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TAPE RECORDED INTERVIEW PROJECT

Interview of Margaret Smagorinsky

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**Interviewers: Kristine Harper, Ronald Doel, Terry Smagorinsky
Thompson**

Doel: I can hear things, here, and if everyone could just say a few words. Kris --

Harper: OK. Everybody. Yes. I'm here. All right, today is the second of January, 2006. This is Kristine Harper. I'm with Ronald Doel. We are conducting an interview for AMS-TRIP of Margaret Smagorinsky at her home in Hillsborough, New Jersey. It is now about 10:30 in the morning. Margaret, we're glad that you're with us today. Could you tell us when and where you were born?

Smagorinsky: Yes, I was born in Brooklyn, New York, on December 23rd, 1915. A memorable day.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: My mother always told me about that day. She said, "Oh, it was such a cold, cold snowy day." And they already had a little girl and when my father found out it was another girl, he went out in the backyard and chopped a cord of wood.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: Which somehow or another really rattled my mother.

Harper: (laughter)

Doel: (laughter)

Harper: And what is your mother's name?

Smagorinsky: Her name was Anne Conwell.

Harper: OK, and your father?

Smagorinsky: George Knoepfel. K-N-O-E-P-F-E-L.

Harper: E-L, OK. And was your mom a homemaker?

Smagorinsky: Yes.

Harper: Yes. And what did your dad do?

Smagorinsky: He was a plumber.

Harper: Uh-huh.

Doel: And what part of Brooklyn were you living in?

Smagorinsky: It was always called Fort Hamilton. The next little area was Bay Ridge, but as time went on Bay Ridge seemed to be a little classier than Fort Hamilton, and that's now what it's usually known as.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: But I call it Fort Hamilton.

Harper: And were your parents born in the United States?

Smagorinsky: Yes, in fact my mother was born in Brooklyn, too. My father was born in Providence, Rhode Island.

Harper: OK. And you mentioned one sister -- did you have any other siblings?

Smagorinsky: Yes. I mentioned a sister?

Harper: Right.

Smagorinsky: Oh. Well, I had three sisters.

Harper: OK.

Smagorinsky: Oh, yes, I mentioned her. (laughter)

Harper: Yeah.

Smagorinsky: The older sister.

Harper: The older sister, right.

Smagorinsky: So, I had three sisters.

Harper: And so your father never got the son that he wanted?

Smagorinsky: No. My mother had had two boys, and her first children were twin boys, and then they both died in the flu epidemic of 19 -- you know, after the war.

Harper: Right, yeah.

Doel: Yeah.

Harper: Yeah. OK. And so, you had three sisters. So you went to grade school in Brooklyn?

Smagorinsky: Yes, St. Patrick's School.

Harper: OK, and also high school in Brooklyn?

Smagorinsky: Yes, Bay Ridge High. We could have gone into Bay Ridge High, or to one of two -- what are they called? Bay Ridge High was a girl's school.

Harper: Oh, OK.

Smagorinsky: That's where my mother sent us. (laughter)

Harper: Uh-huh. (laughter)

Doel: What kind of house did you live in when you were growing up?

Smagorinsky: It was a small one-family, two-story house. Just a plain, ordinary house, but a nice little house.

Harper: It was like a row house, wasn't it?

Smagorinsky: What?

Harper: A row house?

Smagorinsky: No.

Harper: It wasn't? Oh, I thought it was a row house.

Smagorinsky: No, when the lot next door was sold, it was built right up against our house which was OK. It made our house warmer.

Harper: (laughter)

Doel: Do you remember receiving magazines, newspapers at home? What you were reading when you were growing up?

Smagorinsky: Well, yes, we got -- I think it was called the New York Herald Tribune, a Republican answer to the New York Times. My father was actually a very liberal person, but he liked the Herald Tribune. And it had comics in it.

Doel: Mmm-hmm, which the Times never did.

Smagorinsky: Right.

Harper: (laughter)

Doel: Was religion important at home?

Smagorinsky: It was to my mother. My father was not religious at all. Although, he had been baptized a Lutheran, I found out, because his parents were German. And so, I found out he was baptized a Lutheran but I didn't know that until long after my father had died. And he never told us he was a Lutheran. I don't think he requires a --

Harper: (laughter) And was your mother a Roman Catholic?

Smagorinsky: Oh, yes.

Harper: Yeah. Oh, OK. (laughter) What kinds of books did you like to read as a child?

Smagorinsky: Oh, one book I had to read was a whole series of books -- Elsie Dinsmore. Elsie Dinsmore's *Kiss and Kin*, Elsie Dinsmore's *Wedding*, Elsie Dinsmore's *Grandchildren*—it was endless.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: Every Christmas when I opened another Elsie Dinsmore book—"Oh."

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: And so, eventually they were all given away, of course. Then at a used bookstore I found an old Elsie Dinsmore—my first book. Fortunately, nobody wanted it. And then, we sent one of our daughters to a little school, a weirdo school, called Burgundy Farm Country Day School. And there was a woman who sent her kids there, too. And everyone who sent their kids there was a little bit wacky, including me, I guess. Anyway, they had this newspaper being published and sent around. And this woman wrote in: "At the recent book sale, somebody took a whole package of books that I did not intend to go to the book sale. If

anyone who is reading this has the Elsie Dinsmore..." I didn't like the woman, by the way. (laughter)

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: I thought, oh, this means a lot to her. So I got in touch with her and gave her my second copy of Elsie Dinsmore. So unfortunately, my children didn't have the opportunity to read Elsie Dinsmore. Nobody clamored to get it, either.

Harper: Yeah. (laughter) They weren't fighting you for them?

Smagorinsky: No, not really.

Harper: What about favorite subjects in school?

Smagorinsky: I just liked to study. Anything. Geography, history, the whole thing. You know, you've seen kids like that. You know, you get the history book and read the whole thing through and you're way ahead of the teacher and everybody else, and then you go on to the second book yourself.

Terry: You should say why you started school early, mom. You started school when you were five, right?

Smagorinsky: Right. A Catholic school. My older sister was in the first grade and I went. I guess maybe she was in the second grade. Anyway, my mother used to walk her up to school. I don't know what she did—I later thought, "I wonder what she did with the other kids while she was walking us up to school?" Anyway, I would walk along with her and I always wanted to go into the school. And they were very lax about things like this. And the nun said to my mother, "Oh, she wants to come to school so much." Because I was always like, "Can I? Can I go to school please?" And my mother said, "She's only four years old." She said, "Oh, that's all right. We can take her." So I went. (laughter)

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: Can you imagine doing that now? They'd probably make her pay tuition for me.

Harper: Probably so. So you started first grade then?

Smagorinsky: Yes. And we used to have these classes -- we had 1A and 1B in the same room.

Harper: Right.

Smagorinsky: So probably I was 1A; I don't remember. But later on, you know, in 3A... look at those birds. They look like geese.

Terry: They are.

Smagorinsky: They are?

Doel: Yeah.

Harper: Yeah, there are lots of them out here. (laughter)

Smagorinsky: Yeah. 3A and 3B, we were all in the same room. So I did my 3A work and then I listened in on the 3B, and at the end of the year I took the 3B examination. The nuns didn't care. (laughter) They would let me go on into the fourth grade. Because I think math was the one thing that was really propelling me along, but it was pretty easy. You couldn't do that today. (laughter)

Harper: So since you started early, how old were you when you graduated high school?

Smagorinsky: 15.

Harper: 15? And so, what, then, did you do?

Doel: I wonder if I could just ask --

Smagorinsky: Yeah, go ahead.

Doel: Were there any teachers that were particularly memorable for you when you were in grade school, high school?

Smagorinsky: Not in grade school. I remember them all, but of course they all looked alike because they wore these habits and they always were so clean. Their hands were so white. And they all wore glasses. They all were so extraordinarily immaculate. And they were all very nice. Kind people, except they were pretty strict with boys. The girls were such good kids that they were rarely disciplined. But the boys sometimes got it.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: And deserved it.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: But there were all little things that you would do that the nuns would go crazy about. One thing I remember: we had a library case in the front of the

room with glass windows on it. And if the nun caught you looking at yourself in that like a mirror—"Vanity!" (laughter) We were not allowed to look at a mirror. It was very bad for me because I learned never to look at myself in the mirror. I'd go out of the house with my hair all—(laughter).

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: It was sinful to look in the mirror. We were clashing with a lot of sins. (laughter). It didn't have any ill effect. I don't think it made anyone any better. It didn't make anybody any worse. They were all pretty good kids, I guess.

Doel: Did you find that you had a particular interest in science already at that point?

Smagorinsky: My father was a plumber and I was his helper. (laughter)

Doel: So you learned a lot of practical things?

