Claire Tankel

An Oral History Interview

Conducted for the GVSHP Preservation Archives

by

Laura Hansen

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ABSTRACT

Claire Tankel (born 1926) is the widow of Stanley Tankel, an architect and city planner who was involved in Greenwich Village's early preservation efforts. Ms. Tankel begins the interview by discussing her early life, including her initial contact with and marriage to Stanley. Ms. Tankel continues by discussing Mr. Tankel's education at Yale and Harvard, where he studied architecture and obtained degrees in city planning. In 1952 Mr. Tankel received a Fulbright Scholarship to study city planning in Europe. Ms. Tankel opines on the effect these studies had upon Stanley and his ultimate decision to focus on city planning rather than architecture.

Stanley Tankel's involvement with the Greenwich Village preservation movement began in the late 1950s when he led the Greenwich Village Study, an organization of architects, city planners and professional people. Ms. Tankel discusses the Study at length. She also talks about Mr. Tankel's involvement with other activities, such as the effort to close Washington Square Park to traffic and local Democratic politics. In the course of this discussion Ms. Tankel also speaks about Mr. Tankel's relationships with various community leaders at the time, including Jane Jacobs, Tony Dapolito, and Ray Rubinow.

Ms. Tankel concludes the interview by discussing Save the Village and her husband's thoughts on zoning issues. She also speaks about his work on the mayoral pre-commission committee, as well as his role on New York City's first Landmarks Preservation Commission. Tankel was serving as vice chair of the commission at the time of his death in the late 1960s.

INTERVIEWEE: Claire Tankel
INTERVIEWER: Laura Hansen
LOCATION: New York, New York
DATE: 1 March 1997 and 20 February 1998

Introduction:

This interview was conducted in large part to document Stanley Tankel's involvement in the early preservation efforts of the Villagers. Claire was not personally involved in the various committees and campaigns of which Stanley was a leader. She wishes to introduce this interview with the caveat that while she remembers many of his activities and a number of the people with whom he closely worked, her recollections of the larger influences on and context for Stanley's work in the 1950s and 1960s are stronger than the details. Her memories of their travels and studies prior to moving to Greenwich Village and their reasons for choosing to live there are the core of this interview, and provide a framework within which to understand Stanley's contributions to the preservation history in the Village and New York City.

Claire wrote the following addendum to the interview, to clarify her own interests and activities during the years Stanley was so deeply involved in planning and preservation affairs:

> During the 1950s and 1960s the Village was full of writers, artists, and anarchists—women who met in the Park and talked "life" including Grace Paley, the most important thinker of the time. And a mother, too! I was bringing up two children. For a time [my son] Josh was part of the first group at Bank Street College's experiment of taking 2-year olds. Josh stayed until public school and [my daughter] Joanne went for a few years, loving it. But Stan was a firm believer in public school education. So even after many good people tried to persuade him that "they" were only trying to create better public education, our children were enrolled in our local schools—which were excellent. So there were these famous experiments—Little Red, 3rd Street Settlement (Margaret Mead's daughter was there), City and County.

I was also attending studio classes at the New School. I painted with Ruth Gikow (Jack Levine's wife), and I had an assistantship with Prestopino. I was also carefully involved in the anti-war movement. I attended the Women's Strike for Peace in Washington, D.C.—a famous protest. One of its leaders was Ellen Polshek. And also I got arrested at a City Hall demonstration with the *famous* Dorothy Day. Ms. Day, a Catholic Worker writer and humanist, had prepared lunch for those of us who were prepared to get arrested. I was there with Josh and Joanna and Stan's famous words: "Don't get arrested!" It did make a good impression when I told it at a Planned Parenthood dinner.

HANSEN: This is Laura Hansen for the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation Oral History and Archive Project interviewing Claire Tankel at her home in Greenwich Village on Saturday, March 1, 1997.

I want to start with some of your personal history, where you're from, when you got married if you don't mind telling your age.

TANKEL: Well, I am 71. It is very important. It's not that it is easy, but certainly one hopes that that history has meaning. This is why I am agreeing to this oral history project because a lot of it has disappeared because of that. But it is interesting, my husband and I are both from Mount Vernon, New York, and maybe one of the things that might be very interesting to you is my parents were refugees, immigrants to this country, and they moved to Westchester to leave New York City. This is a very old immigrant story. This means that they thought it was progress to leave New York City and move into what was Westchester. So I am a product of that group that if you asked me where I was from I would say "Westchester."

HANSEN: Where did your family live in the city before they left?

TANKEL: You know I never asked that question. First of all, my mother was very, very young, she must have come here when she was about three. My father was older, but they never talked about this. These are people who wanted to assimilate; it's just a very different immigrant experience. So these are people who left behind terrible experiences of pogrom and anti-Semitism and they were both from Polish ancestry. So when they came to this country, they were very eager to be Americans. Not New Yorkers, that isn't what American meant. So, my mother was young, and as I said, she was three. My father was a little bit older when he came over, but they didn't talk very much about their experience in the Lower East Side.

