

**University Corporation for Atmospheric Research
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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview of Janet Smock Roberts

January 19, 2005

Interviewer: Stuart Leslie

Leslie: And I'm with Mrs. Walter Roberts, Janet Roberts. We're at her home in Boulder, Colorado and the date is January 20th, 2005, and maybe -- I'd like to begin, maybe with Walter's earlier plans for the mesa, and I think he had some earlier ideas about some things he was going to build up there.

Roberts: Well, he certainly got his eye on the mesa, but I don't know if he had any specific plan in mind. If you'll notice, you can't see so much from here, but when we first moved here, the trees were a lot smaller and you could see the mesa much more clearly than you can now, and you can see the mesa from our living room.

Leslie: I should point out that Roberts built this house in... 1948?

Roberts: We didn't build it. We bought it.

Leslie: Oh, bought it, in 1940...

Roberts: That had not been lived in. It was a new house.

Leslie: A new house, OK. And was part of the idea the view? Not necessarily that view.

Roberts: No, no, it wasn't nearly that well-planned. That was discovered later.

Leslie: OK, but the mesa was a place you could see. I had heard that he was thinking about some kind of independent, like an institute for advanced study or something like that.

Roberts: Something of that sort. We just thought it would be an ideal location, and in fact we hiked up there a few times. Do you know Tician Papachristou at all?

Leslie: I don't know him, although I've certainly read plenty of his memos.

Roberts: Well, you should talk to him if you have a chance. They're still in New York City and they built a home in Sheffield, Massachusetts.

Leslie: Oh, I didn't know he was still around. That's great.

Roberts: He's sort of semi-retired, I think. He normally was a close personal friend, but he became (inaudible) can fill you in on this more, too. He became the architect who sort of was the local architect who represented NCAR in the dealings for the building. But Tician and his wife, Judy, and Walter and I hiked up there with our children a couple of times and sat on the edge of the mesa while Tician and Walter talked about what a beautiful spot it would be.

Leslie: Now, this was before they even had the idea of having the mesa lab or anything like that. It was just sort of musings about what might...

Roberts: Well, you see, Walter was the director of the High Altitude Observatory and had been that since our days at Climax(?), so at that point he was the director of the HAO, which was then based on the University of Colorado campus. So he did have -- I don't know, it was an expanded HAO, but it was something, I think an advanced studies institute comes close to the kind of thing he was talking about.

Leslie: And am I recalling correctly that he maybe talked to the Ford Foundation and had done some preliminary discussion of that?

Roberts: That I don't know.

Leslie: So you had -- you knew the area pretty well from on foot.

Roberts: Well, it was a wonderful place. The kids used to hike up there all the time, (inaudible) in junior high and high school, and in fact they're still -- fortunately, they preserved a trail. There's a trailhead just up the street here at 17th and King. You can get started on the open space hike, and hike right up there, but used to be able to hike up to the top of the first mesa right here, which is the enchanted mesa. And then beyond that is the -- it's called Table Mesa, which is just (laughter).

Leslie: Table Table.

Roberts: Very redundant. (laughter) But nobody could ever quite change it. And actually, as you probably know now, it was informally renamed to be the Walter Orr Roberts Mesa later on.

Leslie: And what are your recollections of it in terms of the views and the sort of the feeling that you got up there on the mesa?

Roberts: Well, it was really -- it was unusual of course. I had come here from New Jersey, and then we lived in Climax for seven years, so I'd gotten somewhat used to being in the mountains. But you never really get over being impressed, I think, with how lovely it is when you get up there, and just on the edge of the tree line, as it were. And the

wooded mesas here are lovely. And that's another whole story, and something I was much more involved in, is trying to protect them from development.

Leslie: Yes, we want to remember to come back to that, because I guess there must have been some controversy about the idea of building even a great building on that mesa.

Roberts: I'd love to tell you about that, because that was -- I was on city council then, and it was a very important issue. (laughter)

Leslie: When did you -- I'd be intrigued. When did you first run for public office and join city council?

Roberts: Well, I had been appointed to the city planning board in 1956, and then in 1959 I was approached to become a candidate for city council over a zoning issue and some environmental issues, and so I did run for city council that year. I was elected.

Leslie: Did you have a background in planning, or city planning?

Roberts: No. (laughter) English literature.

Leslie: Oh, really?

Roberts: I just was interested, and I had joined the League of Women's Voters when we first came to Boulder, and that was a marvelous experience for me. It was just a revelation. It was like going back to college after being isolated at Climax. That was a very intellectual pursuit, of course, but it was not in my area of science. I was not at all a scientist.

Leslie: Must have been fair -- how many people were at Climax?

Roberts: Well, actually, we were not so isolated, because the mining camp was there and there were several hundred people living there, even at 11,500 feet above sea level, because the Climax Molybdenum Company had its active mine there during the war.

Leslie: Oh, OK.

Roberts: And the observatory was built perhaps a quarter of a mile at the edge of this camp up on the hill.

Leslie: I see. The reason I was thinking of that is that Ezra Stoller the photographer had been sent by *Fortune Magazine* in the Forties sometime to photograph work at Climax, and he met Walter, and he may have met you. He may not have left an impression. He was a short fellow with a big camera. Now, was Walter thinking even with the High Altitude Observatory -- high altitude observatory, that's the correct name for the -- that that needed new quarters? Was he...

Roberts: No, no, I don't think so.

Leslie: I mean, he was happy with the facilities at the university?

Roberts: It was just sort of a pipe dream.

Leslie: I see, OK. Wasn't -- OK. So, maybe we should go to the beginning of NCAR, and was he thinking about a -- must have been thinking, I guess, about some kind of new facility for it, because it was going to be a new venture. And did he share any of his thoughts about where he wanted it to be, or what kind of place he thought it might become?

Roberts: Well, other people can probably fill you in on this, but my memory of it is this was one of the conditions that Walter set for agreeing to become the director of NCAR when it was first founded. There were a couple of other sites, I think, being considered for it in different states, which you'd probably remember if you've gotten into this at all, and when it was finally approached to see whether you'd be interested in becoming a candidate, I think there were two conditions he said down. One was that he would continue to be the director of HAO and HAO would be somehow incorporated at NCAR, and that it would have to be here in Boulder. And I think he had suggested that site was one of the ones that they should look at, and I think there's a booklet that you may have seen too, that the search committee had put out that had lots of pictures of -- picture of the mesa there before there was any development around it at all, which is fascinating.

Leslie: Yeah, but of course they didn't have access yet to that land.

Roberts: No, but it was in private ownership.

Leslie: Yeah, yeah, so that they -- they had their eye on it, but they didn't know whether they would be able to in fact convince the state and...

Roberts: And actually, there was a threat of development, because the wooded mesas here -- well, this goes back to a slightly peripheral story, but it's much more central to my own experience.

Leslie: Sure.

Roberts: One of the big issues here in Boulder has been protecting the wonderful open space we have around here from unsightly and untimely development. And that started back in 1959. In fact, it's one of the issues in which I was elected to city council. When the "Blue Line" was voted in by an initiated petition of the people, they had asked the council to pass it as a -- put it on the ballot as a charter amendment, and the council was not willing to do that at that point. And so they petitioned and called an election, and the reason it was precipitated that year was because the city council had just finished a water system study. A lot of the pipes needed replacement and the

whole water supply system needed to be looked at again, and they had hired an engineering firm to design this for them, and they'd come up with a proposal which they were going to put on the ballot which would've provided for distribution lines for the city water system, where there'd be distribution laws for water to each one of the wooded mesas along the backdrop. Of course, they're prepared for development, but there had also been a very specific threat for building a hotel on the Enchanted Mesa.

