



ROBERT T. MCCALL  
1919-2010

Honored as a Historymaker 1999  
Aerospace Artist



The following is an oral history interview with Robert McCall (**RM**) conducted by Reba Grandrud (**RG**) for Historical League, Inc. on February 12, 1998 in Mr. McCall's studio in his Paradise Valley home.

*Transcripts for website edited by members of Historical League, Inc.*

*Original tapes are in the collection of the Arizona Heritage Center Archives, an Historical Society Museum, Tempe, Arizona.*

**RG:** Mr. McCall was recently named as a 1999 Historymaker by the Historical League of the Central Arizona Division of Arizona Historical Society. First, congratulations on being named a Historymaker. Let's start with you stating your full name, your birth date, and tell us something about you. I know you came from Ohio.

**RM:** Yes. Well, my name is Robert McCall. I was born in Columbus, Ohio, December the 23rd, 1919. I have been an artist all my life, and have been privileged, I feel, to have found a vocation early in my lifetime as a young boy. Before my teens, even, I knew that I wanted to be an artist. I was, it seemed, talented in a way that encouraged me, and I had parents that also encouraged me in that direction. I have continued to paint and will as long as I'm physically able. My mother's name was Lena Storch. She married Harry McCall, my father, I guess, back around 1915. And I was born, as I've said, in December of 1919. So now I am 78 years old.

**RG:** What brought them to Columbus or were they raised there?

**RM:** My mother was born in a small town in Ohio, Miamisburg, and my father grew up also in Ohio; was born, I think, in Georgetown, Ohio. His father was a doctor, and that doctor was very significant in my life, though I never met him. He died before I was born. But Dr. Robert Bruce McCall, who was my grandfather, was a doctor of special note. In addition to being a typical country doctor, typical in the sense that he made his rounds by horse and buggy and was often paid by his patients and clients with bushels of tomatoes or potatoes, and it was a kind of a charming time in the history of our country. We're talking about the turn of the century, when he was most active as a physician in a small town. My



father and I think my mother, as well, felt that wouldn't it be wonderful if young Robert, myself, would become a doctor, kind of following the footsteps of my grandfather. Indeed, I was interested in that and motivated in that direction, because science and the natural environment that I grew up in (we all do, we're all children of the universe) appealed to me and fascinated me. That is, the universe fascinated me; astronomy fascinated me, the stars and the heavens. The world of the microscopic. Animals, plants, how they reproduce. These were subjects that, to me, were wonders to contemplate. I had this sort of spirit and sense about the natural world that surrounded me when I was very young. I mean, nine, ten, eleven years old. And twelve and thirteen I was drawing a lot and found that I started, even that young, enjoying the act of drawing. Now, most children do, of course, this is not uncommon. But I think I was especially motivated to draw and paint. As a result, I did it more than my friends and became better at it. So I was then regarded as a talented young boy by my teachers. "Well, he draws. Bobby is an artist." So I developed and enlarged on that capacity and that ability to the point where I realized when I was a young teenager, maybe 15, 16, that maybe I didn't want to be a doctor, maybe what I really wanted to do was paint pictures all my life, because that is where I found my greatest joy doing that kind of thing.

**RG:** What -- back to those earliest times. When you say real early, what was your inspiration for, or how did the idea of understanding of the universe and the interest in it, would you attribute that to your parents?

**RM:** You know, I don't know how to answer that exactly. My father was a man who appreciated scholarship and education. He was a teacher, as a matter of fact, though, at the time I remember him best, he was no longer teaching in school, he was a principal of a small country school for a period of time. But he had given that up. I don't know, the economy of the time or what it was, but he was not doing that, he was more of a, kind of a salesperson for the Jones Heel Company when I remember him best. They manufacture heels for shoes. So that was his vocation as I grew up as a young boy. At the time he retired, that was what he was doing. But he was a man who appreciated literature and instilled in me an interest in those kinds of things. But probably the inspiration for me came from reading. Now, my father and mother both promoted that process of reading books, and I, early on, became a very active user of our public library and spent a lot of time in the public library in Columbus, Ohio where I grew up.

**RG:** Where was the library, do you remember?

**RM:** It was the Carnegie Public Library, and it was near Broad Street in downtown, close to the center of Columbus. Are you familiar with Columbus?

**RG:** A little bit. How far away did you live? How do you get to the library?

**RM:** By the streetcar. Our family did not own a car, and so an automobile was something that I never had as I grew up, nor did our family have one. I don't think my father ever drove a car, which is pretty remarkable because we're not talking about ancient history, we're talking about 60, 65, 70 years ago.

**RG:** You just didn't need it because of where you lived and --



**RM:** Yes, and a lot of people at that time in the social world we lived in, we were-- I always regarded myself as sort of middle class -- not especially privileged economically, but never wanting. We lived in our own home on Livingston Avenue in Columbus, Ohio. By the way, I saw that home just recently on a trip. I had an exhibition of my work open in Columbus, Ohio at a museum there and was back for that opening event and so I visited my childhood home. At least I saw it from the outside.

**RG:** How much had it changed?

**RM:** Oh, it had changed enormously; the neighborhood had. But, nonetheless, it was a real thrill to having not been there in many, many years to see it and to realize it still existed.

**RG:** Could you describe the house, your early memories of it?

**RM:** Yes. Vicariously, the other night, I awoke in the middle of the night and I, as I lay there, I was trying to remember the details, tiny details. I was sort of testing my own memory of the living room in our home. The mantle place, what was on the mantle, what was the clock like. It was an old Seth Thomas clock and it had the character of clocks of that period of time. What else was on the mantle? Where was the bookshelf or the bookcase? We had a bookcase with books in it. What were the books in that bookcase? There was a set of books called *Great Men and Famous Women*. It was a series of, maybe seven or ten books. These books were so influential, the images, the pictures, lots of pictures. Now, we're talking about 1932-4, when I was 12, 13, 14, and that library that I spoke of became very important and significant and inspirational in my life. Libraries can be.

**RG:** Oh, my goodness.

**RM:** Today we are living in a new world of technologies, and those same resources, that kind of research and that kind of reading comes from different, new electronic sources, perhaps. But, for me, that library was so significant. I would go into the rare book room and look at books that had been printed maybe in the latter part of the 19th Century and at the turn of the century, and wonderful publications that thrilled me and excited me and inspired me and, by the way, the paintings that I saw in such books, the illustrations. Looking at old magazines, magazines that were bound in the reference library, that were published at the turn of the century, seeing ads for Ivory Soap, and the covers of the *Saturday Evening Post* with illustrations by JC Lyondecker and some of the great illustrators of the period. Later Rockwell came into great prominence, Norman Rockwell, the great cover artist for the *Saturday Evening Post*. Later I worked for the *Saturday Evening Post* as an illustrator and I did a cover for the *Saturday Evening Post*. But this conditioning that occurs to young people, it is so powerful and so important and so significant for the future.

**RG:** Sets the sails.

**RM:** Oh, yes, yes. You asked where my inspiration came from, and I think it's the natural world that I was introduced to via that old doctor's office, my grandfather's office in Hamersville, Ohio. This is where my



grandfather had his home and where his doctor's office was, which was a small building, about a two-room building next to the house in which he lived right on one of the main avenues.

**RG:** How large was Hamersville at that time?

**RM:** Oh, tiny. And it's still tiny. I don't know how to describe its size, but maybe 5,000 people. Just a small town. I would visit there as a young pre-teenager and post teenager. There again, the books in his library, his medical books which I would-- now, he's been dead, mind you for 10, 15 years by the time -- or 20 years by the time I'm there visiting and looking through these books. The lock was locked on this office of his, and I would go in, I would have the permission to do this, and I would look through those books, examine the instruments that he used, find them fascinating. He didn't have a microscope, but he had some enlarging lenses that he used for certain diagnostic work. I was then introduced to enlarging through these little microscopes, these simple magnifying lenses I should describe them as, looking at insects and flowers, blossoms, learning what all that meant. You know, it all means something.

**RG:** Sure, as a youth.

**RM:** The petals and the stamen and the anther and the stigma and the ovaries where the little seeds germinate and the flowers --

**RG:** The complex lifestyle of a tiny, little plant.

**RM:** Oh, it was just so enthralling for this. Young boy that --

**RG:** By yourself?

**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** Did you ever take friends?

**RM:** No. I had a sister that would occasionally be there. She wasn't interested in those things. But, no, I was by myself with my aunt and uncle who lived in that house.

**RG:** Did any of those things survive in the family, the collection, his tools, his work?

**RM:** I got some of them, but I don't know where they are anymore, there weren't too many. These simple things are so big in my memory and so sort of insignificant in the other ways. We're not looking at a laboratory with a large array of stuff. And even the bookshelf, the bookcase didn't contain that many books. It wasn't a wall of books, but were books that I looked at that just kind of blew me away with the steel engravings. They didn't have the wonderful reproduction quality that current, today's books have. But, nonetheless, they were powerful to examine.



**RG:** Right. What was his training, do you know, the doctor?

**RM:** It was in Cincinnati. He went to medical school in Cincinnati, Ohio, which is just today probably a 20-minute drive from Hamersville, but in those days it was-- seemed a much longer distance. He also wrote articles for the *American Medical Journal*. That was a special distinction he had. In addition to being this typical country doctor, he was a man of some additional letters and skills and scholarly ability to write about cases that he had had. And he was on their masthead as a contributor to that publication. We used to have a stack of yellowing papers of these articles that he wrote, and they are still somewhere in the family. My sister probably has them. My sister is three years older than I am so she is now 81.

**RG:** As you would go to Hamersville, did you travel on the train?

**RM:** Mostly by car, but it would be someone else's car. One of our relatives would drive there. It was a short drive, it took an hour.

**RG:** What about the countryside? Were you out of doors a great deal?

**RM:** Oh, yes, a lot out of doors. But where we lived in Columbus, Ohio, it was on a streetcar line on Livingston Avenue. And the streetcar is significant, too, because at nighttime if you woke up you could hear that late car miles away, it seemed, as it approached. And they made more noise. You know, they were steel wheels against steel rails. It didn't travel very fast. I used the streetcar to go to school, East High School. I used the streetcar finally then to go to art school, which was about a 35-minute streetcar ride from my home. But the streetcar was right outside. You know, we're getting into -- this could take forever.

**RG:** Oh, I know it could, and we probably should move on but this is really interesting.

**RM:** I don't mind, by the way. Clearly, it's a pleasure to recall things that you haven't recalled in years.

**RG:** And it does have a focus on the life work and what you've done in Arizona. And, of course, I'm interested in everything about a person and his background. What other kinds of outdoors things did you do, or do you remember?

**RM:** Well, I certainly played outdoors like any boy would and had my boy friends who were neighbors down the street or down the alleys. There were alleys behind all the houses. And we would play marbles and we would play baseball. I had a good childhood, I think, a happy one, and not an unusual one in my special way. In school, school was close enough, elementary and -- elementary school and then high school.

**RG:** Do you remember the name of the elementary school?



**RM:** It was Roosevelt Elementary School.

**RG:** And East High School. Were you a good student?

**RM:** Yes, I was a pretty good student, one, when he applied himself, was an excellent student. I didn't get all A's, because those subjects that didn't interest me, I did not pursue and did not study as I should have.

**RG:** What were those, the ones that you remember that you didn't particularly care about?

**RM:** Well, there weren't many, curiously, but there were some that I especially liked. I liked science. In elementary school we had science. And my science teachers all recognized that here is somebody with -- a student that had a special fascination for all this stuff. So I remember vividly Mrs. Reinhardt, who took enough of an interest to take me to Ohio State University. And she had me do a few little projects of drawing some of the things that I saw under the microscope in that biology class.

\*\*\* Mr. McCall takes a phone call \*\*\*

**RG:** Let's see, we were interrupted by the telephone. What were you saying? You were talking about the teacher taking you to Ohio State, and I was going to ask what year would that have been? What grade were you in?

**RM:** That would have been, let's see, it was just before I went to high school. I was in the 9th grade at that time, because then high school was 10th, 11th, and 12th grade, and you graduated at the end of the 12th year.

**RG:** Okay. So you started school when you were six or --

**RM:** Probably five in kindergarten. And there were three schools that I attended, not counting the Columbus Arts School, which was after high school. And it was Livingston Avenue School, and then Roosevelt Elementary School, and East High School.

**RG:** Do you remember the block you lived on in Livingston Avenue, about where it was?

**RM:** Yes, I remember the streets on the side. Let's see, it was Wilson and Littlewood were the streets on either side. And it was on Livingston.

**RG:** And did you family build it or was it already built?

**RM:** It was there.

**RG:** So it's an older house, it goes back a ways?



**RM:** Oh, yes. It was probably built around 1915, and we moved in there about 1929. I would have been about nine years old. And then that was the house that I lived in through high school, and then I left home to seek my fortune.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** I went to art school, but I still lived in that house after high school for two or three years.

**RG:** What sort of things did you draw as early as you can remember? What kinds of things were you drawing?

**RM:** I drew knights in armor. I drew men in conflict with broad swords and helmets and men on chargers, knights with their plumes on their helmets and glorious kinds of imagery that fascinated a young boy. My mother used to read to me from the *Bookhouse* series of books. The illustrations on the cover, I think there were maybe, eight to twelve in the set, and they were nice thick book loaded with illustrations. And the illustrations, of course, were of special interest to me and the illustrators who did the work. I am familiar with -- still vivid in my mind are the particular illustrations that moved me in a special way. But books, as you can see, look around you. I mean, every room in our house, stacks of books. And the books, the kind of books are also interesting. Of course, a lot of them have to do with what I do, but then what I do is what I love.