Eventually my mother's family moved to the Bronx, near Post Road and the Bronx Museum. Her family were deeply involved in the union movement, the labor movement. Well, these are people who worked in the garment industry, and we know what the abuses were in the garment industry. There's a wonderful film that Steve Zeitlin had very recently, and I told him, I cried through that….

HANSEN: The film festival, yes, I saw you there. So that gave you a sense of what it was like to be an activist? What it meant in the general sense.

TANKEL: No, because when my family moved to Mount Vernon, they left that behind. In fact, as I said, my father identified with the American achievement in business, not to political, and in fact there was a great difference in the family, that my mother's family were labor unionist organizers and political and when my father moved to Mount Vernon he was rather successful as a businessman. Never wanted to talk about all of this. Little by little, we've been hearing some of the stories, although everybody is dead. They were inspiring stories….

So Stanley and I both came from Mount Vernon, New York.

HANSEN: When did you meet him?

TANKEL: I was in college, and he was first going to Yale. We met at the beach at Gull Island. This is a very popular also if you see it in the popular culture, Gull Island, Gull Island Casino. All of the wonderful music, the log cabin at that time. Stanley had just come back from, well, he was in the air force and he came back to Mayer & Whittlesey. Well, let's say Mayer & Whittlesey, very important firm that was doing housing and architecture.

HANSEN: In—?

TANKEL: In the city. One of the most important. He came back. He had done construction work before he left for the military. He came back, he did messenger work for Mayer & Whittlesey and decided he wanted to be an architect. And Julian Whittlesey just wrote him a note to Yale and that's how people got into Yale….

The world is a wonderful equalizer. He had the G.I. Bill of Rights, and moved into Yale so easily. He was astonished with the kind of openness. His two years at Yale were very important, very important in terms of architecture and beginning to see planning as part of it. And, in fact the reason he moved to Harvard was…Gropius had moved to Harvard.[1] With Stanley's interest growing in the larger picture, not just of architecture and building, but in terms of communities and neighborhoods and history and everything.

HANSEN: Did he get an architecture degree?

TANKEL: He got two from Harvard. He only stayed at Yale two years. But then he was transferred to Harvard, and Harvard created a program where he was given the opportunity of getting his undergraduate and graduate degree in planning. It

[1] Walter Adolph Georg Gropius (1883-1969) was a German architect and founder of Bauhaus. Along with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, he is widely regarded as one of the pioneering masters of "modern" architecture.

wasn't that they were loose, because they were very demanding, but had a broader view.

As you know, Gropius, the Bauhaus idea, this was such an important moment in the history of architecture, of housing, of furniture. In fact, who was teaching housing at the time, Gropius brought this Martin Wagner, incredible name that we should remember. Werben Hausling [sic?], in fact it wasn't long ago there was an article in the *Times* about Werben Hausling and this is a model of workers housing. So, a lot was happening in Germany. And we certainly do know it in terms of ideas and everything. It was a very confusing time, Germany was mixed up with the Nazi thing, but also looking beyond the boundaries. It was a marvelous time, Gropius came into Harvard and really changed the whole picture. We were awed.

HANSEN: You were in college at the same time?

TANKEL: No, I had graduated from the University of Michigan. I should put in a plug for one of my teachers there and what was happening at the University of Michigan at the same time was this opening up. Before, everything was so scholarly and all of the sudden, people came back from the war [Second World War] to the University of Michigan, and it was no longer this closed system. In fact, the people that influenced me, were people who came back, mainly they were young men, who saw school differently. At one time there was a great fraternity situation, setting people apart. But, people came back and saw that this openness had to happen. And so that was happening and William White, William Leslie White. Do you know him?

HANSEN: Not Holly Whyte?

TANKEL: Not Holly. Holly is the organizational man who was very close to my husband here. This is Leslie White who wrote a book, he was teaching at the University of Michigan, this is so interesting, called the *Science of Culture*.[2] The problem that he had was people thought anthropology was too fuzzy.

HANSEN: You were studying anthropology?

TANKEL: I was actually studying the social sciences. I was very interested in art, music, and had been inspired by Margaret Mead, by my high school teacher by the way. So, Margaret Mead was a very strong influence in my life. In fact, I did go to Bali because of her. It was this idea that we are all artists. We do things well, we fit, we are artists. So, Leslie White had this course and the book called the *Science of Culture*. This is very problematic, because science demands certain things: How do we mix these things, how do we come to something that can be helpful, and to be workable?

So, that was a very major influence in my life. In the thought of the day, was questions, you could critique. The most important thing was at one time people went to school, sat at their desks and looked into information, this said you can critique, you can raise your hand and say, "Why?" "What?"

HANSEN: Well, that is something. It isn't true of a lot of educational programs? Everything is so vocational.

TANKEL: And in terms of money. We are a culture that is saying that we should have fewer doctors? And the world needs more doctors? Everybody needs better doctors and a better kind of doctoring, not an HMO doctoring…. . .