Smagorinsky: Oh, yeah. And we worked on his car a lot, and under the car he'd say, "Hand me a tool, helper." Then when he got to something more, he'd say, "Do you see a 3/4 crescent wrench out there? That's what I need." "OK"—under the car. So I was pretty good on identifying tools. He never let me under the car. But I was his helper, I really was. He did all the repairs on our house. When he did the roof, I used to run up the ladder and take his lunch up to him (laughter). It was a pretty casual life.

Doel: You mentioned earlier that your father was liberal in his politics. Was politics discussed much at home? Do you remember that at family gatherings, or at the dinner table?

Smagorinsky: My father was a socialist and he spouted on about it. When his brothers came to visit us, his brothers were not that way. (laughter) And he would have terrific arguments about it. And I soaked it all up! "Jehosophat, George, you're so damn stubborn!" (laughter) Of course, he'd never get my father to agree. "Oh, you'll learn." (laughter)

Doel: Herbert Hoover was president during the time that you were a teenager and growing up.

Smagorinsky: I hardly remember him. I mostly remember FDR.

Doel: Yep.

Harper: Did your mother agree with your father's politics?

Smagorinsky: No. She was a real house mom. Well, if an Irishman were running for something, she would vote for him. (laughter)

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: She voted more on background than on action.

Harper: What kinds of math and science classes did you take in high school?

Smagorinsky: Regular. We started off with algebra, then went to geometry, then -- what was next?

Harper: Did you take trigonometry?

Smagorinsky: Trigonometry. I think that was the end.

Harper: Did you take solid geometry?

Smagorinsky: No.

Terry: I think my mom was more of a mathematician than a scientist. You love math.

Smagorinsky: Oh, yeah.

Terry: I became a math major because of my mother's...

Smagorinsky: Well, I really liked numbers. I liked theory of numbers. When I went to college, there was plenty of opportunity to learn as much as possible about number theory.

Harper: So where did you go to college?

Smagorinsky: I went to Brooklyn College. My parents weren't poor, but they were not ready to send me away to college. It was something they just never really discussed. Nobody in our family ever even went to college. But when I graduated when I was 15 -- what do you do when you're 15? I was too gawky. I had no presence. (laughter) I was such a goof. I just didn't know how to present myself. I think I was too young to really sell myself. I just had no idea what the business world was like.

Harper: Now, had your older sister gone to college?

Smagorinsky: No. I was the only one in my family who went.

Harper: Who went, OK.

Smagorinsky: The younger girls, the twins, went to business school. My older sister just didn't go anywhere. I don't know why she didn't. She was smart, but she never went to college. She never wanted to. She was giddy. She was always laughing and fooling around, and studying was not her specialty. But I loved to study.

Harper: Yeah. (laughter)

Doel: We'd be interested: what did you know about Brooklyn College before you went there?

Smagorinsky: It didn't exist. (laughter) In fact, I thought I was going to go to Hunter College. Because you could fill out a form, you know. And it was just like being promoted from the eighth grade in high school to go to college. And then when I finally got the papers to go, they had taken the two branches of the city colleges -- City College for men, and Hunter College for women -- they both had had branches in Brooklyn. They took those branches and united them, and called it Brooklyn College. So to my great surprise, I went to Brooklyn College. I thought I was going to go to Hunter College. Quite an adventure for me, because I went down on the subway...it was a real adventure. That was growing up. As you went downtown in Brooklyn, and the classes were held on Court St. and Joralemon St. You had to run from one building to another and down the... Anyway, and the men's college was much better organized than the women's branch of the college. The men's college dominated the social life, if there was any. (laughter)

Harper: So were all of your classmates women?

Smagorinsky: No, but most of them were. In some classes, there weren't many women. The math classes. But the so-called soft subjects were just women. It was nice. It was socially broadening. I met a good cross-section of people. It was the first time I ever met Jewish people. (laughter) There were plenty of Jewish people there. And it was interesting. I was so embarrassed. I was on the subway one day with one of my classmates and my aunt came into the subway; she was going to work. And this girl was sitting there, and I introduced them. And then the subject came about writing and my aunt saying something like—she didn't know what she was talking about. She said something like, "Well, you're lucky you're both writing in English, because if you were Jewish, you'd be writing backwards," or something.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: I don't know what her expression was, but this little girl said, "No, we don't."

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: I quickly put in my two cents, saying that "No, no, Aunt Alice, that's not the way it works. Emily is Jewish." (laughter).

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: I guess it was the first time I'd ever spoken to a Jewish person. There were no Jewish people around us. It was all either German or Irish, and some Swedes wandered in.

Harper: Got lost on their way to Minnesota and stayed, right?

Smagorinsky: Or jumped ship. (laughter)

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: Didn't want to go any further. It's a good place to stay.

Doel: Just around the time that you started college, when you were 14, 1929, the Great Depression.

Smagorinsky: I was 15.

Doel: 15 when you started college. And just after the Great Depression started, did that affect your family particularly hard?

Smagorinsky: No, my father had a sort of plumbing business and he had a network of customers. You know, he wasn't doing big contracting work. There were a lot of frozen pipes in the winter; they had to have a plumber. And when people were his customers, he never pushed them to pay. If they couldn't pay this month, they could pay next month. If they couldn't pay next month, when they could, he knew they would pay him. So he had a very nice relationship with the customers. So we were never rich, but we were never wondering when the next meal was coming. He bought a nice little place up out in the country; we used to go out in the country every summer. It was a very simple place. No conveniences, no electricity, no bathroom. And we would all go up there and have a jolly good time. (laughter)

Harper: And where was that?

Smagorinsky: In Ashland, New York.

Harper: OK.

Doel: Do you remember how much tuition was when you started college?

Smagorinsky: At Brooklyn College?

Doel: Yes.

Smagorinsky: No.

Doel: That was provided by the city?

Smagorinsky: The city, and also we got all our textbooks.

Doel: Is that right?

Smagorinsky: Until you took elective courses. But the courses that you had to take, you got your textbook.

Terry: A different world.

Smagorinsky: Yeah, no kidding. I wasn't so grateful then because I thought, "Well, this is the way it goes." I was a little bit envious of my classmates from elementary school who went on to colleges -- one of my classmates from high school who went on to colleges like Vassar, Cornell, and so forth. But I never realized then that my parents couldn't possibly afford to send me there. Even if I'd gotten some wildly generous scholarship, including transportation, books -- everything, the works. But Brooklyn College suited me. Everybody there was from average circumstances, in a certain sense. Nobody was rich. Well, there were some kids who were rich, but their parents were thrifty. Took advantage of the city. It was a good place to go. I never felt deprived. I was very happy. Well, I didn't make many friends there, mostly because I lived out in Fort Hamilton and they all lived out at the ends of Brooklyn -- I can't even remember the names of these parts of Brooklyn. But they lived out...I don't know. I was never very familiar with the areas of Brooklyn. I had no reason to be. Oh, Flatbush. Many of them lived in Flatbush. But you don't easily make a friend from Flatbush if you live in Fort Hamilton, so...

Harper: What was the social life like at the college? Or was there any?

Smagorinsky: There was some, but I was not very active in it. I was too busy. For one thing, they had some kind of program -- you could get a job in the library paying a very nominal sum, maybe 50 cents an hour, or whatever it was. And I worked there, every afternoon at the school, until about 4:30. So then you go and hop on the subway and come home. If I were late coming home my mother would say, "What kept you?" "I don't know." (laughter) "I left later." But that was fun, too. I really loved working in the library. God, all those books.

Harper: So you were a math major?

Smagorinsky: Yes.

Harper: In college.

Smagorinsky: Right.

Harper: And you really liked theory of numbers. Was there anything else that you liked in particular as a math major?

Smagorinsky: Oh, I like English. I liked writing. I was not very full of ideas. I wasn't bursting with creativity, but I liked to write. I used to write at home.

Doel: What kind of writing did you do?

Smagorinsky: Just stories that my father would tell us about his life and all. (laughter) How he got his middle initial.

Terry: But my mom is real unusual -- both the left brain and right brain. The type that would do the crosswords in the Sunday Times in pen.

Harper: (laughter)

Terry: You know, you would do all the word things. And in my family, my brother's an English professor -- professor of English. So you did all the word things, but also you really liked the math part. So, you know, unusual combination. I don't think I've met many people who are so strong in both subjects.

Smagorinsky: Yeah. I probably was better in English. (laughter) I would like to have been a writer.

Terry: You did write. She published these little gargoyle books.

Smagorinsky: But I don't know even know where they are.

Terry: I have one.

Smagorinsky: (laughter) My masterpiece.

Doel: We should mention on tape that we're being joined here by --

Harper: Yeah, we are being joined.

Smagorinsky: Terry knows more about me than I know.

Terry: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: And about Joe. Because toward the end, she was his big confidante.

Doel: And we're looking right now at the Tigers of Princeton University, one of the "little books."

Terry: There's a few of those books. One on gargoyles, then that one.

Smagorinsky: Yeah.

Terry: How many did you do?

Smagorinsky: I didn't do the one on --

Terry: I thought you did a few books?