**RG:** Right. You are very fortunate. I happen to be the same. I can do what I care about.

**RM:** Yes. I am making my own self aware in this conversation of how important books really were to me throughout my life and how early on I became connected with them.

**RG:** You learned to read in kindergarten or were you already starting, perhaps, to read at home?

**RM:** Yes, I learned to read. I read fairly early, like most kids. Nothing unusual about that. I have never been as fast a reader as I'd love to be, and I keep hearing about some people read a book in a day. To me, it's a much, much longer time to get through a book if I read it word for word. But most of the books that really turn me on are the picture books. And so I remember seeing a set of Ottoman prints in books in that Carnegie Public Library when I was very young, and I was so thrilled.

**RG:** Those botanist prints?

**RM:** Yeah. Oh, beautiful, just beautiful prints. I have books about all of those people now that are my own.

**RG:** Did you paint at any point during this time and what medium?



**RM:** Water color. This was when, I suppose, water color -- you know, young people had little boxes of water color. Prang was the kind of water colors that we used, and the maker of it. And, of course, I used crayons like any other kid. But every medium in the world, I've been involved with or used, and continue to run the gamut in that sense.

**RG:** Did you have phases you changed or were these things that you started with continue to be of interest all along?

**RM:** It seems to me, and I've thought about this, that artists repeat themselves, of course. Looking back over a large body of my work, I realize that I'm focused in a particular direction, and that's good. I mean, that's fine. If you're too generalized--you can't be as good at everything. But, anyway, the same things continue to interest me, absolutely.

**RG:** Were there formal art classes in either elementary or high school?

**RM:** We had art class, you know.

**RG:** Just an art teacher?

**RM:** Yes, an art teacher. And they always took a special interest in me because they could see, well, here's a guy that really cares and is trying and loves to do it.

**RG:** You had talent at that time?

**RM:** Oh, yes.

**RG:** Okay. Let's talk about the art school now. When did you know you were going to go from high school on to art school?

**RM:** When I won a scholarship.

**RG:** What kind of scholarship?

**RM:** Well, it was a full year at the Columbus Fine Art School in Columbus, Ohio. And I'm going to be the commencement speaker this spring. They have invited me back to do this. This is actually the third time I've been back. But they regard me as an alumni that is of special interest to them. I have -- the school is much, much larger. It's one of the best art schools for commercial art, particularly, for those who are looking for a career as artists. This school, it's called the Columbus College of Art and Design. That's its current name. And the old building, which was the only building, that I attended all my classes in, is still there, but then they have added to the campus and there are maybe seven or eight other buildings that are



now a part of it.

**RG:** So how long were you there?

**RM:** I went two years on scholarship. I won a second year of scholarship. And then I didn't win a third, and I had a job as an artist, I worked for a sign shop on North High Street. It was 1930 --I graduated high school in '37, so this would have been part of '37, '38, and '39. So, the war was beginning to look ominous, I mean, the possibility of war. I never gave much thought to that, but it was, you know, in the background. It was -- yet things were still pretty depressed. And I remember that Depression vividly because my--

**RG:** You were probably fortunate to have a job at that time. And what happened?

**RM:** Well, I had a job, and there was a need for it, you know. But, better than that, I wanted to work as an artist, and I got a job with this sign shop that produced signs and silk screen posters. It was a print shop, too. They printed these posters for streetcar cards. You know, you'd sit in the streetcar and you'd see those cards above the windows, and I did art for those. So when I was going to art school, I worked for this sign shop. And after art school, I'd take the streetcar and go up to North High Street and I'd work from maybe 4:00 o'clock until 7:00; some nights later if there was a lot for me to do. I'd work on Saturday at this sign shop. It was marvelous opportunity for a young kid still in his teens to start learning more and more and having deadlines and having work that was assigned. I had to make a portrait of Willie Pyle for a truck poster to go on the side of the poster -- of the trucks of the Columbus Dispatch, which was one of the newspapers in Columbus.

**RG:** I don't know the name Willie Pyle.

**RM:** Oh, I thought you would, he was a great editorial writer, nationally known. He was in World War II as a reporter, and he was killed during this time.

**RG:** Ernie?

**RM:** Wait a minute. Ernie Pyle, that's the one.

**RG:** Okay. Of course, I know Ernie. His home at some point was in Albuquerque or below. In fact, his home is a library in Albuquerque, at least it was when I was there.

**RM:** Yes, I think I remember that. See, that's where I was married, was in Albuquerque. Both of my daughters went to the University of New Mexico, as did my wife. I was stationed there was a young Air Force officer.

**RG:** Well, let's talk about how you -- you had two years of art school and then went into the military?



**RM:** No. I got a job with the Columbus and Southern Electric in Columbus, Ohio, still in my teens. I am now the artist and the writer of the ads, and I did just an awful lot of advertising for the light company, which is the local electric utility and had other valuable experience there. But then I decided I had to go to the big city to seek my fortune, and I went to Chicago. Now that would have been 1939 that I went to Chicago. In 1940, I was in Chicago working for the Cliff Davis Publishing Company as an artist. And they published magazines like *Flying Magazine*, and *Popular Photography* magazine. And, curiously, they also published *Astounding Stories* and *Amazing Science Fiction*. These were pulp magazines. They don't make pulp magazines anymore. So here I was with a publisher on Michigan Avenue in a beautiful building and I was an artist that did all kinds of work. I did some covers for those *Astounding Stories* magazines, and I pasted up and cropped photographs for *Popular Photography*. *The Flying Magazine* intrigued me because I loved airplanes. Airplanes thrilled me.

**RG:** When had you first seen airplanes; do you remember?

**RM:** When did I first see them? Columbus. I'd see them overhead, these biplanes, and Dayton, Ohio was not too far away. My aunt, my mother's sister, worked for the Wright brothers, and they were in Dayton. I don't know what she did. She was very young at the time and she didn't work for them long, but she had her first airplane ride in Dayton, Ohio, in a very primitive aircraft. But, yes, at the Franklin County Fair in Columbus, Ohio, was where I saw my first airplanes in a kind of a display of World War I aircraft. Now, this would have been about 1930, so I'm 10 years old. The war has been over about 11 years, or 12. It ended in 1918, I think, World War I. And here were these big bombers that were huge. I couldn't believe -- they were on static display -- and there were maybe just a couple, three, maybe, in a room. There were some smaller fighter aircraft, too, like the Jenny and some of the early aircraft of World War I, but they just -- another thing that just -- I couldn't believe it, they were just so marvelous. Then I'd go out to Fort Columbus a few years later and see the airplanes come in and take off. So airplanes really, really turned me on, as they say, and I started drawing and painting aircraft.

**RG:** Now you were single when you were in Chicago?

**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** You had an apartment, you had friends that you lived there with?

**RM:** I lived with my aunt, who-- my mother's brother, and his wife. And I lived with them on Addison Avenue, which was right across from Wrigley Field, a famous place. And I was never interested in baseball, but I can remember, especially the weekends when they'd play ball there, you would hear the crowds roar. I had one room that she rented me in an apartment that they had. She rented rooms from her apartment which was a complete floor, and so there were, I think, two or three rooms that she rented out, so I had one of those when I worked in Chicago. I lived in Chicago about two and a half years before enlisting in the Army Air Corps and being called up. Golly.



**RG:** And what about your military career? How long were you there and where did you get your training?

**RM:** I loved it. It was just great. I was in from December, January of 1941, '42, '43, and I got out in '45 at the end of the war. I was in-- I wonder if it was January of '42. That's when I went in.

**RG:** After Pearl Harbor?

**RM:** Yeah, after Pearl Harbor, shortly after Pearl Harbor. I had enlisted before that time, but was called up. I enlisted to become a pilot, to become a flyer. Then I trained in Albuquerque, among other places. Kirtland Field.

**RG:** Okay. What do you remember about Albuquerque in those days? Anything that stands out in particular?

**RM:** Just all wonderful memories that flood back. And then, of course, I met Louise there. Louise she was 19 when I met her.

**RG:** What was her name at that time?

**RM:** Louise Harrup; one of six children. And they lived on Tijeras. Do you know where Tijeras is?

**RG:** Yes.

**RM:** And they lived in a lovely old, big home. Somebody kind of famous lived on that street, or close to it. In any event, her father was the general secretary of the YMCA, not in Albuquerque, but because of that involvement with youth, he was appointed as a USO director, and he then established the USO in Albuquerque. So the family moved then, she grew up in Oklahoma City. But, anyway, she was attending the University of New Mexico, and I met her on a blind date in Albuquerque. I was living at Kirtland Field, was staying on as an instructor for a period of time after I finished my bombardier training.

**RG:** Now, B-26s?

**RM:** Well, AT-11s was the trainer aircraft for bombardiers and navigators. But they were also training pilots at Albuquerque in B-24s.

**RG:** Oh, in the 24s, the Liberators. **RM:** Yeah, the Liberators.

**RG:** Did you stay at Kirtland?

**RM:** I lived at Kirtland. I went to school there first as a cadet, then graduated, and then was 16 held back or kept there as an instructor. But most of my time was spent as a training aids guy, so I was in the --



because I drew and I could produce paintings and manuals and do work of that sort. So that was what I did mostly, although I did have a class, and I did have students as a bombardier instructor. But I loved being around airplanes, and they were a real passion for me. And as an artist, I drew them and became maybe the leading illustrator, aviation illustrator in New York for a period of time after the war when I was back in New York and had my studio there. I worked for *Life* magazine and lots of aviation companies and so forth.

**RG:** Were you stationed other places besides Kirtland during the war?

**RM:** From Kirtland I was sent to Lincoln, Nebraska to be assigned to a B-29 crew. And so after dating Louise there, I left to be assigned to a crew and then to train somewhere. It turned out they sent me to El Paso. Biggs Field. You know all these places, don't you? At Biggs field, I would drive. I finally bought a car.

**RG:** What kind was it?

**RM:** It was a Desoto Club Coupe. It was the most gorgeous automobile you could manage, I thought. And I took such immaculate care of it, and that was what I dated Louise in. But I would drive from El Paso to Albuquerque just for a weekend, you know, just one night --to spend the night, be with her, and come back the next day, or whatever.

**RG:** So you were only in Lincoln, Nebraska for a short time?

**RM:** Yeah, about seven months, I guess.

**RG:** Then you went to El Paso.

**RM:** Now, at Lincoln, I was in a holding pattern waiting to be assigned to a crew. When that assignment came through, and by the way I waited for about five or six months there, then I was assigned to Biggs Field to a B-29 crew, and that is where I then trained. It was a three-month period that I'd be training there, and then with the plan that I would then go with that crew to Guam to fight against the Japanese. And the war ended before all that happened, by the way, so I never did get overseas.

**RG:** Were you mustered out at Biggs Field? It would have been after the war?

**RM:** Yes, the war ended, the bomb was dropped, and very rapidly then people were discharged. But I had gotten married by that time. Louise and I were married in '45 shortly before the war ended. I was mustered out, I guess it must have been around October or November. It was near Christmastime, I know, of '45.

**RG:** How would you sum up your military career? What were your feelings about this?



**RM:** Well, they were just great, just wonderful. Being with airplanes, traveling,

**RG:** Using your skills?

**RM:** Yes, using my skills, and meeting my wife. And so it was just a marvelous time. Actually, my life has been marvelous. It's been wonderful.

**RG:** Some of us are blessed that way.

**RM:** Yes, in recalling all these memories, it's nothing but joy.

**RG:** What about, just in passing, your thoughts on El Paso at that time? Did you see the city or did you get across the border and go to Juarez?

**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** Did you learn any Spanish?

**RM:** My wife had taken Spanish in high school and so she spoke some Spanish, and still does. We have a Spanish maid so she needs to because she doesn't speak very good English. I didn't. But I liked in living in El Paso, it was nice. I remember I sold my car in order to buy a ring for Louise.

**RG:** So you're back to trolleys? Actually, they had streetcars in El Paso during that time, didn't they?

**RM:** Yes, they had streetcars. But, let's see-- I rode the bus. I'd take the bus out to the base. And we had little garage apartment in those days after our marriage, and -- but the war ended and all that happened kind of fast, and actually we weren't in El Paso that long. But I did get a job because it was sort of a lot of free time, and so there was an advertising agency right in the heart of El Paso, and I showed them my work. And because I had been in Chicago and working with pretty sophisticated people, I had skills that they could use right away. So they paid me, and I did some ads for --

**RG:** What was that company?

**RM:** The name of the advertising agency? Gosh, I don't think I can come up with it, but I know one of their accounts was the Hilton Hotel chain. Conrad Hilton. He started in Albuquerque, didn't he?

**RG:** Well, south of there.

**RM:** South, that's how they happened to have the account, I guess, because it started there. But they had already bought the Stevens Hotel in Chicago. So when Louise and I left, I got my job back in Chicago. And we took the train to Chicago. She had never been to the big city before, so it was a big thrill for her. And because the Stevens Hotel, which was the biggest hotel in the world for a period of time, they set us



up in a nice, wonderful room. More than that it, it was sort of an elegant, not a suite exactly but we had more than one room in the Stevens Hotel until I could find an apartment to live in. So she enjoyed that, and so did I. It was nice.

**RG:** All of this early time when you were working and illustrating, did you keep any of those things? Do you have work of yours going back to those early times when you were illustrating?

**RM:** Yeah, I do. You know, I have just stored stuff. We have a basement down here. It's just a big room, and I stored stuff down there when we moved out here, portfolios and things. During a rain storm, it flooded and a lot of that was lost. I have stuff going back many years, but a lot of that real early work is gone.

**RG:** That's too bad.

**RM:** It is too bad.

**RG:** How would you characterize now, by this time when you were in Chicago and you were in the Stevens Hotel, any changes in your interests or your work or what you do?