HANSEN: So, at this time then—?

[2] *The Science of Culture: A study of man and civilization.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1949.

TANKEL: But I went to Harvard with him [Stanley]. We were married.

HANSEN: So you got married in what year?

TANKEL: When he left Yale. 1946 or '47. And we went to Harvard together.

HANSEN: Did you ever meet Gropius?

TANKEL: Oh, yes.

HANSEN: What was the social—?

TANKEL: That's the whole point of it, it wasn't the standoffish faculty, it was Gropius, his wife, Wagner, all these people. We met all the time. We met his son outside of Cambridge.

HANSEN: Do you think that your interest in art, and music and literature as very influential on Stanley's planning philosophy?

TANKEL: All of it, yes. Well, I don't want to just leave it that he didn't feel this way, because he used to write me letters that he was beginning to listen…. He was at Yale, and, of course, Louis Kahn, let's not forget Louis Kahn, marvelous inspirational architect and artist…. It was there, everybody was thinking, everybody.[3]

[3] Louis Isadore Kahn (1901 or 1902–1974) was a world-renowned architect originally based in Philadelphia. After working in various capacities for several firms in Philadelphia, he founded his own firm in 1935. While continuing his private practice he served as a design critic and professor of architecture at Yale University from 1947 to 1957. From 1957 until his death he was a professor of

HANSEN: What made him go into planning rather than architecture?

TANKEL: Well, because he saw it as a broader thing. I think our experience in Europe mainly made us understand that that city…that cities were planned nothing was done without thought. And it wasn't arrogant thought, but it was thought of how to create a community….

HANSEN: So you went to Europe for his Fulbright Scholarship, is that right?

TANKEL: No, actually we went to Europe after Stanley graduated from Harvard. He was persuaded by Lewis Mumford and Stein, Clarence Stein, very important person in the garden city movement here, to spend time in England, in London.[4] And Stanley was part of the government.

HANSEN: Where did he meet Clarence Stein?

TANKEL: Oh, everybody was here.

HANSEN: That was in Harvard?

TANKEL: No, he was in New York. Of course, we talked about him all the time, and he talked about Gropius…. I mean, we went to Germany, we went to see the medieval cities, Michelsburg, Würzburg, all those around universities.

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architecture and eventually Dean of the School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania. His works include the Jonas Salk Institute in La Jolla, California.

[4] Clarence Stein, born in 1882, was an architect and major proponent of the garden city, an idea characterized by green belts and created by Sir Ebenezer Howard. Stein studied architecture at Columbia University and the École des Beaux-Arts.

HANSEN: And then you went to, he was encouraged to go England?

TANKEL: Fabulous, incredible. Stanley got a letter from Clarence Stein to serve—I can't remember if he was head at the time, but he was the head of the garden city movement, to the government. What Stanley did was work for town and country planning, and he worked in the new towns. That was a very dramatic time because the idea was can you create a new community, what does it mean to disperse a community? Like the London community, bombed out, bombed out, famous buildings, famous churches, whole communities bombed out. How do you re-house them, and can you create a community? What is a community? Do people walk to work? Do people ride to work? Do they have a community center? Do they go to London? All of these questions were raised.

HANSEN: Now it strikes me [unintelligible].

TANKEL: You brought up a very important question because the balance of power or the balance of understanding and the community relationship was powerful. Communitized. I hope people remember Paul and Percy Goodman, very important people. You know his book [*Growing Up Absurd*] was not an unimportant book…. Paul came up to Harvard and talked and they were invited to a wonderful meeting, conference, to talk about just this. What does it mean?

So there were people like [Robert] Moses. Moses represented—see, my father loved Moses, because he represented progress. You just put these roads through, bigger and better, higher buildings, this is progress. And this is what it meant in America, and Moses represented the biggest in America. He destroyed whole communities. We are still suffering from that man's progress.

HANSEN: So that's what I mean, there were two philosophies of planning at that time. It sounds like you and Stanley were very influenced by European ideologies

as much as American. Who were the Americans who were influenced you and Stanley?

TANKEL: We were settled here and Stanley started communicating with Lewis Mumford and the Wittenbergs, they were kind of wonderful people, an interesting history which I don't know about. I'm never sure who is married to whom.

HANSEN: There was some relation.

TANKEL: Oh, there is. There is a wonderful fictitious story about, lots of stories about who they were and who Mumford was. I don't know if I should talk about it in this situation, you know, because we feel as if Mumford was one of these orphaned children. Very interesting, I can't write that story. Where did he come from? Where did they come from? Very interesting.

But Stanley would meet with Mumford. I have some wonderful pictures of when our English friends came here, planners. The head of Edinburgh planning came here to visit and Stanley and he went up to visit Mumford. Where was it that Mumford lived? Up in New York, famous name. Stanley did this and Mumford was very supportive of all the input….

HANSEN: This was a very fertile period, it was such a moment. You were in England in the early—?

