. Unfortunately, they were more than serious—looking, they were out-and-out sinister. They called me on the phone, harassing me and trying to force me to let them in (when Gerard told us to refer everyone to the friend who was often not at home). They broke in by kicking open the milk box at the side door, reaching around and unbolting the door. They were higher-
powered, sport-coated versions of the motorcyclists we thought we had left behind in Milwaukee.

They closed on the house in mid-December. All we wanted to do was get out of our lease with our $160 of last month's rent. Our new landlords were very much encouraging when it came to the subject of our vacating the apartment. They had already made plans for the apartment, and—we hypothesized—their harassment was designed, at least in part, to be an inducement to get us to leave. We found a new apartment that was suitable. We were about to sign a new lease when our co-landlords became coy about tearing up our lease and giving us the $160 we were due. After a verbal struggle we finally accomplished that. It was Christmastime, we were out of our old lease and into a new one, we had been worn thin by problems surrounding our first apartment here, and we wanted to rest and go home. We did. We rested in Minnesota from our Upstate New York troubles and thought that when we returned all we would have to do would be to move from our old apartment to the new one.

Unfortunately, we were wrong. We did have to move, but we had contracted virulent Minnesota colds that made the difficult job of moving an almost insurmountable one. Fortunately, we had help from some very strong friends.
On New Year's Eve, though, we reached a point at which we could no longer go on. We gave up the last few things in our old apartment until New Year's Day. We had to make three more trips. The first went smoothly. But on the second, the three new co-owners, their wives and children all crowded into our tiny apartment while we were trying to get out. It was infuriating and almost unbearable. The children were allowed to run around and almost broke a couple of our things. When we returned for the last trip, everyone had gone but the head of those three entrepreneurs. He was, moreover, talking on our phone. We had called the phone company a couple of days previously. They said that they wouldn't be able to remove it by the first of January, but that as long as we didn't use it, we wouldn't be charged for it. I told him to get off. We loaded the car some more and he still wasn't off.

Finally, the car was loaded except for a small box of odds and ends and a mop. My husband, angry, ill and upset, pulled the phone wires from the wall in the middle of the new co-owner's conversation. He became furious, grasped the receiver in his hand like a small club and began to chase my husband around the room. I grabbed the mop, screaming and terrified, threatening the man (who, I was by this time convinced, was at least a minor mafioso).
My husband clasped him by the shoulders, preventing the man from swinging. Finally, I shouted that my father was an attorney and that we would be sure to sue, when the man ceased. We grabbed our things and headed for the Brighton Police Station. Somehow, the owner got there first. We saw him walk into the office and up to the desk just before we did. And we saw the policeman behind the counter acknowledge him with a little wave. We spilled our story but demurred on pressing charges, claiming that all we wanted was to be left alone. When we left we were afraid that we might be followed. We weren't. We were still shaken that night, though, and paid no attention to the taped reruns of the big winners in the 1973 Tournament of Roses Parade.

That wasn't the last we heard from them, though. Two weeks later we happened to be shopping. Three men fitting descriptions of our three former landlords came knocking at our apartment door. A new neighbor who knew nothing of our unpleasant experiences told us about them the next day. Fortunately, they never returned. But we rather did keep track of our old apartment, driving by it occasionally. It was empty for very nearly a year after we moved out. Then a "COINS & STAMPS" sign appeared in one of the windows. All of the windows were covered over
with light brown paper. As far as we know, that is how it is today (although we both doubt that so much as change for a dollar has been given in that "coin" shop, or that a single airmail stamp has been sold there).

We were drained—and more than just emotionally. Moving had cost us telephone fees, trailer rental, etc. We had to pay airfare back to Minnesota. Our new apartment was higher in rent than the other one. We were once again broke. I had gone to work at Two Guys on a part-time basis. But it wasn't enough. I had to forego attending school winter quarter. Once again our plans seemed to recede before our outstretched hands. I increased my working hours to almost full time. We were still not making much headway. I decided to formally apply for admission, just to keep some semblance of making career progress.