**RM:** Yeah, I'm enhancing my abilities, I'm broadening my interests and knowledge, but there still is a kind of a focus that still is in that realm of a fascination of science and technology and the universe, aviation, high technology, and that sort. Automobiles interested me. I did a lot of automobile ads as a young illustrator in New York when I finally got there. And these interests still persist. Less interest in people. Some artists and illustrators are skilled at painting people and they paint portraits and things like that. And I have done all of that to some extent, but never really focused on it. So, no, I don't think that there were many major shifts in interests in that time.

**RG:** At this time what was your career idea?

\*\*\* Mr. McCall takes a phone call \*\*\*

**RG:** At this point you were a young married man and doing well, you have got a job that you like.

**RM:** You know, I always have felt that I have done well. In that first job that I got in that sign shop where I made 30 cents an hour, 30 cents an hour, and then I remember getting a raise to 35 cents an hour. A nickel an hour. Incredible.

**RG:** It's hard to imagine.

**RM:** Yeah, it is. But I felt lucky and I felt privileged. I was thrilled with doing the work that I did. Then as I progressed up that ladder through the decades, I have always felt that way. I've always felt well paid, fortunate.



**RG:** Well, yes. I was going to ask if there were some disappointments, some things you weren't able to do. How did you feel about wanting to go to Europe or other places to do this art? Was this something that interested you?

**RM:** Yes. And one of the things that I tell young people when I talk to them, I urge the do some traveling, especially in Europe where they can see how other people live and evaluate their involvement and condition with other cultures that populate our planet. And I think it's so educational to have those experiences. I wish I could have traveled abroad earlier. And I have a kind of an arrangement with all my grandchildren. We have five grandchildren, and each one will receive a certain amount of money toward a trip to Europe when they are ready to do it. And if they are never ready, if they don't have the curiosity or the interest, then they don't get that money. And it's a couple thousand dollars, but enough to provide them the funds to make a short trip to Europe. They get it only if they make the trip. Well, now, all but two have done this. One who really didn't want to go but wanted the money, and no way, you don't get it, you know. And so she is going now just because that is the only way she is going to get it. And she wasn't even particularly interested but now they are all excited.

**RG:** It may make a change in her life, it really will.

**RM:** Yes, it will. Those are life changing experiences, I think, and usually for the good.

**RG:** Right. Moving ahead now with the grandchildren, are any of them artists, artistic?

**RM:** I have a grandson, David is his name, David Foster. Christopher Foster is my other grandson from my daughter Catherine, but David is very interested in art and has talent. I am convinced of it. He is now 13 and just a marvelous young man, as is his older brother, Christopher. And I do have another grandson who is the doctor that I never became.

**RG:** Oh, all right.

**RM:** He is now a medical doctor in Charleston, South Carolina. He is married; no children yet. But I'm real proud of all of them.

**RG:** Going back to now you were in Chicago and it's the mid 1940s --what happened there? How long were you there or is this where you spent the major part of your career, in Chicago?

**RM:** I lived in Chicago before the war about two years, went into the service, married Louise, came back to Chicago, familiar territory, job waiting, and was there five years to 1949, almost 1950. Then, recognizing as I did that the career of an illustrator, an artist, commercial artist, which I thought of myself as, and my great ambition was to be an illustrator for *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life Magazine*, all those big publications, doing the thing that I do best, whatever that is, whether it's aviation, science, the future. I



knew that I had to go to New York. So I made a couple of trips, one very special one that resulted in a job. I got a job with one of the leading commercial art studios. Then Louise and I packed up, we had our first baby, so we took her with us. That was Linda, who is our older daughter. And moved to New York. We lived in New York from late 1949 until 1971, and then we moved out here. We have been here now 26, almost 27 years.

**RG:** While in New York, you worked for all these magazines you had hoped to and others?

**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** What was a highlight, perhaps?

**RM:** Oh, I think working for *Life* magazine. And my first assignment from them was to do about 20 illustrations for a three-part serial of Walter Lord's book, *The Day of Infamy*, which has to do with the attack on Pearl Harbor. So that was my first assignment from *Life*. And it was a big one, it wasn't just a single illustration. It was a bunch of stuff, and I did that in 1956.

**RG:** You did airplanes, ships?

**RM:** Yeah, the whole story of the attack on Pearl Harbor; the men and women involved, and about 20 paintings. And then that's a very special memory and kind of a turning point in my fortunes in New York City. I did work for the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's*. Remember *Collier's*? I did a cover for them, and I did a lot of illustrations for the interior. And I worked for advertising agencies, did a lot of cover paintings for *Popular Science* magazine because that, again, goes back to my specialty of science and technology and the kind of things that *Popular Science* writes about.

**RG:** Where do the movies fit in your life at this time? What are you doing as far as movies are concerned? Attended a few or--

**RM:** Oh, well, my first -- oh, I love --

**RG:** Did you like movies?

**RM:** I loved the movies, I surely did. And when I got-- let's see. The first film that I was involved with was *2001 Space Odyssey*. I got a call from MGM, the advertising agency of New York that handles that account, and they wanted me to go over to London and meet Stanley Kubrick. And I did, and then I worked -- then I moved there with my wife and my youngest daughter, Catherine. Catherine was still in high school. Linda, by this time, was at the time University of New Mexico.

**RG:** Had she chosen that because her grandparents were still living there or --

**RM:** It was because Louise was going there and she was a Theta, and both the girls became Thetas. They



chose it because that's where her parents met and were married and a lot of stuff of that sort.

**RG:** So you went to London then?

**RM:** Yes, went to London and lived in London for about four months working with Kubrick at the studio on *2001 Space Odyssey*; produced a series of, well, there were about four, four paintings to promote for posters and all kinds of promotional material for that film.

**RG:** Back to the early movies, when you first started going to the movies as a young person, a child of whatever, were you particularly fascinated with certain ones because of the illustrations?

**RM:** Yes. I think one of the movies that happened to have been produced at Borham Wood Studio, which is the studio outside of London where I worked with Kubrick, was *Things to Come*, which was a film that was made in about 1937, probably made in '36, but I remember seeing it in '37. William Macy was one of the leading characters in it. I've seen it on television a few times; not recently, but it was an old black and white film, and it has to do with aliens and the future and strange things that happen in that film.

**RG:** What about *Tarzan* and Edgar Rice Burroughs?

**RM:** Yes, I loved those books.

**RG:** Were those things you read as a child?

**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** I loved those books. All of those, the space things.

**RM:** Yes, Edgar Rice Burroughs and his "The Moons of Mars" and some of those wonderful stories, yes, I read those, too.

**RG:** What about astronomy at this point? Is this something you are seriously looking at?

**RM:** In the sense that it is a source of inspiration, I certainly was looking at it and it had a great impact. When I was still in Columbus, working at the sign shop. No, I may be still in high school, but I am interested in astronomy. Even as a young teenager, I got some astronomy books out of the library and read about these stars and how distant they are, and I just couldn't believe that they are that far away, and that there are enormous suns like our own sun, many of them far larger. I went to Ohio State University. They have a planetarium there. And on Saturday nights in the summertime that planetarium was open to the public for whoever was interested in looking through a big telescope. And I remember looking at the moon, and I think probably Saturn or Jupiter, and they'd come up so beautifully, even in binoculars you can see the rings on Saturn, and being so impressed with all that in the majesty and the limitlessness of the



universe. You know, it's just beyond belief, and it continues to be. We are, of course, learning every day how beyond belief it really is. So, yes, astronomy, but I never had any formal education or training in astronomy. I bought a telescope 35 years or more ago just to look at the heavens. I belonged to an astronomy club for a short time. My knowledge is very superficial about it all, but just enough to get the thrill, which then I can translate into my paintings.

**RG:** Sure. Have you heard of Safford in southeastern Arizona? The city and the University of Arizona and others have collaborated and have built what they call Discovery Park. Are you familiar with that? They have a simulated flight to the planets. I don't know enough about computer and electronics, but you're feeling like you're there like the IMAX Theater. It's quite interesting. They also have there an earlier Vatican telescope from about the 1600s, I believe.

**RM:** Really.

**RG:** A real early asteroid, that sort of thing, so it's a wonderful building, tremendous building for the little town of Safford. They're really getting some good science incorporated into what they are trying to do. It's not just a fun things for kids, but kids would love getting into this shuttle and going off to see Pluto. You stop at every one of the planets on the way.

**RM:** Oh, wonderful, I didn't know that.

**RG:** You might enjoy it sometime actually seeing what they're doing.

**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** Well, *2001 Space Odyssey*, any more about that you could describe in outstanding people or the whole process?

**RM:** It was a high point in my career, like the first assignment for *Life* magazine and working for them. Going to New York in the first place was a high point.

**RG:** I was going to ask: At this point in your career you're already recognized as a space artist, is that why they contacted you or you had got honors and things?

**RM:** For what?

**RG:** For this type of art. Why did the movie people contact you?

**RM:** Oh, because I had done work for *Life* magazine, and Stanley Kubrick had seen my work in *Life* and clipped it and used it as kind of a source, a research source for some of the things he planned to do, achieve, looks, backgrounds and so forth. So that trip to London was a revelation in many ways. Louise



had never been to Europe or to London, England, and so it was just a tremendous opportunity.

\*\*\* Mr. McCall receives a phone call \*\*\*

**RG:** Okay. I forgot where we were. You're working with *2001 Space Odyssey*.

**RM:** That was just another great experience that I regard as a very special one because it was my first introduction to film, movies, and it was a major film, and it's a classic. It's a great film. The director, Stanley Kubrick, we got to know him and his wife and his home, and a remarkable, brilliant director that has produced some very fine films; *2001* being probably his greatest. He'll be best known maybe for that than any, although he did some other great films as well. He is working on a new one now. I had some contact with him about a year and a half ago, where for a while he was talking about another science fiction film and he was interested in knowing my availability and interest, but now I understand he's not doing that, he's doing another subject that isn't the sort of thing that I would have anything to do with. So, anyway, we were there for, as I say, almost four months.

**RG:** What year was that?

**RM:** This was 1967. We took our daughter with us; had a lovely apartment near Buckingham Palace. The studio set us up. I had a chauffeur that came and picked me up every morning and took me to work and brought me back. Working on that film and seeing how it was all done, and the models that were built, and the people involved. Arthur Clark wrote the story. Arthur was a man that I had not met before, so that association was great. I've met him on a number of occasions since then, and he is still active and productive. And it was a revelation. I loved that kind of involvement. I did four paintings that were used as posters; one that was used more than the others that is familiar to so many people now because of its wide distribution. It was painted as a big display over Time Square in New York on the most enormous billboard that must have been almost a city block long. My painting was up there in '68, I think, during the premiere, for a period of many months it was there.

**RG:** What was the subject?

**RM:** It was -- I'll show you a picture of it.

**RG:** Oh, all right. Great.

**RM:** I never can find what I want when I want it. Have you seen any of my books?

**RG:** Actually, I haven't. I was not able to get either at the public library. They were out. This one is which one?

**RM:** This is the most recent one, Doubleday published it in '92.



**RG:** *The Art of Robert McCall.*

**RM:** Yes, and there are two other books where they published my work.

**RG:** Let's see, I had this one and one called *Vision of the Future.*

**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** And what's the third one?

**RM:** *Our World in Space.* Isaac Asimov wrote the text for that. And this is the 2007 page. It was made into posters and was plastered all over the world.

**RG:** This was the large one over Time Square?

**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** We are looking at the book, *The Art of Robert McCall*, introduction by Ray Bradbury, "Celebration of our Future in Space" opposite page 34. "A Space Plan From a Half Completed Space Station." Well, you know, I'm already convinced I've missed something by not seeing the film *2001*. I never have seen it, never have seen an episode of *Star Trek*, so perhaps I have quite an expansion to do. After your London stint, then what came about?

**RM:** Then I did a lot of work for *Life* magazine. That was very special in my life, too, the work that I did for *Life*. They were one of my favorite clients and I loved working for them. All this is freelance. I had my studio in Manhattan between -- on 48th Street between Second and Third. The studio is in a building in a home that was owned by Greta Garbo. So the room that was my studio, my suite of rooms which consisted, really, of a hallway, a bath, a john, and this one room was the room that Greta used as a kind of a studio for herself when she lived in that building. She no longer lived in that building but she lived fairly nearby at Turtle Bay, which is near the United Nations building, in that vicinity of Manhattan, so it was a very desirable location. My north windows looked out over the gardens of Turtle Bay, which was quite lovely. And that's where I did so much work for so many years. Katharine Hepburn's house was right across the garden. She was on 49th Street, I was on 48th. Never met her, never even saw her, but that's where she lived. And there were some other personalities that lived around there, too, of course,

**RG:** When did you begin freelancing as opposed to working with an agency?

**RM:** In, I think, about 1955. Yes, let's see, when I did that first job for *Life* it was '56. No, wait a minute, it was 1958 that I left the studio that I went with when I moved from Chicago. Cubra Studios was the name of the studio and it was one of the major important studios with some of the finest artists doing that kind of



work. In '58 I became totally freelance and have been that way since; worked on my own with a couple of interims of representations by agents, but basically and most of time just on my own totally, which has worked for me best.

**RG:** That's good. What brought you to Arizona?

**RM:** We were visiting friends, Natt and Gloria Marshall, who are still our good friends. was going to have lunch with Natt today except that I'm not going to because I'm too busy with other things. We were out here visiting for three days with no thought of ever moving from Chappaqua, which is where we lived in New York. And we fell in love with the desert and the look, and also it was kind of like Albuquerque. That's where we met, and we loved Albuquerque and the west. And so we looked at some homes and, by golly, we saw this house.