Leslie: That's the nearer one.

Roberts: Which was owned by a man named Kenneth Myrose(?). I remember that very well, and it was that that really precipitated the citizen activity on the subject. They were concerned about, and that Blue Line amendment was put on the ballot when the water bond issue came up, and the Blue Line amendment passed. So that was the first sort of blow in the effort to try to preserve the mountain backdrop and eventually preserve much of the open space around the city. And that was followed in 1967 by the vote on it, a sales tax that would be dedicated to 0.4 percent of sales tax to acquisition of open space for the city. And that was the beginning of our really very extensive open space program.

Leslie: So the Blue Line was pretty new when NCAR was going to ask for an exception. (laughter)

Roberts: And here comes my husband. (laughter) With this wonderful idea of this beautiful building up there on the land we had just protected by the Blue Line.

Leslie: What was the response of people on council or the people that you'd known, because you must have known most of the people involved in getting that Blue Line into place.

Roberts: People are very much in favor of bringing it here, because at that point the city was very much in favor of growth. Many people who had established the Blue Line were not so eager, but they were still not in the majority. And so the city manager also was very much in favor of this. It would be a plum really for the city. But the university was essentially the only major employer that we had at that point, just before IBM.

Leslie: Yeah.

Roberts: And before any of the other (inaudible).

Leslie: Was NBS, or what's now NIST, did they have their facility...

Roberts: They didn't come until the 1950's.

Leslie: Until the 50's.

Roberts: They did come in 1954, maybe.

Leslie: So they were here before NCAR, yeah.

Roberts: So they had just started NCAR, and this was -- and I think this really triggered Walter's dreams. It may be the centralization of so much scientific talent.

Leslie: Especially devoted, I supposed, to atmospheric work.

Roberts: The Navy(?) did a piece(?), and then when the NCAR thing came along, I think that must have been one of the other things that intrigued him, but at any rate, the Blue Line had just been passed in July of 1959, and Walter became director in 1960 and the proposal for using that site came up certainly by 1960. It must have come up right away, 1960, because there was an election in 1961, January of 1961, when the City Council put on the ballot an amendment to the Blue Line.

Leslie: An amendment to the thing they just passed.

Roberts: The first amendment. And Walter had been extremely careful and skillful, I think. He's very good, always was very good at dealing with people and understanding, and he also was very much concerned about the preservation of the open space himself and of the natural environment, and so one of the things he had done that first year was appoint a citizen's committee himself of individuals that he had known or met or people recommended to him, who were really much concerned with the environmental issues and with planning in the city.

Leslie: This was a citizen's committee for NCAR?

Roberts: For him.

Leslie: Just for him.

Roberts: Well, you know, for NCAR and planning.

Leslie: For NCAR. OK.

Roberts: But he wanted to have them be sort of a sounding board for the plans for the building, for the mesa, and among the things they talked about and negotiated were of course they would use only the amount of the mesa top that was necessary for the buildings. The rest of it would be preserved in its natural state, and would always be open to the public for hiking and that sort of thing.

Leslie: Sure.

Roberts: And that there would be no classified research, and in fact, Walter got a letter from Alan Waterman, who was the head of the National Science Foundation, I think then. I forget what year it is, but I have a copy of it somewhere -- I'm sure there's one in the files up there -- making this, of course it couldn't be an absolute guarantee, but that

the Science Foundation had no intention of doing anything with the site except what we had described.

Leslie: I guess that would be a real worry at that time, because what was then NBS was doing mostly classified research, including radio wave work here, so I suppose that was a real -- that was a serious issue that they might have asked NCAR to undertake classified research.

Roberts: I think that's always been the case, hasn't it?

Leslie: Yeah.

Roberts: They haven't done it.

Leslie: Yeah, no they haven't, and it's interesting that that... Do you know what else the citizen's committee, do they give any advice on building plans or anything like that?

Roberts: I don't know, but there are a couple of them still around. (laughter)

Leslie: That's interesting, but that -- that was something that he organized within NCAR too, advised him as the negotiations went forward.

Roberts: Yeah, it was just an informal -- didn't have any power at all. It was simply an advisory committee for him, so that he could make -- whatever decisions he came to would be informed by what he thought concerned citizens felt.

Leslie: Did he ever share in those early years before there was an architectural selection committee or anything like that, any ideas about what such a lab might be like, or what he was sort of dreaming about?

Roberts: Not really. No, we really didn't talk about that very much.

Leslie: Ah. Was he a person who, um, was interested himself in architecture, architectural history, art?

Roberts: Well, we had both always been interested in architecture to the extent that we did want an architect when we finally did remodeling of our house, of course, and I think that a lot of were influenced at that point by the whole movement, the Frank Lloyd Wright movement and the move towards designing homes for individuals that were attractive and using native materials and things of that sort. And I don't know that he really was any sort of a student of architecture.

Leslie: I'm just wondering whether when he would go on a trip to a scientific meeting if he was the kind of person who would sneak away to see this building or that.

Roberts: I have no idea, but I'd be surprised. (laughter) He never snuck away.

Leslie: That's my experience. How was Rio(?)? Ah, looked like every hotel room I'd ever seen anywhere else. What was the first time that you heard that there was going to be an architectural committee, and that they were thinking of making a real signature building up here?

Roberts: I really wasn't much involved in that. I don't have any specific memories of it.

Leslie: So that pretty much went on...

Roberts: I was fairly new on city council at that point, and I served on city council from 1960 - beginning of 1960 through 1967.

Leslie: OK, so all during the years when the construction was done.

Roberts: And at the end of -- yes, and at the end of that time, in 1966 and again in 1968, I was a candidate for the state legislature, unsuccessfully unfortunately. But my focus was totally in a different area from Walter's work at that point.

Leslie: It must, though, have given you insight into what the community was thinking once the design was unveiled and once it was known that -- of course, Pei wasn't a real famous architect at that point.

Roberts: No, he wasn't.

Leslie: Not a household name.

Roberts: But he had done something at Denver. What was it, the...

Leslie: Yeah, he'd done a couple -- mostly urban development stuff.

Roberts: Second (inaudible) or something like that.

Leslie: Yeah, mostly commercial buildings and urban rehab. Do you remember when you first met him, when you first met Pei?

Roberts: No, but certainly several times during the process, because I remember him very well as a very delightful man. He and Walter really hit it off beautifully. I never visited them in New York. Walter did many times, but...

Leslie: Yes. But when they were here, did Pei ever come to your house? Did you have...

Roberts: I think so, but I don't have any specific memory of it.

Leslie: Uh-huh, uh-huh. I just wondered if you'd -- because in some ways, Walter and I. M. Pei shared a lot of -- they were almost exactly the same age. Pei had not yet become a famous architect. He was very ambitious to make a statement.

Roberts: He said this was the first non-urban design he had done.

Leslie: Yeah, and he never really did anything quite like it again.

Roberts: No, I think that's right.