I was not admitted. I was surprised and upset. I went to find why I wasn't admitted. Mr. Hoffman informed me that I didn't have enough undergraduate credits. He said I would need somewhere in the neighborhood of 75 studio credit hours, but that I had only 35. I asked him to take another look at my transcript. I showed him the credit-key at the bottom of the page. We remultiplied and found that I had about 95 R.I.T. studio credit hours. I
was, following this revelation, accepted. Two independent occurrences made it possible, financially, for me to attend R.I.T. in the spring as an M.F.A. candidate. First, my husband got a raise. Second, our Camaro was damaged by a hit-and-run driver (while parked) to the tune of about $550. We spent the insurance check, never fixed the car, and I was back in school again.

Now I was to be with the painting majors in the M.F.A. program, and that meant moving to the sixth floor in the West Main Street campus. I arrived downtown at the beginning of spring quarter, looking for Professor Meyer. I learned that he was in Italy at the time. The graduate assistant was there, however, and much to my dismay was unaware that a new student was to be given a place to work on the sixth floor. There was, he said, no room for me. All the available studios were occupied. I tried to persuade him that I was not a space-hustler off the street and needed a place to work but he was adamant. He was too busy and did not intend to set up partitions and lights to give me a studio of my own. Surprisingly, a diminutive studio appeared simultaneously with Professor Meyer's return. It would have made a rabbit consider application for a home-improvement loan (or hutch-improvement loan, as the case may be). On Professor
Meyer's return from Italy I was made to feel much more comfortable than I had been made to feel, and I was appreciative of this. It was another indication that Assistant Dean Hoffman's assessment was right and that my first impression of Professor Meyer was wrong.

The attitude of the graduate assistant toward me— that of an eagle to an intruder in the eyrie—did not alter. And I gained the impression that this attitude was shared by the rest of the graduate students holding two-year non-renewable leases on the sixth floor, at least en masse. I became comfortable working in that environment only slowly and with great difficulty. The events of the previous eighteen months of my life, and especially those of the previous six months, had not shaken the basic and fundamental resolve with which I approached my work, but they had an unmistakable—and perhaps unavoidable—effect. I began to work on canvas of smaller and more regular dimensions. I had recently acquired tropical fish. The placidity, grace and beauty which they brought to my apartment, and sometimes my consciousness when I was most troubled, began to superimpose themselves on the celestial forms with which I had earlier been concerned. The celestial forms on shaped canvases yielded to fish-like and bird-like forms on smaller, rectangular canvases. I be-
gan to divide these canvases into various regions with hard, painted lines that contrasted with the softness of the forms. Sometimes these lines resulted in diptych-like and triptych-like effects. This preserved some of the earlier Baroque-Rococo celestial feelings in my paintings and provided continuity for me. The forms that appeared in my painting at this point both intrigued and worried me. I found them interesting to work with and full of possibilities, but at the same time they seemed too ideal and romantic.

The conflicts which I experienced over these paintings made me more sensitive than I had been for a long, long time and more sensitive than I was to be until quite recently. Near the end of the quarter, when the critique was scheduled, I happened to meet and have lunch with one of those students assigned to the same discussion group as I was. She was an abrasive, brusque, strong person. I found the thought of displaying the paintings I had done that spring to the discussion group in general and this particular negative and critical person in particular to be unbearable. My sensitivity compelled me to leave before the critique was held. The ambivalence which I felt to the forms in my paintings was not to be resolved during that quarter. Later, though, the representationalism of
these forms yielded to more abstract ones.

That summer I worked almost full time at a grocery store. We worked hard at saving money and even sold quite a few of the things for which we had no use in our new apartment (e.g., range, refrigerator, air conditioner). We were forced into buying a new car that spring, so we sold our old car, too, and finally we had enough money so I could go full time.

The next year, my first full-time year, was a difficult one not only financially, but mentally and emotionally and, consequently, artistically as well. There were major changes in my painting. In the beginning of the fall quarter I moved to a new, luxurious studio which had several windows ranged along the outside wall. It was difficult, at first, for me to work there. In fact, I have noticed that usually there is a period of adjustment when I begin working in new surroundings. During this period of adjustment, I find it rather difficult to work, probably being preoccupied with learning—visually—my new surroundings. The view from the windows of my new studio included relatively large office buildings and their regular geometric shapes began to find a way into my work. The colors of the buildings were very drab and that, in part, was responsible for the change in color in
my paintings from the rather bright colors to browns, tans and earth colors.