**RG:** This is the one you bought?

**RM:** We have been in this place for all those years.

**RG:** That was '70?

**RM:** '71. So we've been here now for about 27 years. It was the climate, also, I was kind of ready to get out of that environment of intense competition. It was just so intense in every way, you know. I had to go to town a lot. I had been working out near my home, I had a studio out near my home. I moved out of New York, so I didn't have to go in every day, but that was a three-hour commute round trip.

**RG:** So, essentially, the same reason people are still coming here that sort of brought you out here, getting away from the population?

**RM:** Yes; never regretted it, although I love New York.

**RG:** What about Arizona; are you fairly familiar with the state? Have you traveled around the state?

**RM:** We have traveled around quite a bit; probably not as familiar as you'd expect us to be after all these years but we traveled around. We've been to the Canyon, we've taken a trip down the Colorado River. That was great fun, I enjoyed that. We love the state.

**RG:** Let's see, this one, some of them you incorporate saguaros and you incorporate Arizona?

**RM:** Oh, yes.

**RG:** But some of those even look like Arizona.

**RM:** Well, some of those mountains in the background, yes. Oh, yes, Arizona has become a real source of



material, landscape and mountains and sky. I love the skies.

**RG:** Where does the Smithsonian fit into all of this? When did you become associated with --

**RM:** Oh, I guess it was -- I've always liked painting big pictures and wanted to paint murals. This is a mural. The big mural that I did at the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum in Washington was the first real mural that I was ever commissioned to do.

**RG:** I have seen that one.

**RM:** Oh, you have?

**RG:** Yes.

**RM:** That was in 1975. The painting was finished and the museum was opened in July of '76. We moved to Washington, Louise and I moved there and rented a lovely house in Georgetown, fully furnished, nicely furnished, right in the heart of that wonderful, historic community. I was there about eight months doing this mural, which the master study and the planning was done right here in this studio. And when all that was finished -- the master study being not the one I actually used. I made a couple of studies. There's another one over there. And, we just enjoyed that so much, too. Living in Washington was wonderful. I love Washington, D.C. I love just about everything, really. I'm hearing myself and I was thinking, well, that's great.

**RG:** It really is.

**RM:** But it's true. It's just we've really been fortunate.

**RG:** You have just a zest for life, you are never bored. I recall very well, my late husband worked for Sperry and was involved in designing some instrument, something about the instrument housing or something for Skylab.

**RM:** Oh, really.

**RG:** So when we went to Washington the first time together-- of course, the Space Museum was where we wanted to go, and he told me about your work.

**RM:** Oh, really.

**RG:** And when we came back to Phoenix, we went down to see the one down in, is it 800 West Washington that you've got the mural?



**RM:** Yes, that mural there.

**RG:** He talked about you because he was very much into space and the technology.

**RM:** So he worked for Sperry? That's now Honeywell, isn't it?

**RG:** Yes. He left Sperry a long time before that.

**RM:** I worked for Sperry a long time ago in New York. They designed gun sites for Navy guns and a lot of things of that kind. I remember I did a number of ads for them that appeared in *Time* magazine and publications. So, what years did he work for them?

**RG:** You know, he left in '81, I guess, '82 maybe. During the '70s, all during the '70s, '60s, maybe.

**RM:** I did my work for Sperry in the '60s.

**RG:** Yes. What do you think you're the proudest of in all the things you've done, or could you even single out any one thing?

**RM:** I can, because it is the mural in Washington. I think because it's a successful piece and when I look at it each time-- and I get back to Washington at least once a year-- I am pleased with what I see. It is seen by so many people. So it's for those kinds of reasons and because aesthetically I think it's a successful work. I'm proud of it. It's maybe the most special thing, so I love that.

**RG:** In creating that, or in any of the large things you've done, do you have a vision of what you're doing? Of course I know you do the studies, like we're sitting in the studio and referring to some smaller, what, two by -- how long is that?

**RM:** Oh, this is about maybe two by five feet.

**RG:** Okay, a study that, then, gets done into a larger-- But do you see all that before you really start on-- do you-- I know somebody's constantly wanting to go back and change this and add something else. We'll stop for the door.

**RM:** Yes, I want to spend maybe five minutes or so with them. This is not a meeting, it's some guy that just wanted to come in and have me sign some books.

**RG:** That's just great, we'll stop momentarily.

\*\*\* Brief break \*\*\*

**RG:** We are talking after a brief pause for Mr. McCall to autograph some books for a fan of his. We have



decided to stop and break for lunch and get back together at another time.

*Interview continued with Robert McCall in his home studio in Paradise Valley, Arizona on May the 27th, 1998.*

**RG:** Now, Mr. McCall, we've been talking, and let's go back and perhaps get you to tell me a little bit about your books and possibly the thought of a new one coming along.

**RM:** I guess it was 1970, or thereabouts, I was talking with my wife, as we are in the habit of doing, over coffee in the morning, and I had been talking about the idea of a book about my work. Books have always absolutely been such an important part of my life. I spent hours and hours in the library in Columbus, Ohio, and I think I touched on that in our earlier interview.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** I love books. To think of a book about me and my work was a dream that was kind of beyond the possibility of realization, I think. At least at the time I thought that. But I began to realize that maybe, indeed, I did have enough material and there were publishers that might be fascinated with what I do, and so Louise urged me to do this. By the way, my wife Louise and I, as I've already indicated, have been very close for now almost 53 years. And it's been a very significant aspect of any success that I've had, because I've never had some of the frustrations that must come when husband and wife are engaged in opposite interests. We were both artists. Louise is a wonderful artist, and she understood the artist's spirit. And because she was such a generous person and had children to raise and all, she forwent her ambitions for that period of time that it took to raise the family, which is a tremendous length of time, and energy and so forth, and something that I could relate to on my side. I could appreciate the sacrifice that she made.

**RG:** She also collaborated with you, didn't she?

**RM:** Oh, yes, in later years, then she did collaborate on some of my projects, some of my murals, in particular. Well, so, she sparked the idea, also kind of urged me to do it, gave me that additional confidence. And so I, indeed, then went out and made some contacts with publishers. One of the first ones was *Life Magazine*, *Time-Life Books*. They had a subsidiary called New York Graphics, which is a significant and very successful publishing company that, shortly after they published my book, they went with Little/Brown in Boston, and I think are still associated with Little/Brown Publishing. But New York Graphics was a publisher of sort of serious books, and they were interested. They published my first book, which was entitled *Our World in Space*. It was a title that I liked and I put together, and it was a book of my paintings. Now, I had to find a writer, an author to write the text. Writing has always been difficult for me. I labor over it in a way that makes it inefficient to try to do it, so I looked for an author. Also I was looking for somebody that could put words together far better than I could ever. And Isaac Asimov is a man that I had become acquainted with and had lunch with a few times, and admired enormously for his brilliance and his versatility as to subject matter that he dealt with in his many, many books. I think he had



a total, by the time he died, really, just a few years ago, of maybe more than 400 books.

**RG:** And he was versatile, too, he did other things, as well as space kind of things.

**RM:** Well, you know, he was a teacher early on.

**RG:** Oh, was that it?

**RM:** He was a teacher, a professor, and then he became an author and he's done a lot of science fiction, but also science fact. Also he wrote a wonderful book, which I've never read, but that had to do with the Bible. And then, on Shakespeare. He wrote a books of jokes. He's a wonderful story teller. This kind of incredible brilliance in writing. I know I met with him on one occasion in his office, Central Park West in New York where I, of course, worked for many, many years, and it was while I was still in the know, that I made these contacts. So my first book-- New York Graphics was very interested. They loved the idea of Isaac Asimov writing the text because that would add to the attraction of the book. And, indeed, the book entitled *Our World in Space*, by Robert McCall and Isaac Asimov -- and my name comes first because I remember the luncheon that I had-- and he mentions it in a subsequent book that he wrote. He mentions the fact-- the story of our having lunch and this book that was the first book of mine. And I didn't plead with him, but I made the argument that, "Isaac, you've had so many books published, I really want -- I thought of this, I gave it its title. It's about my work. You're an author of eminence, but I'd like my name to be first," and he agreed right away. Wonderful. Admirable guy, and one that I will remember with great fondness and friendship. So that book was published, and it was a handsome book. It was a large book, great number of colored reproduction. It was all about-- all with my paintings and this very inspiring text by Isaac about the world and the universe and our world, planet Earth, in space in this enormous universe.

**RG:** About what year was it published?

**RM:** It was published in 1972. Then it was ten years later, almost, that I felt that I was ready for another book, and I made some efforts to make that happen. And, indeed, there was an author, another wonderful author of science fact and science fiction, an author of considerable productivity and eminence. I'm drawing a blank here.

**RG:** Ben?

**RM:** Ben Bova. And Ben is known, less known than Isaac, but very well known among authors, and particularly authors that have to do with aerospace and science fiction. Ben, I had met, and he was enthusiastic about having a book. Also, another man who contacted me and wanted to do a book was *Bantam Books* and Ian Balentine. Ian Balentine is the man who started the paperback books. He started the paperbacks, way, way back. He has now passed on so he is no longer with us. But Ian called me one day and said he'd love to do a book on my work and Ben Bova would be a good author and so that all took place. That book was published by Harry Abrams, which is a fine and great publisher of art books, very



fine art books; internationally known, and their offices were in New York. They published my second book entitled *Vision of the Future*, which is this book. And this is by Ben Bova, as you can see, the *Art of Robert McCall*. And, oh, what a thrill it is. By the way, my books, I don't think any of them made any special splash. I hope maybe a fourth one might, but they were all modestly successful. Maybe that word isn't even appropriate. But the publishers were pleased with them and the product was very good. And they had a limited appeal because of the nature of the art, I guess. Space art is a subject isn't broadly in the way that landscape or some other subjects might be. Anyway, but to have the books, they have been such a value to me as an artist and have had an impact on the success that I've had, because to be able to present a book to a prospective client is very valuable. And so I've loved them. Then ten years later, this was about '82 that this was published, I'm not certain. I have to look in the fly leaf. And I was very happy with this book. Then I wanted to do another book and Bantam Doubleday in New York -- these were all very significant publishers, by the way -- they were very interested. Ray Bradbury wrote the text-- or, actually, it's the introduction or the preface, by Ray Bradbury, whom I had worked with, who has been in my home and studio here. I saw him just last week in Pasadena. There was a performance of the Pasadena Playhouse to which we were invited, and Louise and I flew out there for that occasion. It was a performance of his works, his readings by very important actors. Charlton Heston was one of the readers, and there were others, about eight performers that performed. Some of my slides were projected to illustrate the events that were being depicted in the poetry. He wrote poetry, by the way, very powerful, wonderful, unique poetry. So, this last book, which is that one that you see on the top of that stack, the *Art of Robert McCall* is the most recent.

**RG:** Now, that's number four?

**RM:** That's number three, the third book that I've had published.

**RG:** Okay. This is the one with Ray Bradbury. That's right, this is the one that's got the wonderful --

**RM:** Yes, and I want you to take all three of them, if you will, and keep them as long as you need them. And, indeed, I plan to present three new ones to the Historical Society.

**RG:** Oh, great. That will make a wonderful exhibit.

**RM:** Yes, I want very much to do that.

**RG:** Well, before we talk about the fourth one that's coming up, the first one in '72, about how many paintings did you have? Did you have an -- I mean, I assume that each time, each new edition has added things that you've done in that decade.

**RM:** Oh, yes. There are new paintings. There are a few paintings that seem to spill over into the next one. I want to get that other book so we have all three to look at here.



**RG:** Mr. McCall's walking over to a bookshelf and pulling out a book so we can look at all of them. Well, as I mentioned to you, unfortunately, they are rather hard to get in the libraries. And I assume they are pretty popular.

**RM:** Scottsdale does have all three.

**RG:** This one, number three, I was able to get from Tempe just on temporary loan. I can only keep it a couple of weeks.

**RM:** Sure. Well, this is the first one, and this is the one that Isaac Asimov wrote. Buzz Aldrin, the first man on the moon, was with Armstrong. He wrote a forward for this book. And since this time, I've become-- way back in '72 --a good friend of Buzz, and he's been here at our home many times, with his wife. We've done some traveling together. But this is a book that I conceived, and every picture is part of my collection.

**RG:** That's a great one.

**RM:** Yes, it's a good book.

**RG:** Now, that one, I did not see at all. I wasn't able to find that one, so that will be interesting.

**RM:** Let me make sure you have those. So then we're up to the last book, which is the one called the *Art of Robert McCall*, and one that I think is the most beautiful of the bunch. Certainly the reproductions are best, and the printing, all is a little better quality, I think, but I liked them all. This one was also published in German with a different cover.

**RG:** Oh, the second one no, the first one.

**RM:** The first one. *Our World in Space* was also published in Germany. And *The Vision of the Future* was also- and there was a French publication of this, too. *The Vision of the Future* -- there is a Japanese edition of this. A very handsome one. They boxed it, and they have a different cover on it, and they added some foldout spreads on the inside and made it a more elaborate thing and it's all in Japanese. The last one, only in English, that's this most recent book, which was published, I think, in '92.

**RG:** Now, this one is probably available. Is it still in print, third one?

**RM:** No, it's out of print.

**RG:** All of them are out of print?

**RM:** Oh, yeah, they're all out of print.



**RG:** I see.

**RM:** There was one printing of each of these. And when they either sold them or they were -- remainder. In other words, this one came out at \$60, and even I as the author had to pay \$40. I bought quite a few of them at \$40 apiece, and now they are available, or they were, available at \$10 apiece and I bought a bunch of them. I bought about 80 of them. So I still have quite a few of those.