Leslie: It was sort of a one-off design, and he was certainly not the obvious choice.
(inaudible) a letting in the archives from Louis Kahn, who designed the Salk Institute, asking if he'd like to be considered for the job.

Roberts: There were several, I think. I don't remember who they were.

Leslie: Well, there were a number that the committee wanted to talk to, but as far as I know, Kahn was -- he wasn't one of them, and he said (inaudible) like maybe you'd want to think of me, but he was pretty busy with Salk, although later I. M. Pei would say that he wished he done a building as good as the Salk Institute.

Roberts: I know nothing about the Salk Institute, but I'm very interested.

Leslie: It's a gorgeous -- well, they're both on beautiful sites, one overlooking the Pacific Ocean, one in the shadow of the mountains.

Roberts: Is that in La Jolla?

Leslie: Yes, it is, so it's -- he would've been a natural, but -- did Walter ever say anything about what he thought about Pei, or you know, sort of ways they got along? I heard that they liked to hike, or that at least a couple of times, they hiked up there.

Roberts: I think(?) so. Pei told us, in fact I think he may have put this in his biography, he hiked all along the site before he even started to design for it, to see how it looked from different perspectives and especially from up above looking down at it, toward the pines, and I was going to say something about the -- doesn't matter, it slipped my mind at the moment, but...

Leslie: Now, I'm just -- my image of Pei walking around a mountain is a kind of interesting one, because I don't think it's a...

Roberts: Because he may not have done it.

Leslie: I would suspect that he had. I mean, he was a pretty urban character.

Roberts: I was going to tell you that my perspective on the whole thing is really from the city council's point of view.

Leslie: Well, it's a good perspective, yeah.

Roberts: City manager was very interested, but neither he nor Walter thought much of the first design that Pei came up with, which was -- he may have gone through all this, too. This is a tower.

Leslie: I've never seen that. I've (inaudible) the model, so could you describe it a little?

Roberts: Nine-story tower or something like that.

Leslie: Did you ever see a drawing or an image of it?

Roberts: Walter may have. Bob Turner was the name of our civic manager then. And Bob was totally concerned from the city's point of view. Of course, he said, how could he ever fight a fire up there.

Leslie: Oh, good point, good point.

Roberts: Not just the water, but to get up to the upper floors. But I'm sure it was not at all what Walter had in mind for that site. He didn't want anything that was -- well, the Air Force Academy, which he had (inaudible) built.

Leslie: Yes, (inaudible) in Maryland(?).

Roberts: He didn't want it to be like the Air Force Academy.

Leslie: Yeah.

Roberts: He wanted it to be much more fit in with a natural site, and not be something that stood out against the -- sort of a contrast with the background.

Leslie: I know that several people including Phil Thompson who was maybe the second, really wanted much more horizontal space and I was surprised even that Pei was able to convince them to go as high as he did.

Roberts: And I don't know, that compromise between his tower that he was dreaming about, and -- but I know Walter's interests in connecting science to the public has always been part of his life. I mean, there's no question about that. He was one of the best people I ever knew at explaining scientific things in simple terms. I've heard him give lectures to Boy Scouts and to public groups in Boulder, for example, and dinners when he would be -- wherever he went, he got talked about, things he was interested in, people, a group of people would just gather around him fascinated, because he was such a good exposition, made such a good exposition of ideas that he was excited about.

Leslie: Was part of that -- the mesa top was going to be open. Was the idea that there would be an educational mission for NCAR of some sort, that there would be some kind of educational outreach?

- Roberts: I don't know that he ever mentioned that to me.
- Leslie: They have one now, I notice, and they have a program to bring a lot of school kids in. I wondered if he had built that into the planning.
- Roberts: But I know all through the years, he was very interested in things like the transfer of technology to the business sector, and he was very interested and very proud of the work that NCAR did on radar development for airports and things like that, which really had an application that people could understand. In fact, when he -- actually, when he was first raising money for the HAO, one of the main reasons he got interested -- got people interested was because of the connection between the weather and sunspots. That was one of Walter's favorite topics. It's still being pursued by someone who was a graduate student of his a long time ago, named Karen Labitzke, who's still doing it in Berlin. But at any rate, he went to the airlines. This may have been in the early years of NCAR, too, when -- the Damon Room is named after Ralph Damon, who was the president I think of TWA at that point, and an amateur astronomer himself, because they were so much interested in the possibility of predicting the weather, of having a little better handle on what it would be. They would save so much money as an airline if they could have a little better handle on what they were going to be facing.
- Leslie: Was Walter a person who enjoyed going out and -- he did have to raise a lot of money, whether it was from the NSF or from private sources to build the addition. Was that a job that he welcomed, one that he (inaudible)?
- Roberts: I won't say he welcomed it, but he was extremely good at it, and for the same reason that I mentioned to you, that he was so persuasive when he was excited about an idea, and I think he'd get so concentrated on the idea that he wanted to support, that the rest of it would be something he'd just put up with. He didn't enjoy the trying to make the contacts and doing all the shit work, if you'll (inaudible) using a word like that on your tape, because -- but he was extremely persuasive. He made some very close friends over the years among wealthy people and New York and other places, because of how excited he was about the work he was doing, and he got them excited too.
- Leslie: Now, am I remembering correctly that in the original plan there was going to be a conference center and other things in the building, and then they didn't have the money to do that, and so they built a separate building which is a little bit of distance from the main lab.
- Roberts: (inaudible) you'll have to talk to someone else about that. All I remember is that that was built later, with private funds from the Fleischmann Foundation.
- Leslie: That's what -- what I was...
- Roberts: And Walter was one of the trustees of the Fleischmann Foundation.

Leslie: That's what I was going to ask about, whether it was -- yeah, I had imagined that he had to raise the money. It must have been a little bit frustrating though for him, to have gotten this plan in his head and found the architect and then find that the NSF isn't going to cough up all the money they promised.

Roberts: Well, I think he was used to having problems with getting money.

Leslie: Really?

Roberts: Yeah, he had with the HAO and the HAO was never funded by the university. It had been -- had various contracts and grants with the various armed services. I forget which ones at this point. But also -- Navy, perhaps. But there was one year when he actually had to spend the whole year trying to raise the money to keep the HAO going.

Leslie: Yeah, I guess that's the burden of (inaudible).

Roberts: He spent the whole year as a Sigma Psi lecturer, just to raise money. But for one year, for a couple of months, I forget how long, everybody on the staff at HAO, which was quite small then, agreed to go without salary for a while just to tide them over this emergency.

Leslie: I don't know if people would be that idealistic now.

Roberts: Well, there was so much (inaudible). You know there's a young -- young, young from my point of view -- astronomer at HAO named Tom Bogdan who's been doing a lot of research and writing the history of HAO, and doing a lot of research on Walter as well.

Leslie: Yeah, well, you'd have to.

Roberts: So you might want to talk to Tom also and see what he may have dug up about this sort of thing.

Leslie: Yeah, no, that would be quite interesting. Walter was doing a lot of things at the time. He was not only the founding director of a new laboratory and raising money and picking architects and all this. If you'd sort of give me a sense of how high a priority was the lab itself versus other things that he had to -- because the HAO was going on.