I began to experiment with variations of these light and dark colors on a monochromatic scale. I did this by various techniques of surface variation. One of these techniques was the application of various coats of the gesso surface. In some places the final coat would be applied to raw canvas. In some places the final coat would be applied to many other coats. Thus variations in finish resulted from the amount of paint in the final coat absorbed by the canvas. Another of the techniques was the use of matte finish or semi-gloss paint surface to create differences between light and dark tones.

There were other reasons I had felt the need to eliminate wide ranges of color for much narrower ones, aside from my window-view. The most obvious at the time was a conscious decision to create in my work a refuge from the continual assault of images, color and events in contemporary American life in general and in mine in particular. The need to escape from the constant barrage of advertising billboards, sprawling, formless shopping centers, aggressive people and vehicles and the yellow journalism of both newspapers and television became severe. This resulted in not only the sifting out of colors,
but also of shapes, space and even the forms in my painting. The spaces and forms were, during this period, at first created by matte or gloss surfaces of the monochrome color. Other surface variations, as mentioned above, were also used. I then developed a shallow space with large areas of flat acrylic paint followed by surface forms differing not in color but in sheen. This subtle treatment of paint I found most meditative and serene.

By spring quarter I felt that it was time for a change. I felt that the view from my studio windows was not only providing me with material for my work, but that it was distracting me, cutting into my concentration. I increasingly found myself glancing, gazing or staring out the window, at the cloud patterns framed on the solid background of the office buildings, at the people moving along the streets in cars, buses or on the sidewalks, at the buildings themselves. I also found myself spending more time entertaining fellow students in my studio. The oppressive and hostile atmosphere that seemed to surround me the previous spring had dissipated. I was very thankful for that, but felt that my painting was beginning to suffer due to lack of attention. So, when a studio became available away from the windows and away
from other students I decided to move into it.

There were no windows at all in this new studio, and despite the fact that it was near the door to the entire sixth-floor painting area, it was rather more secluded and private than my other studio had been. In my new studio I had more control over lighting conditions (which had been difficult to control in my previous studio, in turn making it more difficult to handle the problems I had been dealing with in my painting). I had more control over the flow of people into and out of my new studio, too, but more importantly I had more control over myself. I needed this additional control to make progress in the new direction that my painting was to take. But first I had to adjust to this new studio, as I had to adjust to my window studio and other previous studios. I found in my studio new shapes, new lighting situations and new forms. Some of the most interesting of these new forms were those I found on the floor of the studio (see Photograph #1 and Photograph #2). These forms resulted from paint drippings, streaks and patterns of bare spots on the floor. There were other visually interesting aspects as well, such as the concrete blocks of the wall, the ceiling, etc. These all provided me with visually novel forms.
I continued with monochrome painting and my color range became--possibly--even more limited. There were, after all, fewer bright colors in my new studio than in my old. But I also began a new style of painting which was, in my final year, to become very important to me. This new style was concerned with a different way of creating forms on the canvas. This technique was roughly the following. After stretching the canvas, I took pieces of masking tape and tore, ripped and formed them. I would have, then, a number of pieces of tape of various widths, lengths and shapes. I applied these to the canvas to create forms. This was the most spontaneous step in the process and the least predictable. I applied gesso to the entire canvas, including over the tape, so that the canvas under the tape was not painted. I sanded the gesso surface until it was smooth, then repeated the process. When the canvas was smooth enough, I removed the tape, exposing the portions not yet painted. I then began experimenting with paint, being very careful in the mixing and selection of a basic color for the canvas. I applied this basic color to the whole surface of the canvas. When the paint dried, the taped areas were darker than gessoed areas. These darker areas comprised the forms in the canvases. I was limited to one--or at the
very most two--applications of the basic color. The reason is that further applications of paint would obliterate the forms that appeared on the bare (taped) canvas, resulting in a canvas of one solid color with no forms at all. I lost a number of canvases during the development of this technique because the paint of the basic color would run, separate or dry unevenly, despite the care taken in mixing the paint.