**RG:** I remember the young man who came when I was here for the first interview, and he was so enthusiastic about this book.

**RM:** Oh, yeah.

**RG:** So I suspect you have quite a following of people who really, really would like to have all of them.

**RM:** Oh, yes, I get letters all the time now from people across the country, people who want my signature or -- and then, of course, the stamps that I've done, and I've done a bunch of them, represent another category of people who are interested in stamps.

**RG:** How did that come about, the stamps?

**RM:** Well, early on --by that, I mean back in the mid-'60s, I was asked one time to produce a stamp, a commemorative postage stamp, and I didn't know -- and I was so busy I had to turn it down. I would not have turned it down had I understood what designing stamps meant and how gratifying it could be. The money was not significant that they paid, the U.S. Postal Service, and they still don't pay, not comparable to a good commercial-- see, being a commercial artist, I was interested in any client. I would do anything in those early days back in New York --that is, any piece of art I would do. It wasn't just exclusively things that had to do with space. I did a lot of automobile advertising in the early days for Buick, General Motors, Ford in particular, and ads that appeared in the national magazines, like the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's* and *Life Magazine* and *Time Magazine*, and so forth. I did a lot of that kind of thing.

**RG:** I'm just thinking, what a role model you are. I can just remember my sons drawing automobiles and spaceships and so forth. And here's someone, you've been able to enjoy it, and make a living doing it. It's been wonderful, hasn't it?

**RM:** Yes, it has. It has. And I think the thing that is so important for young people, and I talk to them frequently about those personality characteristics that are so essential, are the kind that we constantly hear from older particularly. I mean, you know them all by heart, and it's simply that you've got to work hard and you can't expect anything to come easy. Not if you're looking for producing exemplary work, work that is really superb. That's what, as an artist, as a writer, it's for your own satisfaction.



**RG:** That's right.

**RM:** You're striving to delight yourself with producing sentences, stories that are really good, well told, and that's what you're after. Money doesn't even enter the picture, and it never has for me, from the earliest days. It's not the important thing. And if you rule that out so that it isn't the thing that's driving you --I think it's a mistake if it does, though you can't deny the fact that it is a stimulant. When you're getting paid well, you tend to feel really wonderful about the energy that you're pouring into something. But the energy would be the same if you were doing it for free if, indeed, you have that right vision of what you're after.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** So, well, anyway, I've learned that. I've learned it and I know it's true. And, so, yes, I did dream of being an illustrator, an artist that did and does the things that I do.

**RG:** So a stamp was a possibility later, after you turned down the first design?

**RM:** Yes, I did. I was asked then another time, but I remember regretting it. It's one of the few minor regrets that I have in my life. I've talked this over with my wife, and we've talked about it. We don't really have any major regrets. I don't have a regret that bugs me at all, you know, that I turned something down or that I did something wrong, that I feel I hurt somebody. I feel good about myself in that regard. I think that's kind of important in life as you grow older, not to have some painful regret. I think of the painful-- oh, also, gosh, think of the suffering some people have done with children who are born deformed or-- well, all those tragedies that happen so frequently all around us. Anyway, we've been lucky that way, too. And we're prepared for the eventual tragedies that come which can be regarded as tragedies, or, at our age, they're not so tragic, you know. Some day you have to kind of bow out.

**RG:** That's right.

**RM:** I don't ever want to bow out of doing what I do, but I know it's inevitable and it's going to be okay.

**RG:** But it's very gratifying to know you're leaving behind some things that are going to be pleasure for people for a long time.

**RM:** Yes, it truly is.

**RG:** So, what was the stamp you designed? Let's go back to the stamp.

**RM:** The first one I designed was a double stamp, and I can show you pictures of all of them at some point. And I will-- by the way, another thing that I'm thinking of doing for the Historical Society is to-- just stay where you are.



**RG:** Okay.

**RM:** I am going to show you -- well, certainly this, for example, is to a philatelist, or stamp collectors, this kind of thing has great value.

**RG:** Yes.

**RM:** It's signed by Bob Crippin and John Young, the two first astronauts that flew the space shuttle. This is a block of stamps, there are eight here, and they form one single picture. But separated into individual stamps, I mean, individually they hold their own as stamps.

**RG:** We're looking at a plaque about an eight by fourteen, silver framed display with some stamps. Mr. McCall had to stop for a knock at the door and he'll be right back. Okay. Let see, we were talking about oh, you were showing me this framed photo album day of issue.

**RM:** Oh, yeah. Now, what I'm planning to do, they won't be signed. This is very special. If I were to sell that, I would probably sell it for maybe \$1500.

**RG:** I can imagine.

**RM:** But what I'm going to do is, I have wonderful-- this is the first day of issue, and this is detail. This painting back here is, "From detail of mural at Johnson Space Center, Houston, Texas, *Opening the Space Frontier. The Next Giant Step.* The mural on the space achievement stamps were created by Artist Robert McCall of Arizona." I have these for each of my stamps. And I'm going to have it framed, very nicely framed and it will be about this big, and like that with my various first day covers with different pictures and stuff.

**RG:** Oh, great.

**RM:** It will be a nice, very attractive kind of thing, like maybe three-by-four.

**RM:** And I think that is one of the things that I want you to have. And then maybe I'll think of something else, because I'm really-- I am honored to be part of this and eager to provide you with enough material that will be of great interest to people in the future.

**RG:** I think it will grow as we go along.

**RM:** Well, they [Bob Crippin and John Young] were the two astronauts that flew the space shuttle for very first time, which was a historic event back in 19 -- whenever it was. I forget now, '82, something like that. I was there when they did it. I was with them as they were suiting up for this historic flight, lots of anxiety and concern. Then I made a painting, an important painting, I think, illustrated that, the spirit of



that first flight. So many of my paintings are sparked by that kind of experience. There's nothing better for an artist than to experience intimately what it is he paints. So the cowboy guys, they live on ranches, many of them, and do the things that they paint in their paintings. They brand the cattle and ride the horses. In my case, I have been very close to and involved with NASA for many, many years, actually since 1963 ... I watched one of the early launches.

**RG:** If you had the opportunity to be aboard one of the shuttles, would you go?

**RM:** I certainly would, oh, yes. Like John Glenn has gone a second time, and Walter Cronkite, who is a man that I entertained here one time with his wife, and we talked about the fact that he was on a short list to fly in space, as I was. I was on that same list, along with John Denver, and maybe two or three other individuals that were being considered for a shuttle flight. After the first non-astronaut, Christa McAuliffe, who was the girl who was a teacher and who was killed on the Challenger in the Challenger tragedy-- I was on a short list and was told that I was on this list; never officially, never a letter from NASA saying, "Prepare yourself, we'd like you to consider this." But it came from high authority that I was being considered. I remember thinking, gosh, when I first learned this, I wasn't-- I thought, gosh, that's scary, I'm not sure I want to do that. But then the more I thought about it over a period of not too long, maybe several weeks, I thought, wow, what an opportunity. And then I realized there was no way one can turn down that kind of an opportunity. For an artist that paints this sort of stuff and loves it, I couldn't turn down the possibility, because somebody else would go. And, my God, that would be the worst the thing in the world, so I knew if the chance came, I would do it eagerly. And then, of course, the Challenger tragedy occurred and then all of that was wiped out. The possibility of ever flying became moot. There was just no possibility.

**RG:** Do you think we'll be doing more with the space shuttles as time goes on?

**RM:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**RG:** Perhaps even in our lifetime, will we maybe have a chance? Will it develop that rapidly?

**RM:** Oh, if you only knew. There is-- well, in the lifetime of younger people, definitely. As a guess, still just speculating, I don't expect to ever have the chance because I don't think that will all happen in time for me to take advantage of it at my age. But younger people certainly will be involved with space in a major way. And, by the way, the coming years are going to be filled with new activity in space that I am familiar with, because I read the literature that tells about it and I am in touch with the people that are doing it. We have, for example, about nine Mars missions in the coming several years. In the next four or five years, I think there are something like nine missions. They're unmanned. But eventually we will send men to Mars. And that's just as certain as anything can be, in my opinion. There could be some catastrophic event that would -- I mean, that will not happen. I mean, world war or something like that would delay everything. But, in my view, that would only be a delay, even so.



**RG:** It's coming.

**RM:** I think that progress is always outward and upward. And in due course all kinds of wonders will occur.

**RG:** How much do you know about the technology of space travel and so forth, or do you simply observe with an artist's eye?

**RM:** That's a good question, because I observe with an artist's eye that is educated, not in depth, but very broadly, and even in some shallow depth. Meaning, simply, that I can't tell you how they establish the -- and solve the astrophysical problems of orbiting a space craft to rendezvous view with a meteor or another space-- I don't understand that. I understand an ocean or the idea, clearly. But it's like the subject of astronomy that has always fascinated me and, indeed, has affected my world and life. I am fascinated with the universe, reading authors like Isaac Asimov who don't go into the depths and the detail of how galaxies form, but I have a huge library of this kind of material to refer to and which inspires me. And I read it, but I'm-- again, I don't go into great depth, but I go in as far as is necessary to stimulate my imagination. And I don't need any more than that.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** As a matter of fact, I think an artist that would pursue to a greater degree, the technology, might, in so doing, miss the spiritual aspect and become focused on the technical aspect to the extent that the paintings that are produced by him or her would lose some of the quality of imagination and spirit that is so essential to communicating with others. So, that's a good question. And I've explained it to myself, but never verbally, I don't think, often to anybody else. But that's how I would describe my knowledge.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** I haven't gone to school, I didn't take astronomy, I didn't take astrophysics.

**RG:** What about mythology and flight there?

**RM:** Love it.

**RG:** You've read, and that's been part of what you've done?

**RM:** Yes, yes.

**RG:** In fact, I think you used some figures, didn't you, from --

**RM:** Well, certainly Icarus and Daedalus. And the mythological characters that pervaded the religion of



the Greeks, for example, has always been very interesting to me. Even there, in all honesty, I didn't go into the great depths of study of Greek mythology and that archaic and primitive paganism, but always found it very interesting and fascinating and how it has -- it affected the art of the time. The incredible brilliance of the creative masters that built the Parthenon, and Thetis who designed Athena, the great sculpture that was in the Parthenon when it was brand new. And I've often contemplated what it must have been like to visit that magnificent Acropolis. Or the Roman Forum, when it was new, God, what it must have been.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** We just came from Pasadena, and while we were there we went to the Getty Museum, the new Getty Museum. Magnificent. And I couldn't help but make the analogy, the comparison with the Acropolis, because it's up high and overlooks all of California, Los Angeles, Brentwood, that area of California. It's beautifully sited, spectacular, brand new, pristine, built of travertine marble, and then some kind of metal, painted metal squares that form the skin of all the buildings. Just two materials. This tin, you tap it, and it's tin, or metal, that has a white or off white surface baked onto it, wonderful building material, and then in squares that are roughly four feet square. Then other portions of the exterior of these multitude of buildings, not just one or two, but many of them that are sort of designed around that top, that hilltop, travertine marble, four-by-four squares of this wonderful travertine, which is one of the most beautiful marbles, I think. And, of course, Rome was even -- I think, St. Peter's is largely -- I know the columns are all travertine, those huge columns that form the arms that colonnade on either side of the (inaudible) with the obelisk in the center from Egypt, and the cross on the top. When the priests decided the top it with a Christian cross, it's a Pagan, obviously a Pagan symbol from ancient Egypt.

**RG:** On the other side, going from the J. Paul Getty Museum, which just opened, I guess, last year didn't it, 1997?

**RM:** It's only been opened --

**RG:** A few months.

**RM:** I think so.

**RG:** What about some of the Inca or Mayan ruins, have you seen those astronomy kinds of things that were involved hundreds and hundreds of years ago?

**RM:** Yes, indeed, and they are fascinating. That great pyramid outside we've been there and the buildings that surround it, and it's quite an awesome structure built by the Mexicans or the people that preceded them and the Central American civilizations that were so advanced in so many ways.

**RG:** So man's always been fascinated with the universe and space?



**RM:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, the sun and the stars have been understood, especially in India. They comprehended -- and wasn't it the Indians that developed some of the early calendars based on the heavens? But all of that sort of thing, and the long range of time that is in the past, and it's infinite in the past and infinite in the future, and just the contemplation of that wonder of infinity, of distance in the macrocosm and in the microcosm going that way with the electron microscope and peering, and ever and ever smaller particles. And then looking through a telescope into the cosmic world above us and outside is just as astonishing, just as mind blowing, if you want to use that term.

**RG:** In some ways, man shrinks with that? And in some ways, he doesn't?

**RM:** Right, beautiful.

**RG:** Because he doesn't understand

**RM:** Man is enlarged.

**RG:** Let's talk about the chapel windows of the Valley Presbyterian Church in Paradise Valley, Arizona.

**RM:** My wife and I, Louise, did in them back in '84. We spent probably a full year devoted to this project. We took a trip around the world, which was something. I had a show in Japan, in Tokyo and Osaka that we were invited to. And instead of returning back to Arizona from Japan across the Pacific, we decided to go the rest of the way around the world. But we, because we knew we were going to be designing these windows and we wanted to see the prime examples of great glass in other parts of the world, we thought, wow, wouldn't it be wonderful to just go to some capitols of the world and see some of this great work, and a lot of other wonderful things, as well. So we did that. And we were inspired by the glass that we saw, particularly in western Europe where there was much to be seen, of course, and in France and Paris, and some of the great cathedrals. And we visited temples, Jewish temples, is that what they call them?