TANKEL: Fifties. We went to England after Stan graduated from Harvard which might have been '49 and then we came back for the Fulbright to France a year later. We came back here.

HANSEN: What did you learn in France?

TANKEL: Oh, it was the most wonderful— the Fulbright was an incredible possibility. Talk about government opening up possibilities….

HANSEN: He was working for the French government?

TANKEL: No, there we had the opportunity on the Fulbright to just study cities. So we bought a car and we traveled to France. We spent a little time in Germany, because we had to see the German cities, although we were still hurting from the war and not wanting to give Germany anything. So, we spent three days traveling through all the cities that Mumford wrote about in the *Culture of Cities*.[5] That's it, that's what we've forgotten. The culture of cities, and it's from the beginning into the modern age. That was an incredibly wonderful opportunity to go there.

HANSEN: Was there anything particular about the French way of looking at cities that—?

TANKEL: Oh, absolutely. I mean look at Le Corbusier, we went to Marseilles.

HANSEN: So, why then, after all of that, why did you choose Greenwich Village as a place to live?

TANKEL: Because I became pregnant and wanted to live in America.

HANSEN: And why Greenwich Village over say the Upper West Side or—?

TANKEL: Because Greenwich Village represented all the kind of unique people and the unique way of looking at— I mean Margaret [Mead] lived here.

HANSEN: What did your parents think?

TANKEL: It was so funny, because we came back, I was pregnant, so my husband was looking at all these apartments in the Village. My mother would come down, if Stanley saw something, she would come down with me and she kept saying, "You can't live here, you can't live here. We escaped from here." Finally Stanley said, "I found the apartment your mother can't come, we're going to move." It was a renovated apartment on Carmine Street, 68 Carmine Street. Newly renovated, very interesting people. An Italian contractor had really renovated the space quite nicely. It was full of interesting people actually. I mean I wish I could remember now everybody's name. There were six families the Tomentis [sic?] lived in one floor, but this wonderful actress who was part of the Actor's Studio, if I could remember her name, lived in the other part.

HANSEN: All different ages?

TANKEL: Not different ages, no.

HANSEN: All young?

TANKEL: Mainly young, because they were young, we were young, the Tomentis were older Italians but [a] wonderful community, it was an incredible community.

HANSEN: And 68 Carmine is near what avenue?

TANKEL: Near what is Eighth Avenue—

HANSEN: So pretty far west.

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[5] *Culture of Cities*. Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938.

TANKEL: —and Sixth Avenue, Bleecker Street actually.

HANSEN: So that was a large Italian—

TANKEL: It was this wonderful neighborhood, full of Mafia people, so you knew it was safe. You knew it was safe. Jane [Jacobs] described it best when she said, "The eyes of the community were watching." We even felt it here. There used to be a man across the street who watched out of his window. He was an ex-policeman, and he knew everything that was going on on Bank Street. So, this idea that the eyes of the city and in fact, coming back to the Mafia we used to see (in fact, Stanley said, "Don't look!") because parking right in front of our house was a black limousine that used to draw up regularly and people would go in and out the limousine. You know, we used to think that Carmine DeSapio was in that, but, you see, he was a very important political leader. And in fact, we would not have won the Washington Square Park without Carmine DeSapio, and the political people…. The people who romanticize this forget the strategies. There were smart strategies, it wasn't just human interest. The most important people probably in that were Shirley Hayes, Edith Lyons, and I understand that she is still accessible.

HANSEN: Yes.

TANKEL: You're going to interview her? Good. I don't know where she is in her head, I haven't met with her for years, but feisty, feisty ladies who went out with the posters and petitions and were definitely the voice of the community…. One of the important strategies to Washington Square Park Stanley had started the Greenwich Village Study.

HANSEN: I wanted to ask you about that. What was that, and was it a reaction to something or was it more proactive?

TANKEL: Yes, well, it was a reaction to the fact that Stanley is a planner, he is here in New York City, he gets involved in local planning boards and he organizes about 1956 a group of professionals in the Village to help with decision making in the Village.

HANSEN: Where was he working?

TANKEL: Oh, that's probably why he was doing this, he was working for a friend of his who was building very expensive houses out on Long Island. Just after that he started working for Regional Plans and the Regional Plan starting 1958 had to do with open space, the environment. One of the most important studies—

HANSEN: Was that study called, "Planning and Community Appearance?"

TANKEL: No.

HANSEN: A different one? So tell me, the Greenwich Village Study—?

TANKEL: It started out in 1956 and Stanley called together these professionals. They were planners, architects, there were some real estate people, builders. Most of them, first of all I don't remember all of their names. Mary was the treasurer of the group.

HANSEN: Mary Nichols?

TANKEL: Yes….

HANSEN: Were these people that he knew already?

TANKEL: Yes, well, mainly they knew each other through professional organizations and through interests, people that were interested in housing.

HANSEN: And you came here pretty well-connected, you knew a lot of people?