Another facet of the development of this new style with which I was struggling was the making of marks on the canvas. Previously, the canvases prepared with the technique described in the above paragraph seemed too controlled and lacked vital energy. I hoped to infuse some energy into my paintings with these marks. I began by using compressed charcoal. I knew these marks would have to be affixed somehow, so I experimented with various fixatives. Some of them, when dry, retained a wet, shiny appearance which darkened the paint and gave a shadowy appearance, which I liked. I began to consider the fixative as a new way of making shapes and forms. I began using it as a standard tool (see Photograph #3).

By the end of spring quarter, I had made a fair amount of progress, even though there was not a large number of finished works. I had become accustomed to my new
studio—the studio at which I was to remain during the coming academic year. I had gained additional self-control by working in my new environment. Also, I gained a boost in self-esteem when one of my paintings was included in the Finger Lakes Show at the Memorial Art Gallery. The recognition was needed, and gave me added assurance in pursuing my own development.

The summer was spent, for the most part, in working at an ordinary job. In July, however, I was the artist-in-residence at Letchworth State Park. Most of the work I did while there was representational. I worked mainly in drawing. This provided a change for me, although my main interest continued to be in the abstract forms in what I saw (and even in what I drew). While artist-in-residence I also gained some valuable experience in teaching art. This experience would prove valuable during the next year when I became an art teacher in an adult education program. I had only a limited opportunity to paint during the summer. But I did experiment with other ways of making the marks on the surface of my paintings. I began to use pastels for this purpose. This was to signal the beginning of the reintroduction of wider color ranges in my work.

In the fall I was a student teacher at Finger Lakes
Community College. I also taught adult education three nights a week. At first I was rather apprehensive about teaching, but those feelings of apprehension were quickly dissipated and I found I was quite confident with my students. The large amount of time required for these teaching activities definitely limited the amount of time I had to work on my own painting. Nevertheless, my work underwent a good deal of change during the fall.

To begin, my paintings became more colorful, the neutral monochrome of the previous year gradually giving way to brighter and more varied colors. The surface chalk marks on my paintings became more colorful, too. I began to notice that my paintings in some ways resembled motifs found in the work of New World Indians. At first I rather disliked this similarity and was—to a degree—distressed by it. Later, however, it came to interest me. Although there were antecedents to be found in the art of both North American and South American Indians, the greatest resemblances between my work and Indian art were to be found in the weavings of South American Indians. I discovered that the forms and markings in the woven work were symbolic and had definite meanings associated with them, although they were not, strictly speaking, hieroglyphic.

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I became interested in developing forms that had no meanings associated with them. This was almost the diametric opposite of the celestial feeling. For in the celestial paintings there were images without strictly demarcated forms whereas in my new paintings there were clear forms with no imagery content. In other words, in the celestial paintings it was possible for an observer to isolate images of various kinds of things among the amorphous forms. In the new paintings, there were on the contrary sharply rendered forms, but forms in which no images of ordinary kinds of things were to be found. Instead, these forms were crisp and much like the forms of conventionalized signs, insignias or symbols. Susanne K. Langer's conception of art as "articulate but non-discursive form having import without conventional reference"² seemed to fit almost perfectly what I was after in these paintings. I wanted to capture the aesthetic qualities of the kind of symbolic communication embodied in the textile designs of the South American Indians without retaining any vestiges of conventional reference which the forms in the textiles carried with them.

Unfortunately, I was to find that the project outlined above—creating pure signs with no referents and no imagery content—was not to succeed. My first efforts in this direction retained too noticeably the potential imagery content which I sought to eliminate. When this imagery was refined out of the paintings, they became too austere and inaccessible. The paint quality seemed too tightly stretched on the surface of the canvas. This very flat quality of the paint which had previously been of much interest was becoming a negative factor. The imagery had been eliminated, but the price which had to be paid for this elimination was a loss of dynamism and vitality. The result of this experiment was that I knew there would have to be changes to relieve the static and inaccessible quality that had made its appearance in the last paintings of the quarter.