**RG:** Synagogues.

**RM:** Synagogues, yeah. Right here in the U.S., as a matter of fact, we visited one in Los Angeles that was just beautiful with some wonderful, wonderful glass, visited the -- here in the U.S., we visited the Air Force Academy and the chapel there. I was very familiar with it because of my involvement with the Air Force for many years and because aviation was my great passion before it was moved into the realm of space vehicles and space flight. So, we then designed these windows, which are designed in -- it's kind of a cosmic environment that we've created. You have not been there, right?

**RG:** No. I have seen the picture in the book, right.

**RM:** So it's a large environment with a lot of glass. For the size of the volume of space that it encompasses, it's probably more glass than one ever sees in a church or chapel. Yeah, it's right there at the



end. Yeah. And, of course, that is 360 degrees than you're only seeing a portion of it. But that's a lot of, a lot of stained glass, and it's a cosmic effect. This can be interpreted as the Earth, this arc that you see here.

**RG:** All right.

**RM:** The master study is there. And here you're looking at that portion in the actual study.

**RG:** Oh, in the corner of the studio here, he's pointing to it.

**RM:** Right.

**RG:** And we're looking at book number three.

**RM:** Book number three, yes.

**RG:** On Page 144. Okay. Wonderful colors.

**RM:** So it was such a -- we were working with a committee, and concerned about whether they would understand or were sensitive to this unusual kind of imagery that we were creating for this environment of this chapel, because it's unique. I mean, there is -- I've never seen a chapel that had this kind of imagery. The sun, perhaps, but more likely, religious symbols. The saints or the dove and the crown, Christ himself, perhaps.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** But we wanted it to be nondenominational and universal in its appeal so that people from any religious background, or none, if they were from such a persuasion, could enter this environment and feel a sort of spiritual quality, and I think we were successful in doing that. This is the only thing that might be interpreted as a cross and it certainly can be, is the only symbol in the chapel that is.

**RG:** Oh, that's in the north side?

**RM:** Yeah, that's the north side. And the altar is right here. It's a wooden altar. We designed that, too. And these two windows were exclusively were Louise's, and we've entitled those, or she has, the Earth Garden Windows. And these are symbolic flowers that sort of embrace this -- in other words, we come down to Earth here. And it was-- by the way, I was at a social event recently and this man and this woman, who I've never met -- and this picture was taken by a photographer so I wasn't there --

**RG:** A bride and groom in the picture?

**RM:** Yeah, came up to me and said, "We are in that picture." And they were, of course, thrilled to have been in that picture that was then used in the book, and elsewhere, too. So, anyway, this and the clear story,



you see, that goes clear around, as well.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** This is the window that opposes this one that we do not see in this photograph. That's the creation window or, as Louise likes to tell everybody when we talk about this, "Bob calls that the big bang window." And that's when that primordial atom exploded, from which in a millisecond the universe was created. Now that's incomprehensible.

**RG:** Oh, absolutely.

**RM:** Incomprehensible, just as black holes and the distance of stars is incomprehensible at the beginning of the universe, because what prevailed before that. So, those kinds of things have stimulated me for a lifetime.

**RG:** And, you know, this is reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's *Universal Man*, in a sense. **RM:** Of course, yeah, I think so.

**RG:** Along with being the cross.

**RM:** Yes, yeah. And that is da Vinci, of course, that simple figure, which I decided not the use because of the fact that it was designed by da Vinci. I wanted-- and so we went to the figures that were (inaudible) --

**RG:** Now, was the other one later?

**RM:** This came later. I painted this after I did the windows. And this is, I think around, what does it say, 20 feet or--

**RG:** 12-by-22.

**RM:** Yeah. So this is a big painting, 12-by-22.

**RG:** This is one for the choir, the church choir room.

**RM:** Yeah, it's the Herberger Rehearsal Building on the campus of the Valley Presbyterian Church. And I did it on site right there in that new building, and . . . there's an amphitheater, or a theater, for the choir to sit in, it's kind of steep, and so that they all look at this as they rehearse.

**RG:** Wow.

**RM:** And it's a very successful painting. I'm really pleased with it, and I spent one summer painting it on the wall.



**RG:** And you gave it this name?

**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** The Gloria in Excelcius deo.

**RM:** Yeah. So that chapel is one of the things, along with the big mural in Washington, which is much, much larger -- well, it's the largest painting I've ever made, 63 feet high. And I mentioned that, I guess, earlier. But that is, along with this chapel, two very special and significant works that, if I have to come up with two favorite things, I would mention both of those. And I'm very pleased with this last piece, too, that I've got just a-- you saw it when it was just roughed in, I guess.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** It is, I think, a very successful work.

**RG:** Now, where will it be?

**RM:** It's already there, and we had the official unveiling about two weeks ago.

**RG:** Let's talk about that.

**RM:** All right.

**RG:** Tell me about where it is and what's going on and what--

**RM:** Yeah. Well, we're talking about the cosmic evolution painting which we see here. And I have a copy of it in my hand, just a small card. But my challenge or the request from the people that were commissioning me to do this painting was to make a painting that somehow captures the story of the evolution of life on planet Earth. And so, in this painting, I start with the big bang, which is off in the distant horizon on the extreme upper left, which from which everything evolved, and then the lightning in that ancient time, before time almost when the oceans of the earth were still broiling and roiling and under the influence of that chaotic time when the earth actually formed and those waters were cooling. And when conditions became just right, life was somehow sparked, and it happened. And those tiny cells which I've attempted to symbolize in the painting separated and divided and then subdivided, and then the first life was born in the oceans of that ancient time. And that life became more and more complex. Then I've depicted the age of the dinosaurs, which started millions and millions of years ago, and ended, we think, rather abruptly by the chaos that resulted from the impact of a giant meteor that struck Earth and disrupted the heavens and blotted out the sun and destroyed vegetation and the food chain, and the dinosaurs became extinct at that time. Then the mammals that remained, there were small creatures that



survived that event, and life continued to evolve. Modern man was the final result over many millions of years--and then civilization. The civilization of this modern man from the earliest years, many hundreds of thousands of years ago that finally resulted in very sophisticated civilization such as the Egyptian civilization and the Stonehenge, and then the more and more sophisticated, the Greeks. And then the great capitols of the world are depicted and represent symbols that suggest the great cultures that evolved.

**RG:** On the right hand side?

**RM:** Yeah. And in the heavens, in the central heavens, there's a huge overriding galaxy that just simply suggests that the universe is limitless and the possibilities are incredible. The sun is in the center of the painting which illuminates this whole scene from left to right. And the planetary system, our own planetary system, of which Earth is one, is depicted on a horizontal line that sweeps from the extreme left to the right. The people, the great personages of history that have contributed enormously to changing human society through the centuries are depicted.

**RG:** Are there particular ones there?

**RM:** Yes, there are specific individuals that, in collaboration with my client in Bellevue, Washington, the Foundation for the Future, we came up with a list to be included in this group. And they included -- I'm going to read them off. Plato and Socrates, Aristotle, Confucius, Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo, Gutenberg, Christopher Columbus, Sir Isaac Newton, Copernicus, Shakespeare, Joan of Arc, Napoleon, Beethoven, Darwin, the Wright Brothers, Madam Curie, George Washington Carver, Einstein, Picasso, and Martin Luther King are just a handful of the multitude, the limitless multitude of great minds and personages who have -- really, the giants that have affected and continue to affect our lives.

**RG:** Now, how large is this particular --

**RM:** This painting is twenty-four feet from left to right and it's seven feet high. And it is now in the lobby, I guess one might say, of the Foundation for the Future, which is in Bellevue, Washington.

**RG:** Okay. What's the mission of this Foundation for the Future?

**RM:** The mission is to enhance the understanding of the next millennium, an understanding of the past, of course, but also with the mission of dealing with, of enhancing human understanding of the next millennium to benefit humankind. I've got a paragraph that I can read to you. It is a not-for-profit entity or organization that has very lofty and worthy goals. It is designed to bring together some of the world most prominent thinkers to assess the current state of humanity, to identify the most significant factors that may affect the quality of life of the future people of the Earth and, among other things, it will hold workshops that will suggest research to be undertaken on the factors that will most affect the future of humanity during coming millennia. So we're dealing on a millennia kind of time frame, which is an ambitious undertaking.



**RG:** Is this foundation fairly ... it's new?

**RM:** Yes. Conceived just three years ago and only now is gaining its awareness. But the scholars of the world-- it's a world wide effort to accomplish its goals. This is more specific about what they call Humanity 3000. And one of the -- holds first planning meeting. The very first meeting is here, and it's in this building that my mural is placed. And many of these people were present at the opening and the unveiling, at which time I gave a brief talk.

**RG:** That was in April?

**RM:** No, that was May.

**RG:** It was in May, that's right, just recently.

**RM:** Like ten days ago, or something.

**RG:** And the newsletter is called "Humanities 3000," is that right? No, the newsletter you have.

**RM:** This newsletter, yeah, "Humanity," singular -- "3000." And that's a new newsletter.

**RG:** I wanted to ask some questions just from looking at one of your books, you cooperated with a Russian space artist?

**RM:** Yeah. Andre Socolof. Andre and I met in 1984. He was and is regarded as one of the, if not the eminent space artist of Russia. And, of course, this was before the dissolution of the Soviet empire in 1991. I paid my first visit to Moscow and met him. I had known about him before by reputation. And since we were counterparts -- he painted their space program with the same excitement, enthusiasm that I have for our program. He was acquainted with their cosmonauts as I was acquainted with our astronauts. He had entre, as I have entre with NASA, to certain facilities that (inaudible) can only work. Interesting to me. Andre and I met. And during some of our conversations -- he spoke English with considerable difficulty, not too well. It was always a little difficult to carry on a conversation, but -- sorry, got to do it. It's business. [Interruption]

**RG:** That's all right. We were talking about the Russian and your collaboration with Andre. What sort of fellow was he or is he?

**RM:** Well, first of all, he's six foot three, at least, and had been in an accident and lost some of his teeth driving motorcycles. But he was a man in his -- he's probably 50 -- probably 60 now. When I met him first in '84, of course, he was that much younger. A really handsome, big, huge man; not fat, but just huge. Must have been an incredible physical specimen when he was really young. Huge hands. He was married to



Nina, his wife. Andre has been here. We worked here in my studio, we worked in his studio in Moscow to produce this painting.

**RG:** Oh, is he a native of Moscow, or is he from one of the other --

**RM:** Yeah, he lives in Moscow. His apartment is in Moscow and where the Embassies are, so that's a very nice part of Moscow. However, I was astonished at the rundown condition of these buildings that had at one time been fabulous, probably built around the turn of the century, the building that he lived in. Tiny little elevator that needed maintenance, the johns always tiny and -- you couldn't live that way. And yet the room had molding around the ceiling that was elegant, and the chandelier that was quite elegant. And so it was a combination of good and bad stuff that gave one an idea of what life must have been in Moscow for privileged people years and years ago. Of course, there's always other people who live better, but Andre was one of the fortunate people. He had, as one of his neighbors, one of the great Russian stars, and we saw him at the opera house in a performance one night. Anyway, we worked-- decided back in '84 that we would consider doing a joint project to enhance a greater understanding between the U.S. and USSR in the little way that it might, you know. It was kind of naive thinking big thoughts like that. But the painting now is -- I bought my half -- or, his half of it so that -- we did own it jointly because we both painted it. And his signature is on it, and mine. And we got together and produced it. And, of course, I have pictures of it, which I could get out right now but I can't be doing that all the time or we'll --

**RG:** We'll never get through.

**RM:** -- never get anything done. I have a beautiful poster that the Smithsonian produced of it because it is on view at the Smithsonian in Washington.

**RG:** And where is it now?

**RM:** It's now in Virginia in an exhibition of my work that consists of about 70 paintings.

**RG:** Oh, so it travels?

**RM:** Yeah. It's about the size of that painting, so it's quite large. It's a little bit longer and maybe not quite so high.

**RG:** So what is that, maybe eight, ten feet?

**RM:** Eight by, let's, say-- I didn't know. Oh, I know, it's in my books so I can show you.

**RG:** In book number three. Did he have art training?

**RM:** I think so. I think he went to art school in Moscow and -- this is it. And this is Mir, the space station. See, it's a combination of the achievements of Russia, and here's their Sputnik Satellite.



**RG:** Right, the very first.

**RM:** And Apollo. Soyuz is in the center. That's the Apollo, and that's the Soyuz, the Russian spacecraft that joined up. This is our Freedom Space Station, which is -- well, the first pieces of it will be going into orbit this year, and it will be fully assembled in 2002 or '3.

**RG:** Wow.

**RM:** But, anyway, this is the painting and it's signed "McCall" here.

**RG:** On the right.

**RM:** -- and Socolof there.

**RG:** "Socolof" on the left. I remember the excitement of that early stage when Sputnik went off, and then we and started our program. I mean, we wouldn't leave the house if there was going to be a TV program or show those shots.

**RM:** Oh, yeah.

**RG:** Anymore, you just don't pay much attention.

**RM:** Oh, no, right. You asked some questions about the shuttle that were like "Is the shuttle going to be used?" Well, it's used all the time, and it will continue to be used until we have a new transportation system that is cheaper, because it, you know, every time it goes up they expend, and it costs an enormous amount of money. It's like sending a 747 across the ocean to a destination and then destroying the vehicle that carried whatever it carried, passenger or cargo. I mean, that's what we're doing. Every time we launch a shuttle, the cost is probably \$200 million, the cost of a 747. And so we can't reuse it. So that's the big thrust now, is develop a transportation system to replace the space shuttle that can be reused right away, can return to Earth, there are no expendable elements to it that are lost, and then you have to bring in a brand new one and hook it up to that, which you do now. So, anyway, that project was a good one and fascinating and we produced a nice work of art, a nice, big painting. And the fascination was that we did it right here in this studio. And I have lots of pictures of us working together in Moscow and here.