TANKEL: I think so.... Without those connections also nothing would have happened. I mean, Mumford, Eleanor Roosevelt was on our side, she came and spoke to close Washington Square Park. We were able to close Washington Square Park because Stanley, with this group, did a traffic study. It was a traffic study.

HANSEN: The Greenwich Village Study?

TANKEL: Was more than just the traffic study, but that was the part of it that assisted. It had statistics, they brought it in front of the mayor, and the borough president, who was [Hulan] Jack at the time, and it wasn't fly by night. It was saying, "Professional people have gone and counted traffic." It wasn't just homey, feeling about community.

HANSEN: What else was in it?

TANKEL: The traffic study?

HANSEN: The Greenwich Village Study.

TANKEL: Oh, they worked on all kinds of things, housing in the Village. Stanley was very strong on programs for children and young adults. We had a lot of

problems here in terms of where did children fit and what are the schools, what are the playgrounds…. You know there were so many wonderful things happening here at the time, ideas in education, the Greenwich Village Music School, the Greenwich Village Pottery, the Greenwich Village—what were they called, there still doing it, it opened social services, our settlement house, the Greenwich Village Settlement House. The Settlement House movement was going very strong, and here they are. So, all those people, do-gooders.

HANSEN: And those kinds of things were included in the Greenwich Village Study?

TANKEL: Those people, and it was not only that broad, they went out to larger communities to bring their study. So Stanley arranged for these meetings that they had. One was at the New School, one was at Bank Street when it was here. We have a letter from the Bank Street President saying, "We are so pleased to be able to offer this kind of information to our community." It was also very interesting community. There's that school P.S. 41. There was a question at the time, we lost the Rhinelander Estate and they built P.S. 41 there. Which is a marvelous school, still marvelous, needs help, but still marvelous.

HANSEN: So, this was much more than a conventional planning study?

TANKEL: Right, it was this idea that a loose community of professionals could help their own community and bring in their expertise and their help. So, therefore, we had real estate people. You see, it is a very hard thing, because I think—what's his name who was a real estate person was working with them, what was his name, he had a big real estate company? I can't remember his name. It's there, somebody said it at that conference on city law. You remember, he said, "You have to bring in the real estate community. They have to have an investment in this, so that's what

it was." It was difficult, because one of the problems—my husband was a great compromiser. So in some ways it allowed certain things to happen. I don't think that we would have gained as much as we did if we didn't compromise at that time. We didn't compromise on the highway, but it wasn't the whole Village that could be designated.

HANSEN: Now let's go back to the Greenwich Village Study. He [Stanley] was doing this on the side?

TANKEL: Yes, Jane Jacobs was very important in this.

HANSEN: Is that when you met her?

TANKEL: I think that Stanley knew her before, we did know her before.

HANSEN: Before you moved here?

TANKEL: Maybe.

HANSEN: Was she a nearby neighbor?

TANKEL: She was close, yes.

HANSEN: So, the Study, does it exist?

TANKEL: Yes, in 101 West 10th Street at the time we developed the Greenwich Village Study, the first meeting was there. And Hal Edelman, you should speak to him about it. I brought him in. They were luring him with the Jefferson Courthouse. We would not have had the Jefferson Courthouse unless Hal Edelman,

Stanley, were at Pratt. They took two of their graduate students and did a study on the practicability of adapting that building. We would not have that building with the pure glassy-eyed, dreamy keeping the clocktower. That would not have worked. Hal Edelman, make sure you speak to Hal.

HANSEN: He was part of the Greenwich Village Study?

TANKEL: Yes.

HANSEN: Does it exist as a document?

TANKEL: No, I mean I have some of the stuff, but it is all falling apart.

HANSEN: You have things these various groups—?

TANKEL: Well, we have some statements rejected. The statement that Stanley made in front of the—was it Hulan Jack?—we do have his statement.

HANSEN: What was the goal of it? Was it something to present to the City? What was to come out of it?

TANKEL: Well, first of all, one goal was to stop the road going through.

HANSEN: So this was in reaction to Robert Moses? It wasn't done before—?

TANKEL: No, it was before. It was about the same time, about the same time. They didn't meet just because of the road. They met because they saw that they needed to use their expertise. There are newswriters talking about the problems in the Village.

HANSEN: So a broad—

TANKEL: Broad picture first.

HANSEN: And then the issue came up with the park and so everybody put their energy towards that.

TANKEL: But, I also want to say one of the things that they felt strongly about was they are not just for their own community; it was to be used as an example of what every community should be doing.

HANSEN: Well let's talk for a minute about Robert Moses. Now you said that your father thought—

TANKEL: Adored him. Sure.

HANSEN: So, when did he become someone that you heard about a lot or that you knew about. When you moved to the Village in the early fifties was he someone who lots of people were aware of? Was he still considered—?

TANKEL: There were interesting questions. Interesting questions in terms of people interested in housing, interested in the welfare of the city. One of the things that Moses did do was great parkways, great beaches. I mean my family, we went to Orchard Beach, my family went to Jones Beach.