Around Christmas I began two paintings almost simultaneously which were to lead to solutions of the difficulties which I had been encountering. The first of these was begun with acrylic polymer medium instead of white gesso. I applied several coats to the canvas, just as I had with the gesso. I also had used strips of tape, as previously, which left unpainted the portions of canvas they covered during application of the polymer medium.
I attempted to make the surface marks on the canvas with pencil. The pencil did not work well, though. I decided to set this canvas aside for a while, and I began the second painting. I used only \( \frac{1}{2} \)-inch tape, first securing it near the top of the canvas and allowing the ribbon-like strips to descend across the face of the canvas in strong geometric patterns. This time I tinted the polymer medium before applying it to the canvas over the tape strips. But the polymer medium was tinted too heavily, resulting in an effect like that of a flat monochromatic color. The painting, as it stood, was unacceptable and I was left with two canvases covered with new problems to be solved, rather than two finished paintings.

I returned to work on the first canvas. I began by applying pastels to it. About two years previously I had tried to use pastels with paint, but my efforts at that time were unsuccessful. The pastels had discolored when I attempted to affix them, so I had set them aside. But on the present canvas there were areas not yet painted--the ones masked by the tape--and I rubbed the pastels into these areas. I discovered that even the polymer areas absorbed the pastels, though less completely and fully than did the raw portions of canvas. The differential effects of the pastels on the painted and un-
painted surfaces of the canvas were very exciting. I continued to build a variety of soft pastels into the canvas, applying on top of these the kinds of surface marks which I had previously discovered (see Photograph #3). Part of the solution to the problems of austerity and inaccessibility which had become apparent during the fall was beginning to emerge. I completed the first painting of my thesis work with this canvas.

I returned to the second canvas. The strip-forms that fell into geometric patterns still seemed promising, but the darkness of the polymer medium led me to start again by restretching a new canvas on the same frame. Similar forms were developed with the strips of tape. More tints were added to the first layer of the polymer medium, but I was careful not to tint as heavily this time. I was successful at that, avoiding the flat monochromatic appearance that had forced me to begin again. I proceeded with pastels and marks as I had in the painting just completed. The result was, once again, encouraging (see Photograph #5).

The next two paintings which I did were the largest ones of my thesis work, approximately 5½ feet by 5½ feet each. I followed the same kinds of methods used on the previous two paintings. Some new features were introduced.
In the first painting I added the use of clear contact paper for masking purposes. The clear contact paper offered two advantages. First, it provided a flexibility in creating the masked forms on the raw canvas as far as size and shape which could not be obtained by the mere use of tape. Second, I could see the color of the raw canvas through the masking contact paper. This allowed me to better assess the differences in color. There was a feature which I felt ambiguous about. I could not get the ripped, ragged edges that I could with the tape. This altered the appearance of the forms--an alteration which I was not sure whether I really liked or not.

Other than the addition of the contact-masked forms, I proceeded with the first canvas much as I had with the previous two. Because the clear contact paper was used to make some of the forms, the strong geometric patterns formed by the tape strips lost some of their importance, but retained a kind of directional significance through the painting. The next step was to apply the tinted polymer medium. From that point onward, the painting was beset with problems. The tinting was not taken on the canvas evenly, but was spotty and irregular. Fresh coats of the tinted medium seemed only to aggravate the irregularities. Things were looking down and I was discouraged.
with the progress—or lack of it—that I was making. The canvas was recalcitrant and repulsed the efforts I was making to control it. I could not seem to find the most natural way to handle the painting. I began to feel about this painting as I had about the work I had done during the first quarter I was on the sixth floor. I was not pleased with what was happening and I did not want others to see the struggle that I was going through.

Very slowly, though, the painting began to take shape as the problems which I was having with it began to be solved. The first step leading to the solution of these difficulties was the abandonment of the two-tone background field with which I had begun. The tinted polymer medium which provided the background was a pinkish flesh color and aqua blue. These were arranged to provide a hazy effect as in "Descending Forms" (see Photograph #5). At this point I alternated between eliminating the pinkish flesh color and eliminating the aqua blue color, resulting in a monochromatic background field of aqua blue and pinkish flesh, respectively. One effect of this repainting of the canvas was that the forms originally masked by the contact paper and tape became hazy and indistinct because of the constant reworking of paint around their edges. After deciding that the aqua blue
background allowed the forms more flexibility to float in the space created by the field, the painting seemed to fall quickly into place. I felt good about the painting and consider it my strongest work to date.