**RG:** That's great. One of the things I was impressed in looking at, particularly at that third book, you don't seem to do a lot of Star Wars type things, the violence, the fighting, the enemy.

**RM:** No.

**RG:** It's very peaceful. The use of space or peace is part of it.



**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** I thought that was interesting.

**RM:** I don't think so. Like the agricultural one where we have learned how to farm, and then small communities of people. Prehistoric man began to fashion weapons, for example, at some time in the history of humanity. And then they settled down and had little villages that then developed into larger and larger civilizations and complexes and cities and states. And then war. You know, there was a time when there was never war, there were conflicts between individuals. But, anyway, and then the industrial revolution that came along in the last century. But this is a technological revolution that, because of the speed at which it is moving, is unique in the history of human time. It is progressing so rapidly, explosively, snow balling and becoming so enormous and so-- so many new advances. I mean, we're solving so many of the riddles of medicine, for example. I really am now optimistic about a cure for cancer. I think it's going to happen, because the rewards are so enormous to the pharmaceuticals agencies that work on such things. There hardly needs to be an effort to raise funds to research cancer because private industry is devoting incredible treasure to finding the answer to make the money that will result. So, I think we are in the midst of this incredible revolution that has, as a result, incredible and wonderful benefits to human society. There is a down side, too, like with anything. There is a dark side--which I don't concern myself with. And you touched on the fact that I seem to paint sort of benign, pleasant environments, and I like that. It's not --

**RG:** There's an optimism there in your life.

**RM:** And as I may have said before, I -- this is not something that I have calculated or planned, it is part of my personality. That's how it comes about, doesn't it?

**RG:** Right. Right, I think so.

**RM:** Like in writing, if you write with sort of a spirit of optimism, it's not -- it's because that's the person that you are.

**RG:** Right. So this really, in a way, what you're saying, gives rise to your doing quite a bit of work with schools, with school children.

**RM:** Yeah, yeah, and I love that. I really enjoy it and hardly ever turn down a school that asks me to come out and speak for an hour, and I do. I've done it dozens of times in the time that I have lived here. And more than that, probably maybe close to hundreds, but, I don't know. I don't want to exaggerate that, but I enjoy it. And it gives me -- I also -- you know, I used to think it was almost phony when people older than I would say, "Well, it's payback time. You want to pay back for the good fortune that you've enjoyed." But now I kind of really have that feeling myself, and it's honest. It's really a feeling that, gosh, you know, I remember when I was a young artist and wanted an interview with somebody that I admired, and the times



when I got it and appreciated it so much so that I find it hard to say no even when maybe I should.

**RG:** I had a couple of questions I wanted to back up; one on the sustained glass at the Valley Presbyterian Church. How was that actually done? Where did you do that? That's an interesting process.

**RM:** Oh, it is. It's very interesting and it is-- and I'm proud the way we did it. I made small sketches, much like I make a sketch for a mural. And then having arrived at the concept, the content in small little color sketches, then I went to this, and that is one of two pieces. And notice clear story segments that are the little long rectangular pieces above? Those are the clearstories.

**RG:** Those are about nine or ten foot tall?

**RM:** No, the clearstories aren't.

**RG:** No, I mean the piece that --

**RM:** Oh, they are ten.

**RG:** Ten, okay.

**RM:** They're 10-by-20 feet-- those segments. Each of the eight, see, it's an octagonal structure.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** So the circumference is 160 feet. So that's a lot of glass and a lot of color. So it was painted this way. And then on top of this, I laid acetate, a transparent acetate material, taped it in place so that it couldn't shift, and then I painted black lines that represent the epoxy matrix that holds each piece in place, because that became a part of the painting and it became part of the design. The people actually cut the pieces of glass on big rotary diamond tipped saws, and they had about eight guys working to do this to produce these 30,000 pieces of glass that constitute all of the pieces in the entire thing. But I designed the shape of all 30,000.

**RG:** Wow.

**RM:** I mean, I painted every shape and the matrix that supports the glass has a design to it. It flows from the central sun and it-- that was important. The people who did the cutting and everything, and then actually poured the epoxy between the pieces based on the pattern I designed. Then I had to make a full scale, 20 by-- 10-by-20 foot pattern on paper from this small acetate that I had designed. And I photographed the acetate on 35 millimeter film in a darkened room with the big pieces of paper on the wall, not in this studio because there wasn't enough room, but in the church. One of the meeting rooms of the church had space for that. Then I projected these transparencies with the black lines, and in charcoal



did it, and then painted with color on the black -- on the white paper. This has to be confusing to you, it would be for me, even telling you.

**RG:** Well, it's quite a process.

**RM:** But it is a process. And the point I'm making, really, which is so significant, is that every piece of glass, I determined its shape;

**RG:** Individually.

**RM:** And its color. Oh, I'll take you into the dining room and show you, because we framed the two earth garden windows, the patterns, just the patterns, because there's color in it and it will show you just how that's done. And so it was an involved process, and one that was well worth the energy and time put into it.

**RG:** It looks like it. Another question I had in thinking about a lot of the paintings are cities with our Arizona background. And what about Arcosanti? You're familiar with that?

**RM:** Yeah, yeah, I know Soleri. Not well, but I've met him on a number of occasions briefly and chatted with him just a little bit. He's a very placid German; not easily engaged in conversations, but when he talks, I've heard him speak to a group, and he can do that. He knows what he's about. Have you ever met him?

**RG:** I've met him, yes. I've heard him speak. One of his first projects, maybe his very first one for pay, is in Cave Creek and it's the Dome House.

**RM:** Oh, I have never seen it.

**RG:** We actually call it the Nora Woods House. He made it for a lady who became his mother-in-law.

**RM:** Really?

**RG:** And it's extant, it's still there. And, as he told us, it wasn't real successful in some of the things he did with it, but it's quite interesting. I've never been inside of Arcosanti, and it seems like that's a city of the future.

**RM:** Sure, it is.

**RG:** And I just wondered how you felt about it --

**RM:** I've been there.



**RG:** -- and what you thought of it.

**RM:** Oh, I think it's a wonderful enterprise. It's too bad he hasn't been able to fulfill his dream there because the need for funds to build it. But I have one of his books. It's a large format, soft cover book with, I think it's even a ring binder. But I know that-- and there are page after page of his designs for cities, even cities in space. And I got a copy of one of those books when we first arrived here. That was 27 years ago, and I still have that, of course. And I was inspired by these bold and ambitious and almost unbelievable concepts that he had, which I admire in anybody, any dreamer.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** And, by the way, Werner Von Braun, the German scientist, is one of those dreamers that dreamt large dreams. And I've met him a couple of times, too, and had a wonderful interview with him one time. In my first book I had had an interview with him when this book was being produced back in the early '70s, and I took a lot of my paintings to him in Washington. And this particular thing, the Space Bottle of 1955 concept of Dr. Werner Von Braun for a work capsule, really a small spacecraft that will allow one astronaut to work in space and see. Okay. It doesn't make reference to my meeting with him, but this is --

**RG:** It's a space bottle like big enough for an individual to be inside.

**RM:** And so I interpreted that description that he gave to me -- he was making the point when I had this meeting with him that artists have often inspired the engineers. They have been able to dream dreams way out.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** And engineers who then see them who may be less creative or imaginative, or less dreamers --

**RG:** Right. That was part of it.

**RM:** And another guy that dreamt big dreams was Carl Sagan and also Gerard O'Neill. I don't know whether you know that name, but he wrote a book called *The High Frontier* about 20 years ago. He was another guy with this ability to dream and imagine and talk about as though it really can happen with conviction, you know, the kind of personality that it takes to inspire a group of people, a leader who can inspire them with lofty goals that he -- that convinced them that it can be done. And it just gives one the sense that almost anything is possible given the right dreamer or leadership and the right motivation and the need to have it happen. Anyway --

**RG:** Where is he?

**RM:** He's dead. He died about five years ago. He was on a panel that I was on. Well, not important, but



he's been dead. He was a professor of physics at Princeton.

**RG:** Okay. Now, I have one little question on the painting you did, "Prologue & Promise" for Epcot. There's a caption that I believe your wife helped you with this, and then you used members of your own family in that.

**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** Who are they, or could you name the --

**RM:** Oh, yes. That painting, "The Prologue & The Promise," and there's a reproduction of it in here.

**RG:** It's in number three.

**RM:** Yes. Don't let me forget to give you these books when you go.

**RG:** I'm referring to this book as number three book, just to keep them straight in my mind.

**RM:** I know it's in here. Here we are. Page 72 and 73 of *The Art of Robert McCall*, my most recent book. This family group that is on the hillside overlooking the city of the future, which is a portion of this "Prologue & Promise" painting, this is actually the promise. This is the prologue, of course. And this family group is my daughter, Linda, and her husband and her three children, and the dog, even the dog. And then right back here is this. This is me. And it actually looks like me, my bald head, and we are looking at the city of the future, too.

**RG:** Oh, I see.

**RM:** This is Louise with her hand raised. And over here we have my other daughter Catherine and her little boy Christopher. Now Robert, who is my grandson, is now a medical doctor.

**RG:** That's the older one of Linda's?

**RM:** That's the older, yes, he is the oldest. He looks smaller here -- this is Sara and this is Annie. Annie was just married.

**RG:** Oh, okay.

**RM:** Christopher is now going to school and I think he's a senior in high school. And this is Catherine.

**RG:** He's the little boy that his mother is holding up in her arms?

**RM:** Yeah, yes. And they all look like the people that they are. Of course, we're not seeing their heads,



they're faced away from us.

**RG:** That's real interesting. That really makes it special.

**RM:** Yeah, yeah. I have done that in the past with other murals with people that surround me when I'm actually executing it, and it's kind of fun to do that.

**RG:** Helps date them also, doesn't it, in your mind?

**RM:** Yes.

**RG:** Well, maybe we should wind this up. And I have one thing, we were talking about Von Braun and Carl Sagan and Mr. O'Neill and others. I wanted to ask about the astronauts that you've known, like Buzz Aldrin and all of them. Did they have, at the time they were getting into the space program, do you think they had a sense of history and the importance? I know they thought it was important, it wasn't just a job. But did they really think about this, do you think, in terms of how long we're going to look back and remember what they did?

**RM:** Yeah, yeah. I think they probably all did. They knew they were making history, and because they were in such an obvious way. And the younger astronauts, those that are doing the flying today, the history that they're making isn't as --

**RG:** Cutting edge?

**RM:** Well, yeah, I guess it is, except that it's been done before.

**RG:** Okay.

**RM:** Those that are now repeating the shuttle flights are not doing anything brand new. But there is always this horizon that is right ahead of them and we are challenging space more and more, and we will continue to do that. We're constantly reaching further. So they're all making history, and I think they were all aware of it; some a little more than others, perhaps. I know that Gene Cernan, who made the last flight to the moon, he was the commander of that last mission, and the one that I designed his mission emblem for. The rest of his crew was Jack Schmidt, who was a geologist that was on the moon with Gene Cernan, and Ron Evans, who was a good friend of mine who lived here in Arizona and died recently, unexpectedly. But Gene, I know I've talked to him often, and I've read some of the things he's written. His flight, of course, was 25 years ago. But I remember at the time when I was designing the mission emblem for him, for example, he wanted Stonehenge maybe to be one of the symbols on this round patch that he wore. And I designed some consents using Stonehenge, those monolithic pieces of stone, and the sun, and tried to tie it in with the fact that he was now reaching out as an astronaut landing on the moon. Also, he had the sense of history to articulate his sense that their mission was the last one to the moon. There has not been a footprint on the moon since Gene Cernan left the moon. His foot print was the last foot print on



the moon, because he left last. I mean, Jack Schmidt was already in the spacecraft, and Gene saw to it that he was the one that left last. He described that last flight to the moon as the end of the beginning. It was the end of the Apollo series of lunar flights, and that ending was really still just the beginning. And we you know, one could go further and say that whatever the next step might be will still be only part of the beginning, because it will always be the beginning. We will never, ever not be reaching further because there is always a more distant goal to reach.

**RG:** Which is the fascination of all of this.

**RM:** Yes, it's the fascination of living.

**RG:** Right, true.

**RM:** Yeah, it's fundamental to what we're all about, you know. And even when we die, we are ending the beginning. Who knows what lies on the other side?

**RG:** That's right, absolutely. It kind of gives you shivers when you get to thinking about this.

**RM:** Oh, yes.

**RG:** Jack, would that be Harrison Schmidt.

**RM:** Yeah, Jack Harrison Schmidt.

**RG:** He's from New Mexico.

**RM:** Of course. Did you grow up there?

**RG:** Yes, I did. I grew up and lived until about 20 years ago in New Mexico, so I remember he came to my high school when I was teaching.

**RM:** He did?

**RG:** Early, early on, and we were so excited about having him. Now, one more question about men like this, Gene Cernan, for example. I wonder how many of them have preserved their papers and, you know, their personal effects and those will be deposited somewhere.

**RM:** Oh, yeah, I think many of them have. Most of them have, I think, to a greater or lesser degree. Some have saved every scrap. And Gene, as a matter of fact, one time naively said, "Bob, if you want those sketches back" -- I made many sketches for that mission emblem. And he sent me a picture. . . of himself on the moon with an inscription, and my mission emblem is on his chest.