Roberts: No, the HAO -- he had really pretty much turned the HAO over to someone else to be the director. As long as he was assured there was going to be a division of NCAR, he was totally devoted to NCAR, I think, and to the future of it. I know one thing he talked about a lot, not just to me, was that he talked to various other people about his dreams for the NCAR institute and what kind of a place it would be, and he felt the most important thing, that first he'd gather the best mind he could find before he laid

out any plan for what the future work would look like and that's why he got people like Phil Thompson at the very beginning and John Firor, who came very early, and Will Kellogg, who got people assembled who were -- he thought would really have very keen minds and very imaginative approaches and they just brainstorm.

Leslie: And what was his pitch to them? Why would somebody leave Harvard or...
(laughter)

Roberts: I don't know, but...

Leslie: Berkeley to come out to Boulder?

Roberts: Persuaded them. (laughter) For the same reason he persuaded others that the work was exciting.

Leslie: My sense was that he had a plan, that he thought the interaction was important, that people had to have some interaction with one another, to bounce ideas off, and so the lab ought to be designed to encourage that.

Roberts: (inaudible) spaces for people to be private, but they ought to have to go down corridors and bump into each other so that they would have chance meetings. I remember us talking about that sort of thing.

Leslie: Do you know whose idea it was to have those crow's nest things up on top?

Roberts: You mentioned that in one of your...

Leslie: Yeah, I wondered about that, because they certainly are a strange kind of space. I mean, they're almost monastic in the way they're...

Roberts: They're not very popular either, I recall. (laughter)

Leslie: Because they were difficult to get to, or because they were cold and noisy?

Roberts: I don't know. Maybe they were too isolated. I just heard that just by talking to people at NCAR. I think that they're usually used by graduate students now.

Leslie: I think the idea was that they would be for the top scientists.

Roberts: Yeah. But (inaudible) too, there's no way to get up except the little spiral staircase.

Leslie: That's right, yeah.

Roberts: Which means you have to be fairly agile. (laughter)

Leslie: And it's very -- I can imagine on a cold, blowy day, sitting up there with the wind on those windows would be not all that -- you wouldn't be thinking great thoughts, you'd just be sort of...

Roberts: I never heard Walter talk about the crow's nest. (inaudible) idea of this could've been.

Leslie: Well, his office certainly wasn't up there, so... (laughter)

Roberts: No.

Leslie: Well, do you remember the groundbreaking ceremony, when they began the construction of the lab?

Roberts: No, I remember it vaguely, but the thing I do remember is that whole year that Pei was working on it, he was very much interested in following what Walter had wanted. What he wanted to was to have it blend with a backdrop, and so he actually had several test panels up there on the mesa top, of the various aggregate combinations with the concrete and different kinds of crushed rock to see what color it would be and how it would weather through the winter instead of just looking at it when it was freshly applied.

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Interview of Janet S. Roberts

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Roberts: Well, it was sort of a thing we showed people. (laughter)

Leslie: Oh, kind of a tourist thing.

Roberts: Yeah, a tourist attraction.

Leslie: And did Walter then pick one and say, "I think this is the best?" Or how did they decide?

Roberts: That, I don't know. I think he and Pei probably agreed to a consensus of some sort.

Leslie: Now, how often, and how much time was Walter putting into, you know, going to see Pei himself? I know he had other people who were doing that or having Pei come here. Was it very often, or every few months?

Roberts: I don't know. Walter was always up at NCAR.

Leslie: Oh, really. (laughter)

Roberts: I really was off somewhere else, so I'm afraid I'm not much help in that regard.

Leslie: OK, I was just wondering how much. But it was -- for that first year or so, at least, is it fair to say that the lab was pretty much a consuming passion? Or is he continuing...

Roberts: I think so.

Leslie: So he was...

Roberts: It never ceased to be that in a certain extent. Not the building itself, so much, I mean once that was built. But the various kinds of research that were going on, he was just fascinated with them. I would love to go to -- when he'd go traveling somewhere he would love to describe the research that was being done. I remember he'd get sort of hepped on one particular item and he'd take people up to the lab, because we often took visitors up there to show them. He would always have some pet research project. There was one I know about, the methane gas that still is going on, I guess, up there, and the various ways it's produced around the Earth, and the various anthills(?) and things of that sort. I can't remember the relationships.

Leslie: Yeah, and the termites, I guess, are a major contributor. (laughter)

Roberts: Termites. Yeah.

Leslie: Yeah.

Roberts: But he just was so interested in the research itself, and managed to make it so interesting and alive to other people that he was always a very good spokesperson, I think, for the work that was being done. He also loved the workshop. When we lived at Climax, he had had the place all to himself, just this one little observatory, one instrument and a (inaudible) connecting passageway and then our house, which had -- about one-third of it was his workshop and his darkroom and his office, and the rest was where the children and I lived. But he had his own darkroom and he had his own (inaudible) and his own developing equipment, enlarger and so on in the darkroom, and he really hated leaving that when we moved on from Climax and he'd never really had that chance again, what he did then. But he always was fascinated with the work that was going on in the instrument building, and in fact many people who worked in the workshop years later would say when we'd go up there, they'd say how Walter always took visitors to see the workshop. Instead of just the more elegant places, he'd take them and he'd show them all the tools. (laughter)

Leslie: That's great. I'm surprised he didn't set up a little workshop in his office. I've seen people do that.

Roberts: He didn't have time. It was too bad, because he had moved up into a different kind of responsibility and he couldn't do a lot of the things he loved doing.

Leslie: Did he like giving tours of the facility to visitors? Was that something he...

Roberts: He did, yeah, especially when they got into the computer. He was really (laughter) -- he would get people going until their eyes glazed over.

Leslie: That's interesting, because of course, that was the one thing that was I think very difficult to anticipate when the thing was going up, is how computers would change.

Roberts: I don't even remember when they first got the first really big one, but from then on it was one of his favorite things to tell people and tell how many billion or million whatever.

Leslie: Was it just the sheer power of the machine, or was he fascinated with the models, the climatic models that they were building, or what?

Roberts: It was more the computer itself I think, and the technique, just the sheer awe of the amount of work that could be done now that couldn't be done before.

Leslie: Did you ever meet Seymour Cray when he would be out?

Roberts: No, I didn't. (inaudible)

Leslie: Oh, because...

Roberts: Walter talked to him many times. It was a Cray computer at the beginning, I think.

Leslie: Yeah, and of course then, Cray moved out to Colorado Springs before he died in a car crash, but...

Roberts: Oh, really?

Leslie: Yeah, but the banks of computers there now are still impressive. I mean, they're bigger than a refrigerator and just -- I don't remember how many, 20 or 30 or 50.

Roberts: Well, Walter would love to show people and tell them how much wire there was under the floor. They'd have little tiles you could pick up and see how much was under it, and I guess -- I haven't been up there for a long time to look at anything around the computer, but it's now underground, I guess.

Leslie: Yes, yeah.

Roberts: And totally different, much more complex, but anyway, that -- they had that one central thing where it looked like a bench sitting around.

Leslie: Right.

Roberts: I don't know if that's still up there or not.

Leslie: There's some photos of it, and I think there is an area where one of the old shells is, and of course the computer is long since obsolete. I did ask why they had a bench around them, and there's no real reason for the bench.

Roberts: It wasn't intended to be a bench, I know.