Smagorinsky: I did a whole bunch, but I can't remember what they were. I did *Pomp and Circumstance*, or something like that about Princeton University ceremonial.

Terry: She entered into this, like -- how would were you when you were doing these books?

Smagorinsky: (laughter) I was pretty old.

Terry: Like, your 60s or 70s?

Smagorinsky: Pretty old.

Doel: This one is copy written in --

Harper: In '89 the first time.

Smagorinsky: When is it?

Doel: 1989.

Harper: In '89.

Terry: They're on the Internet, I think. Someone said they found them on the Internet.

Smagorinsky: Just a kid.

Harper: (laughter) So is there anything else that you want to tell us about your college years that stand out as being, you know, something that still strikes you as important for your later life?

Smagorinsky: No. (laughter) It wasn't exciting. There were no sororities of that sort. The first year that I was there, I had written something for the college magazine and it was printed, and I was invited to be on the staff of the magazine. But then

when they had their staff meetings, they never called me, so I never attended any of the meetings. Though I was listed. If you looked me up, you might think that I was an active member, but I wasn't. I was a very silent member. (laughter)

Harper: Do --

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

Interview of Margaret Smagorinsky

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Harper: OK, after a very short pause we're on the second side of the tape. So how old were you when you graduated?

Smagorinsky: 19.

Harper: 19, OK.

Doel: When you think back, were there any teachers who are memorable? When you were at Brooklyn College.

Smagorinsky: There were a lot of good teachers. I don't remember their names, that's the only problem. There was Professor so-and-so... There was one who stimulated my interest in baseball. He was a big fan of the Brooklyn...

Doel: Brooklyn Dodgers?

Smagorinsky: Dodgers, yeah. Because I never got to a game until after I married Joe. Because Ebbets Field was not in my backyard. And my father used to say, "Oh, they're just playing for money."

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: (laughter) I'm not supposed to get interested in them.

Doel: Did you have classes in physics and chemistry when you were going through Brooklyn College?

Smagorinsky: No. Well, yes and no. I had physics, yes, but not chemistry. I took chemistry later, after...

Terry: NYU?

Smagorinsky: No, I took it at... University of Virginia had a branch in northern Virginia, and I took a class there in astronomy and in chemistry.

Doel: Do you remember seeing research being done? Or did what you experience seem more of a kind of cookbook experiment?

Smagorinsky: Cookbook. (laughter)

Doel: Yeah.

Smagorinsky: And even when I went to work as a statistician, that was cookbook, too. There was no research problem in the statistics. It was going to a class in statistics, and statistics that was taught by a man who just paraphrased the textbook.

Doel: That's right.

Smagorinsky: While I enjoyed statistics very much, I was never a theoretical statistician. I enjoyed studying the probability part. I had a real love for the probability angle. But when Terry was going to graduate school, she took a course in probability. And I thought, "Oh, boy, I can help Terry get a good start on probability ." And I couldn't help her at all.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: It wasn't the (inaudible). So I'm really not a scientist at all, but I had dreams of being a scientist. I could do science. I was an excellent statistical clerk, that's about it. I wasn't a real statistician. We didn't have problems that required inventive techniques for classifying things. We just used T-tests and Chi square tests. I knew where to apply a T-test and where to apply a Chi square test. Do an analysis. But now it's all done, I think, on a computer.

Harper: Yeah. (laughter)

Smagorinsky: I've been replaced.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: It's the kind of work that is well done by a computer, too. I'm a handheld computer.

Harper: So once you graduated, then what did you do?

Smagorinsky: Well, I had taken an exam, and I'd taken some extra courses, my mother thought, to teach school. (inaudible).

Harper: Yeah. (laughter)

Smagorinsky: So she wanted me to be a school teacher, so I took these tests for teaching school. At that time, New York City didn't hire school teachers. They just hired substitutes. And that continued for many years. And to get on that substitutes list was another big deal. So I was never on a list where I'd be called upon to teach. And Ashland, New York, where we had our farm, they had a little one-room schoolhouse. They needed a teacher. So I thought, "Well, I can't get a job here as a teacher." So I asked Mr. Tuttle, the local school officer, how about considering

me a teacher of the school? So he was very happy about it. I showed Terry my contract. (laughter) It's a joke.

Terry: Yeah, you found it in your drawer.

Smagorinsky: Yeah. Where is it?

Terry: Just (inaudible).

Smagorinsky: You have to see the contract. And I was happy to get it. That was really funny. Because otherwise, I would go home to New York, I'd go to employment agencies, I was looking for jobs as a statistical clerk. And I had taken a test for the US Statistical Clerk, but I never got any offers. So I continued up there for years. And it was an interesting experience, but I really had to be very broad-minded about life. (laughter) But this was an interesting experience? What good it did, I don't know. But living up there, so many interesting things happened. I was teaching science up there, so we got from the state a pamphlet about science. One thing you have to be in a one-room school is you have to just be wary of the fact that kids learn a lot of science from their grandfathers. And if you can, politely and discreetly try and clear them up about some of these myths about hoop snakes and so on. They mentioned several things. And I remember especially the hoop snakes. And discreetly -- don't contradict grandfather, but if you can show them another way. So in the spring time, there were some kind of worms that come and infest all the trees. And they were terrible. Of course, if you found one on the ground, you could step on it, that'd be great. And Mr. Tuttle said one day, "Now, if you come upon a tree full of those worms, don't blow your horn. Because you blow your horn, they'll all fall down. The worms will come right down on top of you." (laughter) So the kids were all interested. So I rode back and forth with anxious kids anticipating the rain of worms, which I didn't believe were going to respond to my horn blowing. When we're going down the road, we came underneath this tree and it was just alive with worms. I said, "Now, grandpa said if you blow your horn, they'll all fall on us. We don't have the horn to blow, but if we all hold hands and all of a sudden -- when I say one, two, three, we all yell, that'll be the same as the horn. Let's see what happens." (laughter) What happens? The worms responded, dropping all over, falling down on my shirt, into my pockets, wiggling onto my shoes. Why didn't I believe Grandpa Tuttle?

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: -- in my hair. These despicable worms.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: It's a good thing I didn't have my mouth open.

Terry: I didn't find your contract, but here's a report card. You took meteorology in Brooklyn College.

Smagorinsky: Yeah.

Doel: We're looking at a document from Brooklyn College, dated April 25th, 1936. And it's listing the courses that you took, including (inaudible) trigonometry, advanced algebra, solid geometry, general mathematics, analytical geometry, differential calculus, integral calculus, higher algebra, theory of numbers, theory of equations, mathematics of statistics, and history of mathematics. As well as three courses in physics, general physics 1 and 2, and then meteorology as a separate course. Is that something you remember taking? The meteorology course.

Smagorinsky: The book we had was called Piston -- the author. A very slim book, you know. About that thick. Now introductory meteorology... Once Namias saw the Piston book. He said, "Where in the world did you get this Piston? I had this when I was in college." And he pulled it out and -- (laughter). I guess it was about 200 pages long, not much on each page, either. He was the only other person I ever met had used Piston. (laughter) Namias was a great guy.

Terry: Here's a copy of something if you want some dates.

Harper: Oh, good, this is helpful.

Smagorinsky: What's that?

Doel: We're looking at your curriculum vitae?

Harper: Yeah, it's your CV.

Terry: And then here's another...

Smagorinsky: Oh, that was a silly book they published when I was in Hawaii. You know (inaudible) these books that the (inaudible) publishers to try and sell a list of people? (laughter)

Harper: So when you were teaching, how many students did you have?

Smagorinsky: In this one-room school?

Harper: Yeah, at that little one-room schoolhouse.

Smagorinsky: At the most, I had 12. But we had 12 students. And they'd just separate all of them. It was fun.

Harper: And did it include high school kids, too?

Smagorinsky: No.

Harper: It was through eighth grade, or...?

Smagorinsky: Through eighth grade. And they went on to high school and did very well in high school.

Harper: So after you worked there, then you went to work for the Weather Bureau, is that right?

Smagorinsky: What?

Harper: You went to work for the Weather Bureau after you...? What happened?

Smagorinsky: I had taken this test for statistical clerk for the US, and had never heard anything from them, which didn't surprise me. But I used to call my mother up every couple of weeks and she said, "I got another one of these notices from the Civil Service Commission. They want you to apply for a position at the Railroad Retirement Board." And I said, "What is the salary?" And she said, "\$1,440 a year." It's terrible we can't find that contract. I think I was making something like \$960 a year. I said, "Of course I want to go there." (laughter) I was getting pretty tired of... It was nice living in Tuttle's and it was a big experience. They were really wonderful people. But in the evening, we'd turn on the radio, we'd listen to the reports on the price of beef hides and chicken feet and all that stuff. So our entertainment was old stock prices on the agriculture radio show. I guess there wasn't much on. It was WGY Schenectady, that's what it was. Because it wasn't my radio. Anyway, when my mother said, "You wouldn't be interested in this. I've been throwing these off as lint."