HANSEN: When you were doing that, and your father thought of him in terms of progress, so at the time were people sort of generally aware that the reason they could go to the beach because of Robert Moses?

TANKEL: Definitely aware, but they weren't aware of the whole situation, it was their own situation. Like we came from Mount Vernon, so this fast road to this incredible beach on Long Island Sound was incredible. You know you zip right down, it wasn't just a local little Jones Beach. So people who loved the water and loved the ocean that's how they saw it. And they didn't see it in terms of it in terms of what he was doing to communities.

HANSEN: When did people start to see that?

TANKEL: It's hard for me to say, but we started understanding that he was breaking up whole communities.

HANSEN: So by the time of Washington Square?

TANKEL: Yes, he was at that point…. It was saying, "No." It was saying, "No." It was part of a lot of questions, where we saw things were being lost…. Albert Mayer was an important influence in terms of housing. In fact, my husband had wanted to go to India because Albert had commissions to do housing in India…. Again, a major interest in neighborhood and housing for everyone. So, Mayer was working on it, he was working on it in India, he was given commissions to do housing in India. My husband wanted to go there and actually I thought it was not a good idea because he didn't think that I should go, Stan thought we shouldn't go as a family. That it was a very bad place for a woman, because of all of the kind of disorder that was in India at the time. But, Albert cared about housing, and the preliminary housing that he did in New York City was very important.

HANSEN: Let me ask you about that because of a quote in one of the articles on the Save the Village group. The man that was so involved with that, Arnold

Bergier, he was being evicted from his building for development of a high rise. One of the quotes was, "People are being evicted with sickening regularity from the small scale Village buildings for building high rises." So, given that Stanley was very interested in housing issues, how did that balance out?

TANKEL: Well, it wasn't destroying a community; there were plenty of places where you could build proper housing. In fact, in 1961, it wasn't Jane who worked for the West—there was a committee here, I have a plan, what was it called, MICOVE or something. 1961.

HANSEN: And what was it?

TANKEL: It was a plan for lower and middle class housing in the Village. They were saying we didn't want to destroy the fabric of the Italian community that was below Washington Square. It was Italian, and it was neighborhood people, people just like this man, he was head of the Greenwich Village—one of the small societies. In fact, what I do have is a list of the community organizations that were active at the time, and the people who were active in those communities. And he was active in his community.

HANSEN: What about the Italians? Were they involved in this?

TANKEL: Well, I think that's one of the reasons we went over Passanante. Talk to Tony Dapolito, a major person. In fact, I was very upset when I was invited to the first meeting whenever I was re-involved in this thing, when Tony wasn't invited. I couldn't believe that Tony wasn't invited. He should have been the premier speaker. He was Italian, he was born here, he worked as a community organizer from the beginning.

HANSEN: He has a bakery, right?

TANKEL: He had his famous bakery, still has it.

HANSEN: How did he get involved?

TANKEL: Because he cared. You'll have to speak to Tony. I mean, part of what I am telling you, and my reluctance is several people have spoken and left out so much. I don't want to. Tony will speak for that community, I don't want to speak for that community. I had a friend who stayed in Washington Square South and defied NYU. For years she lived in that lonely building. Alma, whatever her name was.

I worked for Save the Children Federation. I actually worked for them twice. They were on 14th Street and then they moved over to the building across on the east side, Save the Children Federation. Actually, one of the most wonderful inspiring social service organizations started by a Mrs. Cole…. This little lady and her husband started selling old clothes in the south to help young kids. They moved here to become part of the Save the Children organization, which then became national, and international. Inspiring people.

HANSEN: This is the woman who stayed in the building?

TANKEL: No, but Alma worked for them. Alma stayed in the building, you'll find her name. They were furious they couldn't get her out. And by the way, do say, NYU was for the roadway. NYU fought us tooth and nail wanting this roadway, and now they use it [the park]. I'm furious. In fact, one of the things that I asked Vicki [Weiner] to do was NYU owes us a building. The Greenwich Village Historic Society should have a building donated by NYU, because they have used us up.

And I wanted them to have that building they have a fight about now, they want to make the international law building….

HANSEN: Let's go back and take that story from the beginning.

TANKEL: As much as I remember, ask me questions.

HANSEN: In the early—

TANKEL: Ray Rubinow, very important. One of the people, one of the groups this is J.M. Kaplan Fund, who got interested in this was a guy called Ray Rubinow.

HANSEN: Why did he become interested?

TANKEL: I think he and Stanley were friends or involved, and the Kaplan Fund was very involved, very interested in this kind of situation….

HANSEN: So we have the group that Stanley had convened for the Greenwich Village Study, organized, ready to go, and then this battle with Moses comes up. How did they learn about his plans and what were the first steps? Was it something they read in the newspaper?

TANKEL: All those things.

HANSEN: Hearing it from people involved?