Leslie: No. (laughter)

Roberts: I think it's just a cover-up for a...

Leslie: Exactly, yeah, there's no reason. It looks like you're supposed to sit there, et cetera.

Roberts: But he would just tell about how long it took to do things with going through the cards, the IBM cards, and you could just put (inaudible) whoosh, it was done.

Leslie: Were there other things? I know that on some of those rooftops there were experimental set-ups and things like that. Is that a kind of place he would take somebody out and show them an experiment on the roof?

Roberts: I haven't heard as much. I think HAO did some of that, didn't they? He was more interested in, well, things that were sort of dramatic like the methane gas thing that really had a popular appeal. And later on, one of his good friends was Carl Hodges(?) from Arizona, who was also involved with NCAR to a certain extent, I think, on the board of trustees or something, at the University of Arizona, and Carl has a research

laboratory at the University of Tucson, I think, which he had done fantastic work. Walt was always talking about Carl's world in desalinating sea water and growing shrimp and so on. (laughter) So it was really just projects that caught his imagination.

Leslie: What was his -- when the building was finally completed, although they never got to the south(?) tower, was he entirely delighted, pretty happy but some things he would've changed? What kind of response...

Roberts: My memory is that they got so involved right away with the roof leaking. He didn't really have much time except to do administrative stuff for a long time. There was a great debate who was going to be responsible for repairing that. The roof leaked in several places.

Leslie: Yeah.

Roberts: And whether it was the contractor or whether it was Pei's design or whether it was whatever, and I think that it even went to lawsuits, didn't it?

Leslie: Oh, it did.

Roberts: It's too bad.

Leslie: It cost about as much money to fix various things with that building as it did to build it.

Roberts: I think that's been true for some of Pei's other buildings as well.

Leslie: The Hancock Building with the windows falling out. That's true. Well, I'm interested in whether Walter saw it as a -- believed it was important to have a signature building, something that was distinctive, because there wasn't anything else like it anywhere, and it was in fact for a while on the letterhead, as I recall.

Roberts: It was what?

Leslie: On the letterhead. NCAR was a schematic of the lab. I just wondered if the look of it and the distinctiveness of it was something that he considered important.

Roberts: Oh, I think it was, although again I don't have any specific memories of that. But we all -- everyone is in Boulder, I think, is so proud of (inaudible) building is so -- it's just an architectural masterpiece, really, I think. Somehow it just did something to that site that made the site and the building special. In fact there were lots of rumors later that people down at the federal labs were quite -- made some snide remarks about it. They called it Roberts Castle. (laughter)

Leslie: Oh! Well, now, that's very interesting.

Roberts: So that sort of implied that they felt he was arrogantly proud of it, as it were, that he had to have (inaudible) his site up, a special place up on the mountaintop, but they weren't allowed to move anywhere down here on the plain.

Leslie: Well, I'm sure -- I haven't done any cost comparisons, but there's no question that it was a more expensive building and certainly a more distinguished one. It's the only one in Boulder than anyone would ever have heard of. Were you around when Woody Allen came to do *Sleeper*, by the way?

Roberts: Yes, but I didn't really see it. (laughter)

Leslie: I just wondered what people in town thought of that.

Roberts: They thought it was wonderful.

Leslie: Yeah, yeah.

Roberts: And he put several other buildings in Colorado at that point, too, maybe in the same movie, but it was one of up on I-70, up towards the mountains, that house that's still -- it never got lived in for a long time. It's finally been resold and rebought (inaudible) I think, but (inaudible).

Leslie: Yeah, I remember those scenes, yeah. It's a funny film, but it's -- it uses a very futuristic setting to do an old-fashioned kind of physical comedy movie, which is good. It's kind of unusual. I just wondered what the town thought of Woody Allen coming to town in the early 70's.

Roberts: The town always ate things like that up. After all, we had Mork here, you know. I don't know if you really remember.

Leslie: Oh, Mork and Mindy.

Roberts: Mork and Mindy.

Leslie: That's right, that's right.

Roberts: On the downtown mall. (laughter)

Leslie: Were there any dissenters on either the city council or people that you knew, who really thought, gee, that isn't the right building for that site?

Roberts: I don't think so. I don't recall what the vote was in putting that to the ballot, but I think it may have been unanimous. I recused myself from voting, as I had to, and I really didn't take part in, as I had to, and I really didn't take part in the discussion but the city manager was very much in favor of doing it.

Leslie: I was thinking more in the community itself, whether some people thought, "That's a really bad idea, I don't care how great a building it is. It's sitting (inaudible).

Roberts: I'm sure there were but I don't remember them.

Leslie: But those would be minority voices, you think.

Roberts: Well, I think that would be basically a list of so many of the leaders of environmental preservation issues, in advising him on it, sort of got them invested in it to a certain extent, and I think also it was the very strong feeling among the people I knew that this was by far a better use of the site than having it developed for homes. That was - - the private owners would've originally done, and in fact, Walter and others at NCAR had persuaded the state of Colorado, I think, to purchase the site.

Leslie: That's a good point, that if they...

Roberts: State funding involved for it.

Leslie: That it wasn't probably so much a question of whether it was going to be undeveloped or developed, but how it was going to be developed.

Roberts: Well, they felt -- but the fact that it basically guaranteed that a good part of, what is it, three or four hundred acres to begin with would always be open to the public and preserved in its natural state, was a very important guarantee and in fact later on NCAR donated some of it back to the city's open space program.

Leslie: I saw that, yeah.

Roberts: But I know that Walter took a lot of pride and so did Pei I think, and the effort they went to to restore the natural, the native grasses after the construction was over, and they had a hard time trying to do it, and that famous tree that I guess finally died...

Leslie: I saw it last summer, and it died. You could see the little walkway around it and the poor tree was dead. Yeah.

Roberts: But Walter loved to show things like that to people, about how concerned Pei had been and he had been about the native environment.

Leslie: I presume that Walter knew much more about how he was going to restore the top of the mesa than Pei did.

Roberts: No, I suspect -- I know they went to CSU, to the state university for (inaudible) of grass that they used, and that sort of thing. Walter knew where to go to ask, but Pei I think was very concerned to accomplish that. I remember Pei saying, I think that the 25th anniversary conversation, they called it, that he was almost as proud of the way he had designed the road leading up to NCAR as he was of the building itself. He

just spent a lot of time and thought and how to build anything on top of that mesa without destroying the mesa, and he finally had that very winding, curving contour drive that comes in and eases itself onto the mesa from the back, so it's already reached the elevation of the mesa almost by the time you come out on the site.

Leslie: Now, it's quite -- I mean, it sort of plays hide and seek with you as you go through, which is quite interesting. Did you have any friends who worked up there and had any reaction to what it was like to be in such a space, and how they enjoyed working in it?

Roberts: I had no personal friends. Of course, I knew a great many people who worked up there, especially when it was much smaller.

Leslie: Yeah, I'm just curious what they had to say, because it was a completely different space than they would've been in anywhere else.

Roberts: Not any specific memories, no.

Leslie: I just wondered if anybody looked really fond of the inspirational lookout at the surroundings, or whether they basically buried themselves in a computer screen and never really noticed.

Roberts: You'd have to ask other people, but I do know that when Walter finally had his offices down in the Fleischmann Building, he was very pleased, loved to show people how the deer would come up just outside of the window and you could often go in, children would come in and just see these deer just standing right by the window and looking at them.