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: I said, "Gee whiz, mom, just send me one, will you?" She said, "But you'd have to go all the way to Washington to take this job." I said, "Fine."

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: So she sent it and I returned it, and it turned out they were using the statistical clerks and any clerks they had to -- the government needed a lot of clerks. It was the beginning of the war. And this particular (inaudible). The employees of the railroad companies were suddenly becoming eligible to become civil servants. And they all had to apply and send in their health (inaudible), and so forth. And so, the statistical clerk that handled these applications and had to code them, and what was their problem... I don't know what these (inaudible) the

railroad, but some of them had hernias and they were described very graphically. Size of the -- (laughter).

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: Anyway, that was my job and that got pretty tiresome.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: It was even worse than living at Tuttle's. See, I have no gumption. I didn't really know enough to go out and get a job for myself, but I met a girl who was in the same bunch of recruits. And she was very, very aggressive. And she said to me, "We shouldn't be working here. There are lots of jobs. There's the Navy department, there's this and that." But she said, "This is a good start. And I am interested in a job at the Weather Bureau. Oh, I did a course on the weather." I said, "Oh, boy, you're lucky." She said, "When I get there, I'll get back in touch with you." So she got back in touch with me and she said, "They need, here, a person in the statistics department."

Harper: (inaudible)

Terry: (inaudible)

Smagorinsky: So she gave them my name (inaudible) recommendation. But she was the only one who knew someone who was interested in statistics. And so I trotted over and was interviewed by the man who was doing the hiring, and they called me. And it was a simple matter going from the Railroad Retirement Board. And in addition, Railroad Retirement Board was moving its headquarters from Washington to Chicago, and my mother would have gone and had a fit if I had moved to Chicago, but that wasn't what kept me in Washington. (laughter) I didn't want to go to Chicago. I did want to go to the Weather Bureau, so I went. And from there on it was just clear sailing.

Doel: What were your impressions when you went to start work at the Weather Bureau? What was that like?

Smagorinsky: It was wonderful. Suddenly you're talking to people who were doing something, you know? (laughter) Not just having hernias.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: And talking to people, whereas everything else was just shoving paper around. See, I just can't understand why I was so shy. When I went to an employment agency, I never sold myself. I didn't know how to sell myself. I had no idea. You know, I'd go in there and fill out a piece of paper and hand it to the clerk at the desk, and then I'd go back and sit there. And she might call me up and

ask me a few more questions, but I never pushed anything. I didn't know how. I was so -- I don't know. Anyway, it all worked out and I got this job in this new department where there was a new extended forecast system. It was not in the extended forecast system, but they were making five-day forecasts in the (inaudible) office. And it was a fun place to be around because there were all these young forecasters joking around. But they were working hard, too. It wasn't just all jokes. A lot of jokes... Anyway, then the man that was interested in the statistical clerk was Glenn Brier, who was a very serious person. Very serious.

Terry: How old were you when you started there?

Smagorinsky: I don't remember. If I can find a paper where --

Harper: That was in '41, so you would have been 26.

Doel: You would have been 26.

Smagorinsky: Yeah. Not exactly a kid anymore, but still very unsure of myself.

Doel: And of course, Washington became very crowded during the war. Where were you living during that?

Smagorinsky: Well, I didn't know anybody in Washington so my mother said, "What you should do is, go to a church"—naturally, I knew it—"and ask a pastor, or ask somebody at the church, if he knows of any homes where a great Catholic girl could live." Which I did. Exactly that. And the housekeeper there said, "Well, we don't usually find places for girls," but there's a woman who had been here who is a very good Catholic. And she's worried. Somebody had given her a talk about Catholic girls were coming into Washington and they were going to these big boarding houses, and god knows who they meet, you know? They certainly wouldn't meet these fine upstanding Catholic men. And anyone who was a Catholic, she would take in a Catholic girl. And Mrs. Strieter, she really didn't have room for us; she took in four girls. And she put her sons up in the attic. (laughter) And she was rich. That was the funny part. She didn't need the money. She took us in and she fed us. That's where I learned to eat grits. (laughter) But she was very good to us. She fed us and they had a big summer house down in Bay Ridge, near Annapolis. And every weekend in the summertime—I had a nice little car—we all went down to Bay Ridge and frolicked around at the seashore. (laughter) It was really great, except that Mrs. Strieter—we all had to go to Mass every day.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: (laughter) As the years went by, I got kind of fed up with the -- (laughter). And there were religious icons all over the house. And that was OK. I mean, she

was a good woman and she was fun, too. She wasn't a (inaudible). But anyway, after a while a cousin of mine moved down to (inaudible) and his wife. With his wife and family. And (inaudible), so I moved out of Strieter's and, ultimately, moved into an apartment with (inaudible) and then (inaudible) came down and (inaudible). Anyway, it turned out OK—the moving. But quickly made friends at work and could have done anything I wanted. There was one friend who was teaching me to play tennis (laughter). I was out there playing tennis. Because in Washington, they used to close everything as soon as it got hot; at a certain temperature, they closed shop. And everybody's looking at the thermometer. And then when it reached that certain point, the whole city closed and everybody went down to the tennis courts. (laughter) It was too hot to work.

Harper: But not too hot to play tennis? (laughter) How many women were working at the Weather Bureau? I mean, were there just a handful?

Smagorinsky: Oh, yeah. Yeah. In Namias' section, there was just one. And for Brier, where I worked, there was just one. But eventually more women were hired.

Harper: And Namias was running the long-range forecasting section?

Smagorinsky: That's called extended --

Harper: Right, yeah.

Smagorinsky: The main purpose of our office was, we were checking those forecasts and rating them. And every once in a while we gave a test to forecasters en masse—I mean, the new ones—to see who was going to be kept. So that was fun. It was good. It was a good test.

Terry: I don't know if you've ever run across this, but this says in the article a year after you were hired -- that's when they did this article.

Doel: We're looking at an article that's in the Times-Herald.

Terry: But there's no date.

Doel: There's no date on the top. But the title of the article is, "Girl Weather Expert Fails to Give Interview a Chill."

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: I'll tell you the date: June—

Harper: Oh, great.

Smagorinsky: 27th—oh, perhaps you can see it better than I can.

Harper: Oh, It's June 27th—missing. 19 something—40...

Doel: But it's Sunday, so that's a way to figure out what the day is in this period.

Harper: Yeah, that's true. OK. And she'd been there for a year, so it was probably in '42?

Terry: That'd be a good place to start.

Harper: Yeah, we can kind of move back from there.

Doel: We can fill that in on the transcript later.

Harper: Right, yeah.

Doel: And we should say the article includes a photograph of you at the time.

Smagorinsky: (laughter)

Harper: "The first feminine professional statistician."

Doel: (inaudible).

Harper: Yeah, (inaudible).

Smagorinsky: But I feel I really wasn't a statistician. I was a statistical clerk, but they called me a statistician because that was my rating. P-1, professional. But as far as anybody else was concerned over there, I was a professional statistician. They had a really super statistician there named Todd Martin, who later went to Illinois.

Harper: So was Brier's group that you were a part of—were you basically just doing verification kinds of things on Namias' group?

Smagorinsky: Yes, mostly. (inaudible) at first. Then Brier branched out. He was working turbulence (inaudible). And I was his real assistant because I would check all his work and actually find some errors, which always made me feel good.

Doel: Pause here just to...

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Interview of Margaret Smagorinsky

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Smagorinsky: (inaudible) in Central Park.

Terry: I think it was one of his life's greatest accomplishments because he did it as a teenager.

Harper: Uh-huh.

Doel: I should say we've turned over the tape and this is Joe's building of the boat that we're referring to, here.

Smagorinsky: (laughter)

Terry: But then he painted that just a couple years ago in (rehab?). Just this little (inaudible), but he took a great care in...

Smagorinsky: Oh, he always does something creative, but he had this little program. And it was an anniversary of the facility and they had these paints. And they passed them around. And when I came, I said, "Where's Joe?" I really liked that place. It was a great big park. And he was out there under a tree. I thought, "I wonder what he's doing out there?" What was he doing? He was painting that so meticulously. He had the paints on a—it's a craft thing you get a craft store. And they have stuff that you can repair it with and all. And I never saw him do anything like that, except I knew that he had some paintings he had done when he was a kid, but he never did paintings after he was grown up. And certainly don't call that a painting, but he was working so hard. And I was doing one, too. I thought, "Oh, if Joe's doing one, I better do one, too." Mine was such a slob (inaudible).

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: I didn't even bring it home. But his was so...you'd be surprised. He was really working on it. I was so happy to see him doing that -- completely absorbed in it. It's awfully hard to see a man like Joe deteriorating so rapidly.

Harper: Well, and he had Parkinson's, is that right? So it must have been very difficult, it seems like to me, to be painting at all.