TANKEL: Absolutely. Ray Rubinow was a very important. In fact, what was not talked about very much, I guess, was he part of the J. M. Kaplan Fund…. He did not speak in terms of the fund, but he brought all the influence. He's the one who

brought Mrs. Roosevelt. A large part of the people who were accepted—this struggle, and there are a list of all the people in the Jefferson Courthouse, and maybe the Joint Emergency Committee to Save Washington Square Park. Look over their list, it includes not just people were active but—?

HANSEN: Here's the list, in a letter to, I think, the *Times*.

TANKEL: [Looks at the letter.] Yes, but that's not—Jim was not part of it, I am furious with Jim Polshek. I want him crossed off that list.

HANSEN: In terms of what happened though, the spring—

TANKEL: Let me give you a copy of the Joint Committee— I didn't give it to her?

HANSEN: She may have it, I am not sure that I have it.

TANKEL: Because that committee was very strong. The most important thing always of course it takes the heart of the community to touch things and move things, but without the strategy, you are lost. We lost the museum, the Planetarium thing, because the strategy was not in place.

HANSEN: I read a piece that Norman Redlich, his talk to the Society, and he talks a lot about the strategy and how it came about…. He talks about the very specific strategies to reach Carmine DeSapio.

TANKEL: Oh, absolutely.

HANSEN: And the Manhattan Borough President, Jack.

TANKEL: Hulan Jack.

HANSEN: And that all of this was very carefully thought, that it wasn't just, as you said, about procession, but it was a lot of behind the scenes—

TANKEL: Absolutely. And Stanley was the major person in that strategy because we could not have saved it unless it was—

HANSEN: This was to save the park? Norman Redlich was talking about the strategies to get Carmine DeSapio behind the closing park, and also the strategy from the very beginning, saying, "We can close it to traffic." And that by getting a temporary injunction it was basically a done deal, even though it was not legally closed, it was temporarily closed and the buses were out….

He talks about how Jane Jacobs said to him, he was a lawyer, "Find out what we have to do to close this park." And as a lawyer he took a very lawyerly route, researched statutes and things and came back and she said, "No, no. who has the authority to do this?" And then they learned that it was the Board of Estimate, so they put all of their efforts into getting the Board of estimate.

TANKEL: It wasn't that naïve.

HANSEN: What do you mean?

TANKEL: Everybody had their own little agenda with this, but everybody knew that it was the Board of Estimate…. I mean if Norman romanticizes it like this—maybe Norman wasn't aware…. Norman was from Mount Vernon, New York. He knew Stanley…. They may have gone to school together, Norman and Stanley….

The politics was eminent. And speak to Dapolito, you can't speak to Bill Passannante because he just died, but I think Dapolito has more of the real hold on this than Norman.

HANSEN: But what do you remember? Did you go to the meetings?

TANKEL: No, I did not go to the meetings. I was involved with my children, and I was painting. At that time I was going to the New School….

HANSEN: Okay, but at the time when this committee, the Joint Emergency Committee—I don't know everyone on the committee, but were there—all of these were community based activists, they weren't

TANKEL: No, they were famous people in the community. I mean Lewis Mumford wasn't even at—

HANSEN: But I mean they weren't politicians and they weren't in city government or anything like that.

TANKEL: Not really.

HANSEN: Stanley was at RPA [Regional Plan Association] at this time.

TANKEL: No.

HANSEN: He was working for—

TANKEL: His friend Al Gold in Frankfurter. He built the Highgrove-Frankfurter estate in Long Island.

HANSEN: So they knew it was the Board of Estimate that they had to go to?

TANKEL: Oh, yes.

HANSEN: And the best way to get there was through Carmine DeSapio and the Borough President?

TANKEL: Absolutely. I mean the politics was naked. The politics was naked. In fact, I'm upset that Norman would talk about his naiveté. It may be one learns it that way.

HANSEN: Well, and the fact that he was a lawyer maybe that he was thinking that way.

TANKEL: Yes. He was on that committee.

HANSEN: But if you're saying the politics were naked, it doesn't necessarily mean that it was easy.

TANKEL: No, that does not mean it was easy. But after all, Carmine DeSapio was Italian. Do you know what the clubs were? You have to talk to Dapolito…. Dapolito knew the politics of the clubs. I mean, how can one be so naïve to realize that every other block had a club. And every club talked to Carmine DeSapio. He visited them with the limousine. It is very funny because it does reflect on the Clinton thing now.[6] How naïve? We're not naïve, we know it exists….

I think, right now the person who will tell you more about the real political influence in the closing will be Tony Dapolito. That's going to be interesting.

HANSEN: Okay. So I have seen the famous picture of your car—

TANKEL: The last car. We have a lot of them, I'll show you.

HANSEN: I'd like to look at those. Tell me about that day though.

TANKEL: My dog's in the car, too. It was an incredible day and we had this funny little car. I mean, part of what we also believed in was, you know, little cars in the city, no gas-guzzlers. That picture shows not only our funny little car, because Jane bought one after that, but it never became a best seller. Yes it did, the Fiat, but not a great seller and it never went on from there….