Leslie: They were there when I was in the Damon Room there. They were pretty close. How did Walter like his own office when it was done, the main office in the building.

Roberts: Well, I think he liked it. I don't know. My chief memories of that were -- this is after Walter died, I think, actually. Cindy Schmidt has been very good, Rick Anthes and others have been very good at keeping me involved in things at NCAR. I get the Staff Notes in the mail regularly and things like that, which I greatly appreciate.

Leslie: Yeah.

Roberts: But one of the problems with the Fleischmann Building is that it's very attractive, that little bridgeway over to the offices that are a separate wing, but there was no exit for the separate wing the way that Pei had designed it, and I remember one of the secretaries telling me that the people who worked over there were really scared to death there would be a fire. They were trying to figure out what they could throw through the window, break it to get out.

Leslie: That's very interesting.

Roberts: And finally, somebody told me about this, they finally built a fire door to that building not many years ago, actually, as a safety thing and sort of -- they did it as unobtrusively as they could because it did spoil his design.

Leslie: That's right, because Pei was brought back for that, for the second part of that, or for the Fleischmann Building. That's very interesting.

Roberts: You know about the fire door.

Leslie: That's a very good question.

Roberts: I still have a chunk of the concrete that they knocked out. Cindy gave it to me as a memento of (inaudible) NCAR. (laughter)

Leslie: That's fascinating. I take it you didn't go up there very often. You do go up to visit it from time to time, to go up to the lab?

Roberts: Oh, I have, even since his death I've gone up. They've been very good at including me in certain occasions. We still take all the out of town visitors. My daughter lived here with me for a few years, until she died last March, and my son-in-law is still here, but he's leaving (inaudible). When anybody would have visitors from out of town, we always take them up to show them NCAR. It's one of the...

Leslie: Was there any particular part, when you go through that, would really grab them, that would be the thing that you -- that's the thing that really impressed them?

Roberts: I think just the way you approach it, this is very interesting. You get closer and closer and all of a sudden there you are. I think once you get on, at least from my point of view, one of the most interesting parts for a public point of view is the Damon Room and the way it opens up onto that little terrace and then into the pathway up onto the mesa.

Leslie: Yeah. Did that pathway get used much?

Roberts: Oh, I think so. And it was used a lot even before they built that little nature trail. Many of the employees as I understand it would take their lunch out there, hike up and go to a little spot to sit.

Leslie: That's right, the day I was there, there weren't too many people that were out, but it was a nice day, but I didn't...

Roberts: They also -- I'm sure you've seen, they did develop sort of a nature trail that they dedicated to Walter also, which was very nice.

Leslie: What do you remember, the story about the fountain? Because that was one of the great ideas that didn't work out so well.

Roberts: My story is that they shot it down almost immediately because it was too windy, and the wind blew the water, and people complained. They couldn't cross that little plaza without getting soaked, and I think nobody realizes how much wind we have here. (inaudible) today, but we can have some really horrendous windstorms, really dry hurricanes. And sometimes it just blows a lot. But I forget how the fountain was -- jets of water, I think, that went straight up. So it was a lot of water to blow.

Leslie: How long did they keep it running?

Roberts: Several years, I think.

Leslie: And then they had enough? I often wondered about the outdoor walkways, too, because in a place that gets a fair amount of snow, a lot of them aren't very protected.

Roberts: I don't know about that.

Leslie: I'm wondering, because there are places where you'd supposed to walk outside and didn't look to me like you'd want to walk outside on several of those. They took down...

Roberts: You can go across on the second floor of that.

Leslie: Yes, yeah. I don't know what your reaction was the first time you walked through it, but mine was that it was a very confusing building, that I didn't find it an intuitive building to find your way around in.

Roberts: Of course, I don't know what an intuitive building is. (laughter) Unless you mean just a standard office building or something.

Leslie: Well, it wasn't clear how you got from one part of the building to another, because you have to move either up and down floors or you'd be here and you could see where you wanted to go, but it wasn't at all a direct path or clear path doing that.

Roberts: I don't know. Maybe was that intentional, do you think?

Leslie: Well, I think it partly was, certainly, the idea of the chance encounter. I think partly, and I've heard it said, and I don't know if Walter's actually said this or not, but he said the ideal office was the one that nobody could find.

Roberts: That sounds like him(?). That sounds like him.

Leslie: On the other hand, from what you say, it sounds like actually was pretty willing to meet with people whenever they would come by.

Roberts: Oh, he was, and he always kept his door open.

Leslie: That was my guess.

Roberts: (inaudible) theoretically.

Leslie: I suspect that was true too.

Roberts: Stoller, I know you didn't get to see. Maybe we could talk a little bit about the Aspen Institute, because I think you probably have pretty good memories of that.

Leslie: Well, again, I don't have any personal memories of being involved in the work at all.

Roberts: I was more not so interested in the work as in the move or in the idea of working with the Aspen Institute, and I was especially interested -- I think I mentioned in the latter because one of the things that Jonas Salk said he wanted to do in that lab in La Jolla was he really wanted to make sure that there was great art, and he said he wanted a laboratory that Picasso would be comfortable in, et cetera, and I wondered whether Walter shared any of that sense that a well -- that it should be a showplace as well as a working lab, that it should have nicely designed furniture, that it should have artwork on the wall or anything like that.

Leslie: Well, I don't know if he ever talked about artwork, but certainly things like design were important to him and furniture. Let's go back to the Aspen Institute thing now, because I'm much more familiar with his early connections with the Aspen Institute than I am with his heading that program. As I said, Mary Wolff will be the primary source for you on that, because she was his assistant director through those years and very closely involved in the whole thing. She had been with him at NCAR. She went with him to the Aspen Institute.

Roberts: What was her official title when she was working at NCAR for him?

Leslie: I don't know.

Roberts: But she was essentially administrative assistant or something.

Leslie: She was basically Walter's representative in dealing with Pei, a good deal I think.

Roberts: Judging from the correspondence, she and Ed and Tician seem to be the people who spent a long time... But anyway, sorry.

Leslie: I can't remember specifically our first connection with Aspen, but I know way back in the 1950's, we had come up to Aspen summers. Walter had -- I think he may have been in the very beginning invited to take part in the executive seminar.

Roberts: Oh, OK.

Leslie: The Aspen Institute has these seminars every summer, we used to. This was one that was much smaller. I don't even know what it is now. I mean to ask, but I think it's moved to Washington and...

Roberts: Yeah, I went to Way Island and Maryland.

Leslie: (inaudible)

Roberts: Yeah, yeah. But in those days, I think it was pretty much up at Aspen.

Leslie: Yeah.