Smagorinsky: He'd be doing that sort of thing. It was probably a great effort for him.

Harper: It had to have been.

Smagorinsky: Of course, he also had this stuff that he could erase and so on. I should have saved mine just in comparison. I didn't do the same picture. (laughter)

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: That was too complicated for me. But anyway, they let me take it home. And I took it home and put it away because I was so happy with it (inaudible) my memory that I didn't know where I'd put it. (laughter) When we were here, we went through a lot of papers. I was so happy.

Harper: Did you meet Joe at the Weather Bureau?

Smagorinsky: No, no, no, I met him at NYU. The Weather Bureau was very kind to me. The Weather Bureau used to send about five students every year for a year of graduate study -- promising students. I don't know about the promising. And one of the courses was statistics. I was a real ace in the statistics course. Joe sat a couple rows in front of me. You didn't know him, but he had a really beautiful head back then. (laughter) Neat little ears. (laughter) Anyway, I met him and he met me, and we used to go to lunch together. Then when we went home in the evening, he also took the subway train downtown, but he got off at, I guess, 14th St. but I went on to (inaudible) Beach. I changed trains there. So anyway, we both got off at 14th St. and I don't know whether he took another train, or whether he walked from there down to 5th St. I think more likely he took the train because he wouldn't be walking. Anyway, we lingered and lingered, longer and longer and longer, and we got off the train and chatted a while. And then we got off the train and chatted a little longer the next time, the next time... And sometimes I'd be maybe 45 minutes chatting at the train station. You know, and usually a big pile of pistachio nuts. You know, we'd walk by one of those pistachio nuts machines. We'd be standing in all the emptied shells. But anyway, when I got home he'd call me and we'd talk some more. I don't know, we talked about so much. We certainly weren't talking about the weather. And then he asked me to go places with him, which I did. Very happy to. And there was absolutely no reason why he was attracted to me, but I certainly was attracted to him. Because he was so nice. And I was eight years older than he was. Can you imagine? And so we kept on going out and all of a sudden he asked me to marry him. I went, "Joe, I'm eight years older than you." "That doesn't make any difference. We have a lot of common interests, we enjoy each other. We can work that out." So anyway, we talked over what probably -- his parents didn't approve. My parents were not enthusiastic, but I think my mother was glad to see me finally getting out of the nest. I didn't regard it as my last chance. I mean, I didn't think, "Oh, nobody else (inaudible) asking." I didn't even think about it. I just liked him so much. It was no difficulty for me to say yes when he asked me to marry him. I did talk it over with a couple of my sisters. I don't think I (inaudible) over (inaudible). I don't know who it was; maybe Florence. Who knows. But anyway, then finally I thought, "Well, if he doesn't mind this age difference, why am I making a big deal about it? I know I'm from a (inaudible)."

(laughter) "I think we'll have a long, happy life together." So we'll forget the age difference; everything else was perfect. And then we had these little differences like religion, so we got that all settled before we were married. It was no problem for me to say, "I don't need to go to a Catholic church." I find I don't really believe everything you're supposed to believe. And Joe didn't believe everything he was supposed to believe, so it was no big sacrifice to either one of us to kiss the churches goodbye. I've never regretted it. In fact, Terry asked me if I wanted a priest to come to see me when I'm in the hospital for my knee. I said --

Terry: I asked that question, yeah.

Smagorinsky: Mmm-hmm. And I said, "No."

Terry: And I didn't know what the answer was.

Smagorinsky: I'd feel like a hypocrite because I no longer believe in it. Actually, when Pete was a baby, that was the first time I had my real doubts about the whole thing. It was when the Pope issued a -- I don't know what it's called, if it's called an encyclical or what. But anyway, the idea was that henceforth it's a principle of the Roman Catholic Church that you must believe that Mary, upon her death, also ascended into heaven. I thought, "Very nice for her if that's what she wanted." But I just can't believe that. Anyway, I'm not going to... But it seems to be such an extreme thing. You look out there...where is she going? Anyway, so that was the first seed in my mind that I really didn't believe this. I did not believe that. They said, "If you don't believe that, you're not a Catholic." I said, "Good."

Harper: (laughter)

Terry: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: I don't believe it and I don't believe a lot of the things that you're taught. And I can't imagine this big life after death that the Muslims are looking forward to, where they have the dancing girls, and great for them. But I expect when I die, I'm dead. In fact, I think it was Kevin, one of my grandsons who said, "When I die, I want to be buried in a dog cemetery because dogs are nicer than people."

Doel: (laughter)

Harper: (laughter)

Terry: Kevin said that?

Smagorinsky: I think it was Kevin. But anyway, there are a lot of nasty people out there that are very religious. Which is nice if they can pull it off, but I told Terry, "I would feel like a hypocrite if a priest were to come in and dab me with some oil and say, 'Now, goodbye and go to heaven,'" because I don't believe there is a

heaven. OK, I'm not trying to convert anybody else. I'm not running down the Catholic Church; it was great while it lasted for me. God, how much time I spent in the church. (laughter) Because of that Catholic school. You're (inaudible) to church all the time...

Terry: Mom, didn't you think that Mr. Panofsky thought that he set them up? Did you mention that?

Smagorinsky: No. (laughter)

Terry: He always took credit for...

Smagorinsky: Yes, because he taught the statistic guys.

Harper: Was that Hans Panofsky?

Smagorinsky: Yes.

Harper: Yes. OK.

Terry: And you were supposed to help dad, or something.

Smagorinsky: Well, I did help him.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: With the little statistics I know. And the (inaudible) that he knew. I was a good technician, but I was not a theoretician. The same thing with the meteorology -- I was a good technician. When I took the meteorology courses at NYU, I did very well. I did better than the (inaudible) for all the weather room service. Not bragging. They didn't do so well. They weren't used to studying.

Harper: Who else was at NYU while you were there? Who else was teaching besides Hans Panofsky?

Smagorinsky: Al Blackadar.

Harper: Mmm-hmm.

Smagorinsky: They were the principle ones that I remember. Culnan—Bob Culnan. I think maybe he was head of the department. I don't think he taught very much. But we would see him a lot. Those are the only ones I remember. Joe would probably remember (inaudible).

Doel: Was William Dunn there at the time?

Smagorinsky: No.

Harper: Was Fred Decker there?

Smagorinsky: No. Not when I was there.

Harper: Yeah.

Smagorinsky: It was just a year.

Harper: Right, I know. But Fred was there...

Doel: I think just after the year that you were there.

Harper: Yeah, yeah. I think so, too.

Smagorinsky: Was he a Weather Bureau student?

Harper: He was. He had come in from the San Francisco bureau, and ultimately ended up at Oregon State. And I talked to him for 12 hours. (laughter) But he was at NYU, but I can't remember exactly what the dates were when he was there. And Joanne Simpson was there for a while -- was she there while you were there?

Smagorinsky: She would just flit in every once in a while, but she was not a student.

Harper: OK.

Smagorinsky: She had been, I guess. Yeah, I'd forgotten about her. Well, she was good. She was very good. You know, she did real work. I never did the kind of work she did. I don't know. I could never see how anyone...did you call her Joanne Simpson?

Harper: Yeah, well, she wasn't Simpson at the time. She was—

Smagorinsky: Starr, or something?

Harper: No, she wasn't even Starr, yet. She had an original name, then. She hadn't married [Victor] Starr yet when she was at NYU. She married Starr later.

Smagorinsky: And then she married somebody else?

Harper: Then she married...

Smagorinsky: Somebody with a German name.

Harper: Yeah, Wilhelm... [Malkus]

Smagorinsky: What? That was close.

Harper: Yeah, Mathis [Malkus]. Yeah, Mathis [Malkus]. And then she married [Robert] Simpson. That was a lot later.

Smagorinsky: And was that her final marriage?

Harper: Yeah. Yeah.

Smagorinsky: So that's her name?

Harper: Right, yeah. And Simpson, he's still around.

Smagorinsky: Yeah. (laughter)

Harper: Yeah. Yeah, she's still --

Smagorinsky: Well, she's pretty smart. She's smart about meteorology, but I don't think she's smart about humanity.

Terry: (laughter)

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: There's a difference.

Harper: Yeah, well, there is a difference. So were you and Joe married while you were both at NYU? Or were you married later?

Smagorinsky: We were married a year later.

Harper: And that was in '48?

Smagorinsky: Yeah. I always have to look at my—

Harper: Yeah, 1948.

Terry: I think you moved back to Washington and he had to finish in New York, right?

Smagorinsky: Yeah.

Doel: And we've skipped ahead a little bit, too, in talking now about your NYU period. How did the position that you were in change during the war—World War II—when you were in Washington at the Weather Bureau?

Smagorinsky: Not much.

Doel: It was pretty much the same all the way through to the time you went up to NYU?

Smagorinsky: Yeah. Yes. Very definitely. Except it got bigger because we had more clerks and more people to whip into shape.