**RG:** Oh, how neat.

**RM:** The picture was taken, and there he is on the moon-- the mission emblem. And that was a big thrill for me to see that, and he sent me that photograph. But Gene naively said one time, oh, about at least ten years ago when I was organizing an exhibition, and I thought it would be nice to have that to exhibit some of those sketches. I have photographs of them that I took, slides, because there were maybe 10 or 15 full color sketches with the Stonehenge and then with other configurations and other symbols, other elements, so that when I talked to the guys, I could say, "Now here are some thoughts of mine." And they finally chose one, which was not Stonehenge. But he has them. And he said, "You want those back? I'll send them to you." And I said, Gene, "Really, that would be great. I'd have asked you to but I'm amazed that you would want to," because those were -- I gave them to him, you see, and I gave him the original art. I realize now that I didn't have to, that wasn't something I had to do. By the way, I did all of those for nothing.

**RG:** Is that right?

**RM:** Never charged him one cent, just thrilled to be involved to that extent. And as a result there were others that have asked me to do them, and I have done maybe ten of the mission emblems. The only one that went to the moon. But then shuttle missions have followed, and the first rendezvous with Mir, that was done in the '90s.

**RG:** So did he send them to you?

**RM:** So Gene said, "Yeah, yeah." He thought about that, and I never did get them. He never sent them, and he's hung onto them, and I can understand why,

**RG:** Actually, that would be very nice if all of those, along with an original one and everything were kept together. Preserve the provenance of that whole thing. That would be good.

**RM:** Yeah, yeah. And I have some of the mission emblems, I have the sketches that were made, the original sketches. And they would sign the sketches and send them back to me so I have astronaut's signature and sheets of many, many sketches. And some of them are-- I have at least two framed panels of those that are in my show that's traveling.

**RG:** We never did finish, I don't think. You have an idea for a fourth book.

**RM:** Yes, but --yeah, and it's crystallized to the extent that I want it to be a book about the evolution of life. So it would be -- see those paintings behind my daughter and the circular panoramic 360 degree mural?

**RG:** Right.



**RM:** The art is all finished. It's right there. And the panels of art are behind her on two easels. I've got them lined up. Right over her head is the sunburst, you know, and that's the original art. And it's like 20-something feet long if you put one next to the other. I wanted to use that material and the material from this and reproduce and cut into the segments that would be the pages of the book. In other words, the book is ready to be produced when we need a text for it. And a treatment, some kind of a-- and I need an author. I asked Ray[Bradbury] if he'd be interested, and he's so busy and he has his own things that he's working on. And he would be given credit, of course, but he said, "Bob, I just can't. I don't have the time." So it will be-- I need somebody with a real intimate knowledge of the history of the evolution of life and with a poetic nature. I love the guy that wrote the text or the captions here, and I've mentioned this, I think, before, because he wrote such --

**RG:** This is the third book, the one with Ray Bradbury authored?

**RM:** Yes. The guy that wrote these -- for example, now, this is, "Of Time and Space, 11 these are all my titles. And then he sat down with me and -- Tappan King is his name. He wrote a lot of stuff for Ray Bradbury. He lives down in Tucson, and did when he wrote these text. He had moved out from New York and lived in Tucson. But just listen to these words. I think -- this is just one of many and I don't know that I've chosen the best example. "The wisdom that we gain from our cosmic journey will lead us to a new appreciation of the riches of our own world. In this radiantly optimistic painting all of human experiences contained within a single moment, a seamless blending of past, present and future. 'I am as intrigued with the past as I am with the future,' says McCall. Who knows maybe it's all happening simultaneously in some cosmic way we don't yet understand. I like that. I like this kind of stuff.

**RG:** That's good. That's great.

**RM:** And I like the way he wrote these captions.

**RG:** Right. Let see, one of the --the new center now that --

**RM:** The new McCall Museum.

**RG:** Yes, let's talk about that.

**RM:** Yeah. Now, this came as a result -- by the way, I designed this little logo for the Challenger Center, which is going to be built in Peoria near Sunrise Mountain High School, and on the property, actually, of that school. It's got a lot of additional property around it. And this new edifice, that big white thing, is a model of just one portion of it. The actual classrooms aren't even indicated there. But there's a central rotunda which is quite huge. See that little black figure in the middle?

**RG:** Yes.



**RM:** That's a man in the center. That's the scale so you get a sense of the size.

**RG:** How tall is that?

**RM:** That's about 45 feet tall. That's four and a half stories high. Each of those horizontal panels represent the floors, the three floors. And the bottom floor, one, two, three.

**RG:** Now, are you designing the building?

**RM:** No, I'm not, Paul Winslow is.

**RG:** Oh, Paul Winslow?

**RM:** Do you know Winslow?

**RG:** Yes, I know Carol very well.

**RM:** Isn't she lovely?

**RG:** Yes.

**RM:** And their son, do you know their son?

**RG:** I don't actually know him, I just know who he is.

**RM:** Kirk, I think is his name.

**RG:** Right, I've heard Carol speak of him.

**RM:** I think he's in California, he's an ordained minister, and a wonderful sermonizer.

**RG:** Is that right?

**RM:** Great sense of humor. Carol, I've only met a couple of times, but she's lovely. And, of course, Paul I know now quite well because we're interacting all the time. And Winslow-- he and his design team have designed, and I've met with them a number of times. But I will be designing the interior of that which is meant to be an inspirational environment, and no classrooms, just all this big space. It's really quite special to have this kind of space devoted to nothing except what we do with it. And my goal is to probably paint some murals or maybe have some digitally enlarged. By the way, I was on the phone with a guy from the Huntsville Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, and I was talking about they're going to use one of my paintings. And they're going to blow it up digitally to a huge proportion. It will be like 18 or 20



feet high and 50 feet long. They're going to blow it up to this huge size, and it's bigger than a billboard.

**RG:** That's part of what we were talking about, the amazing things that can be done.

**RM:** Yeah. See, that was the kind of reproduction that wasn't possible ten years ago. Some of these things that I have framed, the two on the left and the two on the right, not the two in the center, are digitally enlarged paintings. Some of them are relatively small little things like this that are blown up, and really quite beautifully done. So, back to this --

**RG:** It's called the Challenger Center?

**RM:** The Challenger Learning Center of Arizona. And it's one of the -- there are Challenger Learning Centers in other parts of the country, you know. I think there are -- I don't know the exact number now, but at least 30, and like 15 that are in the process of being built.

**RG:** I didn't know that. Who is funding this?

**RM:** The Challenger Center, learning Centers were organized by Jane Scobie, who is the widow of Dick Scobie, who was the commander of the Challenger. And she, shortly after that tragedy, wanted, along with the other members of the family of the survivors, wanted to turn the tragedy into some kind of positive. So they started thinking about what would could it be, and then this learning center idea came. And I was with her on some of the initial planning and discussions on how that might be done. She gives me a lot more credit than I deserve on that score. But I made some drawings of what, if ever they were ever to build a central Challenger Learning Center, let's say in Washington D.C., what it might look like. And, again, this is all volunteer, like you're doing.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** Some of the greatest things have happened, what I intended to do.

**RG:** Right.

(Note: Interviewee has requested that information given here be left out of the transcription.)

**RG:** So how did Peoria get chosen for this Challenger Center?

**RM:** Well, because they were making the effort to have a Challenger Center there. They had heard about it on their own. Paul Koehler, you know that name, he is the director of -- I called him principal once. And he's not the principal of the Peoria School District, he is the director or manager. He is the top man in the Peoria School District. And there are many schools that constitute that; I don't know how many. He was the one that first contacted me, because he had heard -- he had already made the investigations in



Washington about the Challenger Centers and thought wouldn't that be a wonderful thing to have in Peoria for our young people. And then he -- of course, the Challenger Center people in Washington were eager to see these Challenger Learning Centers proliferate, and so they were eager to talk to him. And there are costs involved, the equipment and so forth, and it's a lot of things, a very expensive thing to make happen, but very valuable. And then, of course, he met June Scobie, and June Scobie mentioned me and that I live here and that Bob might be very interested into knowing all about this. So he called me and, indeed, I was pleased to learn about this, and so we got better and better acquainted. So I have known him for maybe three years. Three years ago this all began to germinate. We've seriously talked, and then I began to think, "I'm getting older, I've got this big collection, what am I going to do with it?" My daughters -- our estate is burdened by all of this art, which at the time of both of our deaths, there will be tax on that based on what I have sold some of these things for in the past.

It could be devastating financially anyway. So we were thinking, well, it would be great to sell it all, but that's not easy to do. I just . . . don't have people clamoring to pay 15, 30, \$50,000 for paintings all the time, the best of them. There are a lot of them that are less than that. So, anyway, it occurred to us that just maybe -- and I've talked to some museum people who are friends, personal friends, and they said, "Yeah, your stuff is clearly something that has great value as material to be exhibited. It's historic." It has historic element to it because I have documented the space program from the earliest days. I have been at it since the '50s when I paid my first visit so Cape Canaveral, and I managed to accumulate so much. So, anyway, they were interested. I still don't know what the details of all this will be, but . . . I have acknowledged that I plan to have Peoria as the focus of the place where my collection will be collated and handled and they will have it done. The ownership hasn't transferred, I still own it all, do anything I want with any of it. We haven't gone that far yet, but they've gone far enough to make a very special public announcement, a major one at the new Science Museum, and it's something now that we're doing. I've got a meeting with Paul Winslow in June. We're going to get together with architects and try to include somebody who really understands museums. And I'm going to contribute, I hope quite a lot, but I don't know. It doesn't have to be. I don't want to intrude, but they want me to contribute to the design of the structure --

**RG:** I think this is great, right.

**RM:** -- especially the exterior, maybe the entrance facade is the part that I think I would like to -- because I design futuristic cities so often in my paintings. And I *love* it. If I were asked what I would like to do if I weren't an artist, I would say an architect. I would like to *have* been an architect, and a good one. One that works with monumental stuff not supermarkets.

**RG:** Well, this is really, I think, real exciting. I think it's wonderful it will be at Peoria. That's great.

**RM:** Yeah, they're so thrilled.

**RG:** It's an up and coming city. They're doing wonderful things over there.



**RM:** They are.

**RG:** They are forward thinking.

**RM:** They are growing rapidly and there are seas of houses out there.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** And they want this Challenger Learning Center and the McCall Museum of Space Art to be really, maybe-- maybe even more than I could hope. They're talking of... raising significant funds to build a very handsome place that people will come to. It won't be just for children. It will be an attraction for adults, as well. And if it's done superbly well, I know that it could be a world class kind of attraction.

**RG:** I feel sure it will be. It just sounds like it.

**RM:** Yeah. And I hope, I hope it all evolves. They're on a fast track. They're going to break ground for the Challenger Center itself. They're ahead with that. See, the McCall Museum came along halfway in their-- they didn't even dream of that early on, but now they're making that a very important part of it, and the fact that it bridges, it makes the connection between science and art.

**RG:** Right.

**RM:** The Challenger Learning Center is purely scientific oriented. The young people fly missions and so forth, but to make the connection between that and aesthetics and that softer aspect of human development and human intellect, that creative side is a logical connection to make and a valuable one, I think, for the young people that go use that.

**RG:** You know, something I find exciting is the idea that here in Arizona, of course, you've put Arizona on the map with space being here and you give credit, I noticed, on several things, it says "From Arizona" on things, so that's great.

**RM:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**RG:** But, you know, we don't know how many thousands and thousands of years ago that the early Hohokam or the Anasazi were here studying the heavens, enjoying things, and it's kind of neat to think about right here in Arizona, and then the world wide, the universe wide kind of connection that we all have. That's great.

**RM:** Oh, yeah.

**RG:** Well, let's close with something you and I talked about early on, and that was your wonderful degree



that's just been confirmed.

**RM:** Oh, yes.

**RG:** Could you just tell that story again?

**RM:** Oh, I sure will. Well, the Honorary Doctorate that I just received in Columbus, Ohio, where I grew up and where I went to art school, where I won a scholarship for two years at the Columbus Art-- it was the Columbus Fine Art School at the time. That has grown since the '30s when I attended, enormously. It is now, I think there are 12 buildings that constitute the campus, and it's one of the larger art schools, I think it's seventh largest in the country. And there's some big ones, like the Cork Room Museum, and the Chicago Institute, and the Rhode Island School of Design, and the Disney School in California, and the School of Art, and so it ranks up there among the important art schools in the United States. I was invited to be the commencement speaker here this year, and so I gave the commencement address. At that time I was told that they were going to give me an Honorary Doctorate. I think the Columbus Art School wasn't even an accredited school for degrees at the time...'37 and '38 were the two years that I went. It spilled over into '39, too. It's grown and it's now accredited for Master's Degrees and ... for PhDs. So, I received a doctorate. This was such a thrill to me, because higher education was always -- seemed very important to me, though, in some of my talks, I tell those, especially those underprivileged people or young people that are not likely to go to college, and there are often young people like that "Don't let that deter you. You know, you can still achieve." I never really went to college, I went to an art school. Art schools, at that time, were not considered on the same level with going to a high state university, where a lot of my friends went. Anyway, so, you can imagine the thrill and the delight that I took in learning that they were going to give me an Honorary Doctorate. This all occurred in Columbus ... they conferred on me an Honorary Doctorate.

**RG:** That's great. I think that's a nice ending to a good talk.

**RM:** You've been very patient listening to all of this.

**RG:** Oh, I love it. I love it. You're a great talker. I think-- I know there are lots of things we could talk about and go on and on, but I think this is a good first start.

**RM:** I do, too.

**RG:** And maybe when some more of your books come out or these exhibits, we'll be able to do another interview.

**RM:** Yeah.

**RG:** Who knows? You and I will both be around for another, what, SO years?



**RM:** Oh, at least. This is just a recent article that appeared that they had Xeroxed-- whatever they did. And they had a stack of these for people to pick up at the unveiling of my mural.

**RG:** Okay. Very good.

**RM:** Here, I gave you a copy of the mural.

**RG:** Thank you very much.