Roberts: And just on that one lovely Aspen Meadows area. But every summer they would have two or three of these seminars in which they would invite business executives from different, totally varied groups of corporations and kinds of enterprises to come and meet with an equal number of intellectuals, as we should say, of people who were either professors or artists or architects or actors or painters or whatever, and just interchange ideas. They had their own series of great books that they had to read and discuss. It was a very rigid program, very sort of a mind and body idea, where you had intensive discussions and a seminar which was fascinating, an octagonal, I believe it was, building with an octagonal desk around a central pit. And they would have these long discussions and then they had to take a certain amount of time off and they had to have exercise in the afternoon. (laughter) Get massages, free massages and all kinds of workouts. So it was a very interesting concept. Actually, (inaudible) a participant some years later, but for a number of summers we went up there, the whole family went up there and spent some time each summer, and Walter became a fellow of the institute I think, and became really close to a good many people up at Aspen, so by the time he was asked to do one of the programs, he already had many connections with the Aspen Group and many who lived in Aspen but were not so much actively involved, Jimmy Smith was a very close friend of Walter's, and Jimmy Smith owned a ranch, the North Star ranch which was part of Independence Pass and we visited there many times and spent summer vacations in one of this little cabins that was off by the Roaring Fork, but he was a very wealthy, very environmentally conscious rancher.

Leslie: Now, when you participated in these sessions as a distinguished visiting intellectual, did you have to do the same reading and the same preparation that...

Roberts: Oh, yes.

Leslie: And was Walter enthusiastic about that, I mean, reading -- this is more Adler's influence.

Roberts: I think he liked the idea. It was really part of his whole idea, and in fact later on, this is mentioned in his list of various activities in that book you mentioned, Remembering Walt Roberts. Toward the end of his life, he was very active working

with a group in La Jolla, as a matter of fact, at Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, which ran this thing of -- it was a computer-based program. It was very much like the Aspen Institute Executive Seminars, and Walter was a faculty member of that for many years and they would have -- I forget how many people were involved, but there's be a number of business executives from around the world, not just in this country, who would participate in these seminars and they would do it remotely through computers, through basically messaging and e-mail. Walter loved that. That became one of his passions as he -- he had a computer here at home, of course, and by that time he organized a group himself he called the Climate Club and in fact they published a series of little essays that he had written. He would write these essays every week, I think it was, and send them out to all these business executives and other faculty members and we called some of them provocations, because that's exactly what we wanted to do. We'd give an idea like the sort of things he'd been fascinated with like Carl Hodges's(?) shrimp project. He would describe it and say how exciting it was and then people would respond. They'd get into debates and arguments about it, and he loved that sort of thing, so basically what was really another kind of extension of the Aspen Executive Seminar.

Leslie: What did he have to say about his interactions with people who were really from a very different world and yet meeting on common ground on his books and ideas? What do you think the executive should get out of a meeting like that?

Roberts: I don't think he even had any idea then. He was just interested in discussing the ideas and having other people become interested in the ideas. He was very active internationally too, as you know, in many of the scientific organizations and I think he felt the same kinds of relationships with other scientists around the world and that based on the ideas of (inaudible) for example his project with the Russian scientists, and it's written up in some of those letters I think and the *Remembering Walt Roberts* book, where they were going to have finally a computer, a video conference with the Russian scientists in Moscow, and that actually came off and it was very exciting for Walter to be involved in that kind of thing.

Leslie: Was he a person who enjoyed reading classical literature and the great books? Did he enjoy engaging those kind of humanistic (inaudible)?

Roberts: I think so, although not so much the classics. He was very much interested in humanities, always had been, and in fact I often thought -- he had a roommate at Amherst, he was a major in English. Johnny and I used to tease him about how we were the ones who kept him from becoming an absolute scientist but he'd always been interested in music especially, music was his absolute love. (inaudible) well-informed about music.

Leslie: And of course, Aspen, that was a critical part of the Aspen idea, too, sure, as was design, the Aspen design institute was part of that.

Roberts: Uh-huh, that's right. He was always interested in Herbert Bayer's designs.

Leslie: He was?

Roberts: Bayer was there when (inaudible).

Leslie: Yeah, yeah. Did that translate into the kind of furnishings he liked for...

Roberts: He didn't like them.

Leslie: Oh.

Roberts: He didn't like the Bauhaus furniture so much, or the buildings, but he was interested, very fascinated. We have a book of Herbert's somewhere around here.

Leslie: That's really quite fascinating, yeah.

Roberts: There was another architect up there, Fritz. I can't remember what it was now, Fritz somebody who...

Leslie: I don't know, I'd have to look it up. But so he certainly had a humanistic perspective, you would say. And was that something he liked to encourage among the people that worked for him?

Roberts: I think so. We were very strong supporters of the liberal arts, both of us. We both had gone to liberal arts colleges.

Leslie: Where did you go?

Roberts: Well, I went to Wheaton, which is south of Boston.

Leslie: Ah, yes, I know.

Roberts: Now, let's see. Well, that was a women's college then, but it's now a co-ed as so many of them are, (inaudible). But we encouraged our children to go to liberal arts colleges rather than -- and in fact, my daughter, who didn't want to go to college at all really, she got married when she was 19, so she only had one year at CU, but David our oldest went to Harvard College and Alan, our second son, went to Earlham(?) College in Groverton(?), Indiana. And Jonathan, our youngest son, went to Colorado College. So the idea of a liberal arts education was very important to Walter (inaudible).

Leslie: I was wondering whether he would support the idea that science needed to be reintegrated with the humanities.

Roberts: Oh, I think so, very much so.

Leslie: Because that was certainly something that (inaudible) was very adamant about, that the problem was -- C. P. Snow had written that famous lecture in 1959.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Interview of Janet S. Roberts

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

- Leslie: Talked just fifteen minutes or so about the music, I'd be very interested in that, because that is exactly that kind of humanistic aspect.
- Roberts: Well, don't ask me how it began, because Walter loved music from the time I first met him, and I think that was a very important part of his life. I think it was an (inaudible), but he didn't participate in anything. He took violin lessons, and I think maybe his mother was -- his mother and grandmother were very interested in music. Do you want to check it and see?
- Leslie: No, that's all right.
- Roberts: They had a lot of classical music at home. I don't know whether they had records at that point, but they had a player piano, I remember that. But at any rate, when I met Walter and we got married in 1940, we'd had no money at all, of course. He was a graduate student and I had just graduated from college, and had no money. He bought the makings of a phonograph, a Heathkit -- is that what it was called?
- Leslie: Yes, yes! I remember those. My father had one. Mail order.
- Roberts: We carried it with us. You know, he was going to build himself a phonograph, and he bought records with what little money we had from the Philadelphia Inquirer, as I remember, they had a special offer. We carried these records out. There was nothing to play them on, and in fact we really started this when we lived at Climax, because when he got his phonograph built, he would invite some of the people from the (inaudible), the ones that were special friends of mine, my doctor who was a very close personal friend, the head geologist was a good friend. There were a couple, one of the men who ran the water plant, the other one was an underground foreman. They were not so much into the music, but at Climax they had a K-12 school all through the year in this one building, and they had one building where the women teachers lived(?) with all the teacher (inaudible). So several of the teachers were regulars on Sunday night. If it was Wednesday night, then I wouldn't go. We had people come up then just to listen to music, and we'd just play the records and you had to -- it was always just fascinating. He had an incredible knowledge of music.
- Leslie: Now, would he give a little introduction and say here's what we're going to hear? Was it sort of like Leonard Berns--?
- Roberts: I don't remember that so much, but we must have done this for forty years, I think, after we came here, and it became sort of ritualized on Sunday nights, and every Sunday night, absolutely every Sunday night regardless. When he was out of town,

he would tape it and leave it to me, try to fix things that didn't have to start in the middle of the record, because I wasn't sure I had put the needle in the right groove.