Harper: Did the number of women increase during the war?

Smagorinsky: At the Weather Bureau?

Harper: Yeah.

Smagorinsky: Oh, yes. But they were not really given much proficiency to... In Namias' office, there was a—I don't know what she was; she was sort of a general (inaudible). Did you ever hear of her? She was sort of a floater kind of person; she did a lot of things. No meteorology, though.

Harper: Right. Do you have any other Weather Bureau kinds of questions? OK, so '48, you get married. Now, Joe moves back down to Washington—

Smagorinsky: I think I got married in '49, didn't I?

Terry: I think '48.

Harper: '48 is what it says on the piece of paper.

Smagorinsky: (laughter)

Harper: Yeah, it says you were married in '48.

Doel: We're pointing now to the CV.

Smagorinsky: (laughter)

Terry: It's in print.

Harper: It's in big print.

Smagorinsky: That's nice.

Harper: OK, go ahead.

Smagorinsky: 'Cause I had trouble getting this wedding ring off to check the date.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: I had even more trouble getting it back on.

Terry: And they got married on the holiday because you didn't have much free time, or something like that. Wasn't there something like that?

Smagorinsky: Well, Joe had no vacation time. He was the clinker in that. Or maybe it was because I'd just come back from (inaudible). But anyway, we got married on May 29th, because 28th was celebrated. We had the weekend off.

Harper: That was probably Memorial Day.

Terry: Yeah. And they had to have two services: one in front of a judge, and one for your mother.

Smagorinsky: (laughter)

Harper: (laughter) And Joe was working for the Weather Bureau by this time?

Smagorinsky: I think so.

Harper: Yeah.

Smagorinsky: But I'm not sure. Joe would know. (laughter)

Harper: (laughter) At what point did you end up at Princeton with the Meteorology Project? Because you were both working on [John] von Neumann's project at some point.

Smagorinsky: Yes. Well, wherever Joe went, I went.

Harper: And how was that working on the Meteorology Project? What did you do for von Neumann's project?

Smagorinsky: I should have taken notes. I don't remember.

Terry: In the tapes it said you worked on some kind of program, mom. You programmed equations in, or something?

Smagorinsky: Yeah, I probably did some programming but not the big programming for the computer. Sorry.

Harper: That's OK.

Doel: What did you think of John von Neumann? Did you meet him often?

Smagorinsky: Oh, yes. He was just a lovely man. He was really nice. He was cordial, he was easy to talk to, although everybody had me frightened of him. You know, everyone's like, "Have your wits about you when you talk to von Neumann because he's so smart and he's way ahead of you." So at first I was afraid to say anything, but after I got to know him I realized he was so nice that you could stutter your way through. I really liked him.

Harper: Now, Klara von Neumann was also—his wife was also doing work on the project, doing programming and that kind of stuff. Did you have contact with Klara?

Smagorinsky: No, I don't remember her being there which is rather strange, because as far as I was concerned, Ellen Eliassen and I, and another girl whose name I can't recall, worked together on computers, taking the raw data from the men, the scientists. And actually, computing the forecasts just as the machine was going to later. And it was pretty boring work, but you had to be accurate -- that was the whole thing. And actually, I didn't mind doing it. And I don't think Ellen minded doing it, either. And the other girl -- my memory...

Harper: Yeah, I have her name. I didn't have her married name, but I have her maiden name.

Smagorinsky: Norma?

Harper: Yeah, Norma. Yeah.

Smagorinsky: What was her last name?

Harper: It seems like, to me, it started with a G. Like it was Gilbert or something very close to that.

Smagorinsky: Yeah. I know her son's name is Seth.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: Gilbarth.

Harper: Gilbarth, that's right. That's right. Very good. Yes, Gilbarth.

Smagorinsky: Well, she was very pleasant to work with. She was pretty smart, too. But she wasn't at all creative mathematically. Nor was Ellen, nor was I. (laughter)

Harper: And what about Arnt Eliassen? What were your impressions of him?

Smagorinsky: Oh, he was such a nice man. And now what am I going to say? He was working with a scientist. He was a great guy and he was cordial, and you could talk to him. And you didn't need to always be talking about the (inaudible) rate.

Harper: (laughter) There was life other than barotropic atmospheres and that sort of thing? And Jule Charney was there?

Smagorinsky: Oh, yes. And Jule was a nice guy, but he was full of himself, too, you know. (laughter) And he was very flirtatious but he never flirted with me. (laughter) He was really nice, though. He was good (inaudible) and he was smart. And his wife was a pill.

Harper: Which wife was this?

Smagorinsky: Elinor.

Harper: OK.

Terry: He had more than one wife? Really?

Harper: Yeah. He went through three.

Terry: Oh. Well, there you go.

Smagorinsky: The first one was his California wife. (laughter)

Harper: Yeah, the first wife he met at UCLA.

Smagorinsky: And then, for some reason, they parted. And then it was Elinor. And I always thought that Jule was pretty nice putting up with Elinor. Boy, she was really a pill. Do you know if she's still alive?

Harper: I don't know that she is. You know, I haven't tracked them. I think the third wife is still alive [Lois Swirnoff].

Smagorinsky: Oh, she ought to be, yeah.

Harper: But I don't know whether Elinor's still alive or not.

Smagorinsky: I can't even remember (inaudible).

Terry: It sounds like there was a partying atmosphere.

Smagorinsky: There certainly was, yeah. (laughter)

Harper: (laughter) Oh, good, now we're getting into the good part.

Terry: (laughter) It just sounds like they lived the life of the '50s. (laughter)

Harper: Yeah, I mean, in pieces of correspondence I've seen, it's clear that there are discussions about what's going at the project that they're taking place at parties.

Smagorinsky: Yes.

Harper: Right?

Smagorinsky: Yep.

Harper: I mean, this is often, "We're going to get together for beer, or wine, or cocktails," or whatever—

Smagorinsky: Cocktails.

Harper: Yeah, cocktails. "Whatever we're going to have. And we're going to talk about it and see what was going on."

Smagorinsky: No, they did. And they did some work. I mean, they did a lot of exchanging ideas there.

Terry: But I know the night I was born, dad was at a party at von Neumann's, right? Or something like that?

Smagorinsky: Yes.

Harper: Did Phil Thompson ever wander through?

Smagorinsky: He was before Joe.

Harper: Yes.

Smagorinsky: But I don't think he ever came to visit (inaudible). I don't remember.

Harper: And do you remember anybody else? I mean, people were kind of coming in and out on a regular basis. Does anybody else stick in your mind that was there?

Smagorinsky: Platzman used to come as well. He was a nice guy.

Harper: And Norm Phillips hadn't showed up?

Smagorinsky: No.

Harper: He came later?

Smagorinsky: He came maybe a year later. We were already well settled, and then...someone told me that no one was coming. What a wonderful guy he was. And he liked to smoke cigars—important things, you know.

Harper: Yeah. (laughter) The things you needed to know.

Smagorinsky: Yeah.

Harper: Yeah, right.

Smagorinsky: And his wife was a very nice person. A wonderful person. So when she came, I really liked it here, because she's very young. I think she was married when she was 17, maybe younger. I don't know. (laughter) But she had these two little kids and she's a very nice person.

Doel: We need to—

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Interview of Margaret Smagorinsky

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

Smagorinsky: And Martha and I have always been good friends. And Norman is still beholden to her.

Harper: Wow.

Smagorinsky: Well, anyway...

Harper: Did Rossby ever come through well you were there? Did you guys ever meet Rossby?

Smagorinsky: Oh, many times. He was there. And Norman, of course, was a Swede, so he and Rossby got along very well. And the visit to Sweden meant a lot to Norman.

Harper: Mmm-hmm. Did you and Joe ever travel overseas in that period to check on what was going on with other folks doing computer work in weather?

Smagorinsky: Yes, Joe was mostly going to talk about his work. I think he was really ahead of anybody he was visiting. But he was always welcomed to wherever. He was very welcomed in Japan, and Germany, and England. I think that's about all he (inaudible). He didn't have much communication with the French, as far as I know.

Doel: Did you get to go along on these trips?

Smagorinsky: Yes. Many of them. Not all.

Terry: And she had never been in an airplane before you were -- what? -- 50 or something?

Smagorinsky: Yes.

Terry: And then they did a tremendous amount of travel.

Smagorinsky: Well, I was a little bit slow about that. (laughter)

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: But anyway --

Terry: And also, to my mom's credit, before they went to Russia she took Russian and learned Russian.

Smagorinsky: Yeah, but I could not really converse in it.

Terry: I know, but you took it.

Smagorinsky: I took it and I used it, but I don't know if any -- well, this you need to write down. (laughter) My Russian teacher was very particular about pronunciation. So we had this book where we learned Russian by dialogues. So I gave my Russian book to one of the girls (inaudible); I wish I hadn't now. (laughter) But this particular dialogue was -- you know, it would be one phrase -- and it was "yah speeshew" -- "I am..." -- do you know Russian?