During this time I had been experimenting with similar forms in drawings. I worked in pastels, watercolor and compressed charcoal. The forms in the second of the two large canvases in my thesis work grew out of one of these drawings. The forms under consideration were much more strongly geometrical in shape than had been the forms in my previous painting. The geometrical qualities of these forms were, furthermore, accented by the hard, smooth edges of the contact paper which I was now using for masking purposes. The approaching thesis show added pressure for the rapid completion of this painting but I was to encounter difficult problems here as I had with the previous painting. The sharpness of the forms was the source of much of these problems. I had begun with a very flat paint quality augmenting the sharpness and clarity of the forms. The result was so foreign to the work which I had been doing that to prevent the austerity and inaccessibility which seemed to be reappearing in this canvas from the previous fall I had to soften the hard shapes of the forms. The indistinctness of the
forms was increased, so they appeared as in "Aqueous Humor" (see Photograph #6). I also altered the flat dryness of the paint quality so that it became denser, richer and more luminous. At this stage the pastel marks were applied. These marks had become independent forms themselves, taking their own shape rather than merely reinforcing the shape of the other forms. They provided energy and movement to my painting. Following these alterations the major difficulties seemed to be solved and the painting was finished before the show—by sheer force of will as much as by anything else. I think that there are certain difficulties with this painting that are unsolved. But because of this I think it suggests areas for future development.

The drawings which I mentioned in connection with the last painting had occupied my attention throughout the spring. My drawing and painting have seldom been of equal quality. Usually my painting is more advanced than my drawing, although occasionally my drawing is more advanced than my painting. Previous to my thesis work, I had not been able to use the same kinds of techniques in my drawings as in my paintings, but I thought I saw an opportunity to do so here. I was using in my paintings a common drawing medium—pastel. I tried several times
to simultaneously work up the space and forms in my drawings with pastels. Little success resulted from these efforts. I experimented with tape as a mask in my drawings, using it as I had done in my paintings. Again I met with little success. While experimenting with different techniques I discovered that if I took sheets of paper, cut out forms and used the sheet of paper as a stencil, I could rub the pastels through the stencil cutouts. This was a rather pleasing effect and provided a workable way to use pastels to make drawings. I used this technique in several of my thesis drawings (see Photograph #8, Photograph #9 and Photograph #10). By working with colored drawing paper I already had a background field of color and I tried various different background color fields to create the space in the drawings (see Photograph #9 and Photograph #10).

There are several features of doing these drawings which I find interesting and important. First, these particular drawings were not as taxing as their counterparts in painting. Unfortunately, I do not think that they are quite as successful as are the paintings. But I found they could be done much more quickly and could provide a more accessible field for experiment and innovation than the painting medium. Although helpful and
enjoyable, these drawings are not translatable into paintings. I believe that they must stand by themselves, in the end.

This brings me to the present. It is very nearly the end of my story, and as such calls for some kind of summary or conclusion. But there really are no conclusions to be made. The reasons for this are much the same as the reasons that I had to expand my original thesis project. To abstract merely one aspect of my paintings—the relationship which they bear to South American textiles, in this case—eliminates too much of what influenced me in their development, what I was attempting in them and what they mean to me, both in themselves and insofar as my overall objectives in art are concerned. To arbitrarily overlook so much is neither reasonable nor intellectually honest. I could not limit myself to such a project, although at one time I thought I could. So I cannot draw any conclusions, for I would be overlooking too much that is important.
PHOTOGRAPHS
PHOTOGRAPH #1

Studio Floor
PHOTOGRAPH #2

Studio Floor
PHOTOGRAPH #3

EARLIER CAESIUM FORMS
66" by 66"
Spring 1974
PHOTOGRAPH #5

DESCENDING FORMS
48" by 48"
Winter 1975
PHOTOGRAPH  #6

AQUEOUS HUMOR
  66" by 66"
  Spring 1975
PHOTOGRAPH  #7

UNTITLED
66" by 66"
Spring 1975
PHOTOGRAPH  #8

FLAGELLUM EDDY
22" by 28"
Spring 1975
PHOTOGRAPH  #9

EPHYRA
22" by 28"
Spring 1975
PHOTOGRAPH  #10

CILIUM CURRENTS
22" by 28"
Spring 1975