Leslie: Now, when you were doing them here, were you doing them in the house, or up at the lab?

Roberts: No, right here.

Leslie: Right here?

Roberts: Right here at the house.

Leslie: I see.

Roberts: That was my one contribution to his scientific enterprises. I provided the coffee and the cookies and dessert and so on.

Leslie: And the people who would attend were people from the lab.

Roberts: Oh, it was sort of informal. In the beginning, there were just a few close friends that he invited, but then it became the kind of thing to which he invited (inaudible) scientists, visiting scientists who were here from different countries of the world and particularly those who didn't speak English very well. It was a perfect environment because Walter was a stickler about not talking while the music was playing. I mean, it was like being at a concert, really, and in the beginning he would simply play the records and announce what the music was and describe a little bit for each record. Then later on, as he got more equipment, a full corner of our bedroom was completely taken over with tape recorders and remote controls and interwiring and so on, and he would make these big tapes and he would take the whole concept including his own commentary and then he would kind of sit himself -- some of our friends really got a big kick out of that. He always had a fire in the fireplace and in the summer when it was too hot we'd put candles on the hearth. Then he called it our summer (inaudible) place, and he sat right there. He'd have cushioned on the floor and leaned against that hassock, and we'd listen to a concert and listen to himself narrating it, and then we would have intermission and people could talk as much as they wanted to and they loved it. They just talked their heads off. And we'd serve wine.

Leslie: Would they talk about the music or just generally?

Roberts: Just generally. Sometimes about the music, but people would get off on the little (inaudible). There were all these interested scientists who were coming. People who came here could bring a friend as long as they told us they were coming, but we didn't keep track of how many, and there were never more than about thirty, but that's a fair number. We'd have a lot of questions then, and people could sit on the floor just anywhere, but it had to be -- we'd turn the lights down and everybody had to be quiet.

And those went on for so long that I still run into people I see and they say, "Well, I've been to your house for Sunday night music," and I'll say, "Oh, you have?" (laughter) So, I really knew who the scientists were, of course, when they came, but so many people would bring friends and then other people would come and I didn't try to keep track.

Leslie: That's fascinating. Did they ever have concerts up at the lab? It's got some good spaces.

Roberts: No, but Walter introduced something like that later. The Takacs Quartet came here. He had become -- well, he'd always been very much interested in music, and then for five years next door to us was someone who was very active at the music school. He was here getting his Ph.D. and he's now at the University of Massachusetts as head of their department, Chuck Thester(?) who is -- they were very close friends, and others, made many good friends here at the music school here at the university. And now, what was...

Leslie: We were saying about the quartet, and then music.

Roberts: (inaudible), that's right. He got to be really close friends with a Hungarian quartet who were there at CU in residence at that time, and they were getting old and retiring, and one of them had taken this young Hungarian quartet named the Takacs Quartet, sort of under his wing and encouraged people to bring them here just for an experiment, and Walter was very active in trying to help raise money to get them here and to support them, and (inaudible) they're still here. They are giving concerts and they're really an excellent quartet. He got to be good friends with the quartet members and they worked out this wonderful arrangement where Walter would invite him to an occasion at NCAR once or twice a year and they would play just a very short thing like a movement or something or a couple of movement from something to anybody at NCAR who wanted to come, and then they would adjourn to the seminar room, that one right off the main lobby, and Walter would have one of the scientists from NCAR talk about his work, and it was for the Takacs Quartet, and nobody else could ask any questions. He loved to make elaborate games like that, and everybody loved it. It was a fun thing to do. And he would have the quartet members sitting in the front row and they got to ask any questions they wanted of the scientists. And he said this is our concert for the Takacs Quartet.

Leslie: That's a wonderful story.

Roberts: So that's the kind of interaction of the humanities and science that he loved to promote.

Leslie: That's wonderful. And presumably they good at asking questions after a while.

Roberts: They were very good. They were very intelligent men. They still are. Two of them are gone now. One of them died and one of them had a disability and (inaudible) the

wrist(?) or something and had to quit. So now they have two Englishmen and one of the Englishmen has left, but there are still two of the original Takacs.

Leslie: And the quartet would perform in that, in that...

Roberts: In the lobby.

Leslie: That one public space that...

Roberts: The main lobby, and people would sit on the stairs and there'd be folding chairs in the lobby and then they'd sit up on that little balcony.

Leslie: Yeah, yeah.

Roberts: And the quartet would be down basically right in the -- you know, as you go in the lobby, there was a wall. There used to be a hanging on the wall, (inaudible) that place right in front of the hanging.

Leslie: How many people would show up for these things?

Roberts: Oh, they would be full.

Leslie: Yeah. And then -- but when they returned to the seminar, it was just the quartet members and...

Roberts: Oh, no, anybody could go.

Leslie: Oh, anybody could go?

Roberts: In fact, the room was full.

Leslie: Oh!

Roberts: But they were not encouraged to ask questions until after the Takacs Quartet.

Leslie: Oh, I see. So there were chances for people afterwards, but they got the first crack.

Roberts: Oh, yeah, they got the first crack.

Leslie: That's very, very interesting. Final question, because I wanted to come back to it, because we were talking about design, and one of the things that's intriguing is when you look at the old photographs that were taken at the opening of the building, it looked like it was furnished in pretty modern design, and it wasn't haphazard, it looked like either Pei had picked it out or -- it looked like there was a lot of deliberation given to how it should look.

Roberts: And the chairs and lobby for example.

Leslie: Yes, exactly, or that hanging for instance, things like that.

Roberts: I think Walter was interested in that. I don't really know how much of a role he played, but I know he liked to point things out to people..

Leslie: Point things out that...

Roberts: When people -- we took visitors up, he would always mention the hanging. Well, at the beginning at least. It was something that had been done by somebody at NCAR. I forget what it was. I don't know what it is now. I'd forgotten.

Leslie: But so he was certainly interest in that, (inaudible). Never trust anyone else's tape recorder. (laughter)

Roberts: Be awful if it didn't tape any more.

Leslie: No, I'm sure it is. I'll check it as soon as I've gone and get nervous about that thing. Sort of as a final question, how significant a legacy was the lab and NCAR for Walter? Was it something that he took great pride in as a place and a space as well as a...

Roberts: Oh, very definitely. This I can speak to a little bit, because when he retired as the director of -- as president of the (inaudible) director of NCAR, I guess (inaudible) I forget what order in which that happened. When he left NCAR, which was '73 or '74, it was somewhat reluctantly and it was over budget issues I think and management issues, and he saw the handwriting on the wall, I believe, and simply found a way to make a graceful exit, but they gave some sort of a big celebration for him at that time and he said afterwards that the day after he left NCAR, when he came back the next day, he was amazed to see the building was still there. (laughter) That's exactly the way he felt about it, I think. And I think that that's basically epitomized by the fact that -- this has always touched me very much, that photograph of Walter they had in the main entryway, which says if you would see his monument, look around you.

Leslie: Yes, which was written for Sir Christopher Wren for St. Paul's.

Roberts: And I think he really felt that way. In fact, he had asked that his ashes be scattered up there, which they were. I don't know whether that should be publicized or not. It probably shouldn't, but...

Leslie: Now, if I can figure out how to stop it. Let's see. Rewind?

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1