Harper: No.

Smagorinsky: It was, "I am hurrying." I might not have the correct pronunciation anymore. And then, "Yah speeshew (inaudible - continues to speak Russian)." "I am hurrying to the post office to mail a letter." That's the one I remember best. But anyway, there was one girl in our party whose husband was a German meteorologist. I can't remember her name. But she was notoriously late. The bus would always be waiting for her. We'd wait for her to get on the bus to start, we'd wait some place (inaudible), we'd be waiting for her to get back to the bus (inaudible). So we were going, and I had a bunch of postcards that I had written to the kids, so I thought, "Why am I sitting here on the bus? We won't leave here till ten minutes." So I said to the bus driver -- and the post office was around on the other side of the building in the basement of the hotel -- "I'm going to run and mail these letters." So I did. I ran around and mailed the letters, and came back. And the one who was in charge of the contingent said to me, "Oh, Madame Smagorinsky..."

Terry: You forgot to mention you said that in Russian.

Smagorinsky: Yes.

Terry: She said, "Yah speeshew" --

Smagorinsky: Oh, right. She said to me, "Where were you?" -- she said to me in English. And I said to her, "Yah speeshew—(continues sentence in Russian)." And I waved my letter—what was left of my letters. And she gasped. She said to the other people, "I am afraid Madame Smagorinsky knows more Russian than she has let on."

Harper: (laughter)

Terry: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: And from then on, there was a little chill in the bus.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: She got my whole... (laughter) I could never convince her that was it. She had..

Harper: (laughter)

Doel: That's a wonderful story. Do you remember roughly when that trip took place? Roughly what decade that was?

Smagorinsky: Now, I could probably --

Terry: I think it was in the mid '60s because we lived in Virginia.

Smagorinsky: I can look at my drawings and --

Terry: Because I remember when she was --

Doel: That's fine. 1960s, yeah.

Terry: Like, '65 maybe.

Doel: OK. That's good to know.

Smagorinsky: I took this course in Russian and it was not easy. In fact, I took it two years; that's why I was so good with that particular -- (laughter). This was the introductory course. I never went on to the second term, but I did get the first term pretty well.

Harper: That's a great story.

Smagorinsky: It was for me. I loved it. (laughter)

Harper: Did anyone else in the group speak Russian at all?

Smagorinsky: No. The only one who ever spoke Russian, and not well, was a Finnish woman. Her husband was a famous meteorologist.

Harper: Oh, Palmén?

Smagorinsky: What?

Harper: Palmén? Was that Mrs. Palmén?

Smagorinsky: Yes, she spoke Russian. But she hated the Russians.

Terry: They have bazillions of pictures and slides from those years. They would always come back with a big slide show, because my dad's a big photographer.

Smagorinsky: Now we don't know what to do with all these slides.

Terry: Anne has them.

Smagorinsky: Anyway, it was a great life. And I have diaries of all these trips, which every once in a while I get out and read, and I remember the people who met and so on.

Harper: How long did you continue working for the Weather Bureau?

Smagorinsky: Not long enough. I really had an obligation. I felt like I fulfilled my obligation by giving them Joe.

Terry: (laughter)

Harper: (laughter)

Terry: I think it was until Anne was born.

Smagorinsky: No, no—

Terry: You worked after Anne was born?

Smagorinsky: Oh, yeah, I worked after Anne was born, but not after Pete was born.

Terry: That would have been '53. Does that say?

Harper: Does it? Let's see, OK...'51...oh, that goes there. OK.

Terry: I thought it was until Anne. Anne was '51.

Harper: Yeah, it says that you did until '51...

Terry: Because Anne and Pete were born at Princeton when Joe was at the Institute.

Harper: Yeah, OK. Yeah, that makes sense. Were the Weather Bureau concerned that you were married to each other? In other words, nobody complained, or...?

Smagorinsky: Oh, it never dawned on me that they should. (laughter)

Doel: The reason that Kris is asking that is that certain universities had nepotism rules after World War II. And we're wondering if you experienced anything like that, and it sounds like that didn't come up.

Smagorinsky: No. Joe didn't really want to work for the Weather Bureau because I was there. Maybe that was the sort of thing that was bothering him. But the Bureau was the best job that he was offered. I guess there were some people who didn't like Joe. How anybody could not like him—did you ever meet him?

Harper: No, unfortunately not.

Smagorinsky: Oh, he was such a nice man, such a kind man. So generous to his people. Do you know what we did with Matsumo's letter?

Terry: Who?

Smagorinsky: Matsumo. Another one of the Japanese people.

Terry: Was that one that just recently came?

Smagorinsky: Yeah.

Terry: I think I have it in here. There were so many nice letters that came, so I'm sure a lot of them—I don't know if afterwards you'd like to leaf through. I mean, there's some amazing things that were said. I might have put them...is this the one that just came? This one?

Smagorinsky: Yeah.

Terry: This is the one. I think here, mom, is maybe...

Smagorinsky: (inaudible) Well, it's down right in front and (inaudible).

Terry: And also (inaudible).

Harper: So you really didn't stay. I mean, once Joe helped put together the Joint Numerical Weather Prediction Unit—that was in the mid 1950's. But he really only worked in (inaudible) for about a year before he went to work for what became the GFDL in Princeton. So you were not in Washington really for all that long, right?

Smagorinsky: That's right.

Harper: And then you moved to Princeton?

Smagorinsky: Mmm-hmm.

Terry: It would have been something like '54 to almost '68, that we were in Virginia.

Harper: OK, so they were still down there and then moved up to Princeton after that.

Terry: Yeah. I know we moved here in '68.

Harper: OK. Yeah, 'cause they were still trying to find a home, I think, for the lab.

Terry: Well, yeah, I think they were fine for a while, and then, I guess, decided that they wanted to find a home for it. But I think they thought they had a home for a long time.

Harper: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, they did have a home but as it expanded, I think they were—

Terry: They were looking at different options.

Harper: —they were looking at different options, and ultimately came up here at that point, yeah.

Terry: That process probably started maybe in '65 or something like that.

Harper: Yeah, because they needed a place where they had a big computer and they could... And really an academic tie, I think, with another group that they really didn't have in the Washington area for people that were doing that kind of work. Were you already expecting your first child when you still worked for the Weather Bureau? I mean, were you still working when your first child was born

Smagorinsky: Yes. I was still working, but then we moved up here and she was born here in Princeton. I wasn't working for the government; I had resigned. Foolish. (laughter)

Harper: (laughter) What prompted you to resign from the Weather Bureau?

Smagorinsky: Well, I just never saw myself going back as a full-time employee. I had my beautiful daughter. I wasn't (inaudible) with just the (inaudible) without my supervision. She's a nice girl. (laughter)

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: I think all you kids benefited by me being at home all day, don't you?

Terry: Absolutely.

Smagorinsky: I inspired them all.

Terry: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: Anne, for many years she had her own little business. She reached the point where she had it with all the extra forms that she had to fill out. She had a graphic design business. And one of the people who was her biggest customers had a job and was looking to fill it, and he offered it to her. And she thought, "Why not?" She was just hired. It turned out she's happier there than she ever was. Wouldn't you agree, Terry?

Terry: Mmm-hmm.

Smagorinsky: She has a big commute, which she never had before, but...

Terry: But I think in that time many women didn't go out to work after having children.

Smagorinsky: No.

Terry: I don't think there were many options for what you even do with child care.

Smagorinsky: Oh, down around Washington you could always get outside help.

Terry: Could you?

Smagorinsky: Yeah. I couldn't. (laughter) Nobody could take care of (inaudible). (laughter) Well, I was very too much of a "mother courage." I had to nurse my babies. And I know some people who were going to work, and nursed the babies, and pumped their breasts so they could go to work. (laughter) No, I couldn't do that.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: Good for them. It wasn't my idea of a fun experience. I was going to show you this letter from Matsumo who was a real big wheel in Japanese meteorology.

Doel: This is a letter from October 12th, 2005.

Smagorinsky: Now, you can read it and see if...

Harper: Yeah, and it's obvious that he came over and spent a year at GFDL, and that Joe had brought him over and was...

Smagorinsky: He was here for a while. I don't know how long he was here.

Harper: Yeah, my guess is that he works for the Japan Meteorological Agency—for JMA. Did Joe have contact with the Japanese scientists from a fairly early time? I mean, I know there were Japanese scientists that were coming into Princeton in the late '40s and early '50s to work with von Neumann's group.

Smagorinsky: On weather?

Harper: Yeah, on weather.

Smagorinsky: Oh, well, Joe invited them. Joe had read a meteorological journal's translation of a work of Suki Manabe.

Harper: Uh-huh.

Smagorinsky: And when we first went to Japan, Joe looked him up, and also met Miyakoda. (inaudible) wished a relationship with the head of the meteorological service. Then he invited Suki to come. It wasn't easy because not only was he was a foreigner, but he was a Japanese. So it took a little extra. Fortunately, we had a neighbor, Taylor Burke, who was a relative of a very prominent senator. So Joe spoke to Taylor Burke about it and Burke spoke to Senator Byrd. And (inaudible). It's nice to know the right person. (laughter)

Harper: Yeah. (laughter)

Doel: It helps.

Harper: Yeah, I'm sure Senator Byrd was able to take care of that.

Smagorinsky: That's too bad that it goes like that, but it does.

Doel: I'm curious: before you left the Weather Bureau, did you get to meet Wexler, for instance? Or Reichelderfer for --

Smagorinsky: Oh, yes.

Doel: What were your impressions of them?

Smagorinsky: Well, my connections with Dr. Reichelderfer were very formal. And he was a gentleman, you know, and I didn't have too much to say to him. I can't even remember what the occasion was, but I had a personal chat with him. But as far as—who's the other person you mentioned?

Doel: I was curious about Harry Wexler.

Smagorinsky: Oh, Wexler, he was easy to talk to. He was the head of our unit, actually, and he used to bring his girls in to the office. Hannah, his wife, was an artist and she'd be doing something artistic or was showing her work, and one of the girls would come. And his secretary would baby sit for them. But I never baby-sat them. I was too important. (laughter) But Wexler was a (inaudible) nice man. (Dog barks.) (laughter)

Harper: What about George Cressman? He ran the Joint Numerical Weather Prediction Unit. Did you have much contact with George Cressman?

Smagorinsky: No, certainly I never did. Joe and he didn't get along. (laughter) I don't know why.

Harper: Well, there were a number of people who didn't get along with George Cressman, as near as I can determine.

Smagorinsky: Well, there was a fellow who worked for George Cressman; I can't even remember his name now. He still works for him, I guess. And every time Joe got a raise, George Cressman worked his fingernails down getting a raise for his man to match Joe's raise. I can't even remember the name. Not a particularly big-name scientist. Adequate, I guess. (inaudible). Cressman was really... Now, there must have been some reason why Joe was never invited to become a member of the Academy of Science, which really always bothered me. Because people who worked for Joe, like, Manabe and others -- I can't remember the others. But George Philander was elected to the Academy of Science. Why didn't they ever invite Joe? I don't know.

Doel: Did Joe speculate himself on what might have been the problem?

Smagorinsky: He said there was somebody more important than he was who didn't like him. Who that somebody was...it could have been...or somebody more important than he was maybe -- it wasn't that he didn't like him, but he didn't want to recommend him. It could have been any number of people. But Joe was very well liked, but nobody seemed (inaudible).

Harper: So you stayed home with your kids? And you had five children?

Smagorinsky: Mmm-hmm.

Harper: And then at some point did you go back to work?

Smagorinsky: Well, I went back to work but not full time. I went back to work at the New Jersey Neuropsychiatric Institute. There was a man back there who was himself kind of goofy. And he hired me to -- I did everything you can imagine. He thought anybody who worked in his laboratory had to do it. I had to extract the brains of rats—a fun thing to do, which I had never done before, but I did it. I

didn't like it. But I also injected pregnant rabbits and mice with whatever chemical he used. At a certain term in the pregnancy of an animal, he would inject it and their brains would be malformed in a particular way. And then he'd try to get them to do some tasks that they normally would do, but couldn't. Anyway, there was always something to do at that laboratory. I never cleaned cages, but... I did everything. I did a lot of the library work for him when he was preparing a grant proposal.

Harper: Mmm-hmm.

Smagorinsky: Because I had the resources of Firestone Library [at Princeton University] available to me.

Harper: Uh-huh.

Smagorinsky: So it was very (rowdy?). And I knew I could research. I mean, I knew I could look up things and follow through.

Harper: And did you work full time while you were there? Or were you working part-time?

Smagorinsky: Part time, part time. Mostly a half-day.

Terry: You substitute taught, as well.

Smagorinsky: And sometimes I substitute taught. A young woman worked as my assistant and she had some kind of government job -- a clerk of some sort. And she worked at a florist buying gifts; nothing very technical. And I said to my sister, Gertrude, "Why is this working?" "I go to work on Saturdays." She said, well, she is trying to build up her interest in the Social Security system so that when she retires from the government, she'll have two pensions. I didn't know you could do that. So with that, I went home and wrote to the Social Security Administration and asked them what the specs were for part-time workers getting social security. And they told me that you have to earn at least so much—not much—per quarter. So you're contributing. And if you work long enough... So, "OK, I'll do that." And I did. And when I reached the right age, I started receiving

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

Interview of Margaret Smagorinsky

TAPE 3, SIDE 1

Harper: OK, this is Kris Harper. We're resuming after a lunch break and we do want to note that with us during the time of all the taping today has been Terry Thompson, who is the daughter of Joe and Margaret Smagorinsky. Number child you are?

Terry: Three.

Harper: Number three. Three of five. And her voice appears on the tape, also. So, Margaret, is there anything else that you would like to tell us? Stories that you would like to share about anything that you've done or your life with Joe that people ought to know?

Smagorinsky: No, I think you've covered everything that anyone would be interested in, I guess. Don't you think so, Terry?

Terry: Mmm-hmm.

Smagorinsky: I defer to Terry on that one.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: She does everything for me. She goes shopping for me, makes all my doctors appointments, takes me to the doctor, and so forth. So she knows more about me than I know. So I can't think of anything else I should be saying. I can probably think of some things I shouldn't be saying.

Harper: (laughter)

Smagorinsky: So I won't say them. So there you have it.

Doel: One last question I'd like to ask you. When you think back over your life, has there been any philosophical commitment or similar kind of belief that you feel has been very important in your life?

Smagorinsky: The most important belief in my life is that Joe has been very good for me. I really think that he made me a much better person than I used to be. He made me more tolerant and more generous than was my built-in nature. So you can imagine what it's like—

But anyway, any success I've had in life I owe to Joe. Because he showed me what it is to be a really good person. And we have many friends (inaudible) because Joe was such a good guy and I was a good cook.

Terry: My mom isn't saying this because you wouldn't say this about yourself—one thing my mother did that gave them a lot of social... She reorganized his car rallies and started in Virginia, where she would come up with a route and then use, like, Shakespearean prose and hide all these clues. And they invited their friends to participate in these car rallies and they became quite a legend. And even when we came up here -- and they would have a lot of fun. These scientists were rather competitive. They'd be in their cars trying to beat the other guys out, and it was a tremendous amount -- in fact, at my dad's service, afterwards, at the dinner, that's when the Brians or someone—the Mowers—anyone who knew them as in on these car rallies. And that brought together her fun with prose. And they had a great time doing those car rallies.

Doel: So would that be a one-day affair, or...?

Terry: It was a full day and it would end with a party. And then what we did one year is—I lived in Branchburg at one time, and they ended it at our house in Branchburg, which is maybe 20 minutes north of Princeton. And we gave them a surprise 40th anniversary party at that time, and that was fun, too. Because we invited, then, even more people. Anyway, those car rallies were quite a legend of my mother's.

Smagorinsky: Yeah.

Terry: And it brought out the fun and competitive nature in everybody.

In fact, Mrs. Brian told a funny story. One year my mom sealed in envelopes maps for people to use. And it was said they were under no circumstances to open these unless they were absolutely, totally lost and they didn't know what to do. And they were maps of foreign cities.

So Mrs. Brian was funny because she said, "And some of us had to open those maps." And they opened them thinking they'd finally—this is before cell phones...

Harper: Right, sure.

Terry: —and all that jazz. So if someone got lost, sometimes they got pretty lost.
(laughter)

Smagorinsky: They were lost. So they'd back up until they found an intersection they recognized.

Terry: So I think the car rallies were really a large part of their social life.

Smagorinsky: They were. We had one every two years, for many years.

Terry: And unfortunately, it was also the day before word processors, so you typed it all. And then someone said, "Where are all those clues?" They're gone. I don't know where they are.

Smagorinsky: I know where they were, but they're gone. (laughter)

Terry: That was a lot of fun, yeah.

Smagorinsky: I was going to save all those clues (inaudible). I had saved them all, but someone, in a moment of haste, threw them all out. You know, picked out this nice envelope (inaudible), didn't look to see that it said "car rally." But Terry, I forgave you.

Terry: Hm?

Smagorinsky: I forgave you.

Terry: Thank you.

Smagorinsky: Well, I didn't forgive you...

Terry: Really.

Harper: OK, well, thank you very much for talking to us today. It's been a great treat.

Doel: And we should put on tape that neither the tape nor the transcript will be made available to anyone else before you have a chance to review it. You will be getting the transcript once the transcript is made.

Harper: That's right. That's right.

Doel: And I want to join Kris in thanking you very much.

Smagorinsky: Well, I hope I told you something that will enhance your interview.

END OF INTERVIEW