HANSEN: So, the car came through, you tied the ribbons which was a real nice—

TANKEL: Who tied the ribbons? We have a picture of it?

HANSEN: Someone's little girl.

TANKEL: Maybe it was Jane's or maybe it was Norman's, but we do have a picture of them tying it. I think Edith Lyons, I'm surprised we don't have Shirley Hayes in there at all. Where was she?

HANSEN: But you were all there, and there were speeches, right?

TANKEL: Yes.

HANSEN: Ed Koch, Carol Greitzer

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[6] In the late 1990s, President Clinton was involved in a scandal with a White House intern.

TANKEL: Did Ed Koch speak? I'm not sure…. By the way, *The Villager* was one of the most important influences in our fight.

HANSEN: Tell me about that.

TANKEL: What's the guy's name whose aunt started the *Villager*? Very strong, very articulate voice of the community. Very important in all these situations. Maybe the *Villager*. Did I say the *Voice* or the *Villager*? It was the *Villager* I meant. Editorialized, talked about the problems in the Village.

See, my husband took this little group that went to Cooper Union. Some place it will tell you they met at Cooper Union. And Bank Street, and they were actually looking for a more formal place for them to meet. When my husband started working on a real job, the Greenwich Village Study actually became deceased.

HANSEN: Okay, so there was never a real—

TANKEL: Maybe for two years.

HANSEN: But no product.

TANKEL: Real products were the closing of the roadway, other things…. They had plans. It was Bob Nichols who did a traffic study…. This is Bob Nichols' study "Viewpoints Predilections of . . ." [Apparently shows Hanson a document.] He's so great, Bob. It's so interesting, because they kept everything as open as possible. Yes, this is the great study by Bob Nichols.

HANSEN: So this map shows the proposed Jefferson Courthouse Library and branch libraries and apartment house buildings under construction, planned, or built since World War II. So the Greenwich Village Study as a group was in existence through at least part of the Jefferson Courthouse efforts.

TANKEL: Yes, definitely.

HANSEN: And then—

TANKEL: Here's the Bank Street letter from Niemeyer saying thank you for doing this kind of thing. Here's the Metcop [sic?] meeting, the first meeting Jane and Stanley talked. [Reads:] "The role of Greenwich Village Study project in the planning and retaining of the neighborhood values historic and traditional community."

HANSEN: So, this is 1958, this is just prior to the publication of Jane's book?

TANKEL: Yes…. [Apparently shows photograph.] Here's the rally for a library in Jefferson Courthouse. Burnham is dead.

HANSEN: Tell me about Alan Burnham. When did you and Stanley meet him?

TANKEL: He was a very interesting man. Very interesting. Particularly the landmarks stuff.

HANSEN: I am curious how much contact you all had with the Municipal Art Society, or the Brooklyn Heights people, other people doing this.

TANKEL: Well, what his name, Brooklyn Heights knows—

HANSEN: Otis Pearsall?

TANKEL: Yes. In fact they used Stanley's photograph in their thirtieth anniversary, the photograph of Stanley with the mayor signing [the landmarks law]. They used it and they cut out this man that we don't know. If you talk to Margot Gayle who says she took all the photographs, ask her who this man is. I mean Margot says she took all the photographs, and nobody can identify this guy.

HANSEN: When did you meet Alan Burnham?

TANKEL: Well, that was more professional with my husband. Definitely…. The Greenwich Village Study, they had stationary. That's how official they were. [Shows Hanson letterhead.]

HANSEN: Let me read this into the tape. This is organizations with an interest in Village Planning. [Reads:] "We have Borough President's Local Planning Board Two; Washington Square Association, Inc, Alexander Neimeyer, President"—

TANKEL: Neimeyer. Very important person in the Washington Square struggle.

HANSEN: Through this organization, the Washington Square Association?

TANKEL: Yes.

HANSEN: [Continues reading:] "Greenwich Village Association," which Stanley later became the Vice- President, "The Greenwich Village Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Lewis Solomon President."

TANKEL: This is saying when you go into a community and you're interested, find out all the people who are interested in the same thing that you are. These are your friends. And in fact that's one of the most important things that Stanley did, all over, even with the Gateway….

HANSEN: Okay. Then we have [continues reading] "Downtown Commercial Association, Tony Dapolito; Washington Square Neighbors, Thomas Brennan, President." That was a group revitalized to oppose the Title One Project at Washington Square South…. And then "Washington Square Park Committee, Shirley Hayes. Other groups with interest in planning problems are the PTA of P.S. 41, Progressive Era Club, the Tamawa Club, the New School, NYU, the Cooper Union and other Village institutions."

Now what were yours and Stanley's political involvement at this time? Were you involved with the reform movement, or the Village Independent Democrats?

TANKEL: Actually not, I think we were both Democrats.

HANSEN: But not at—

TANKEL: They did work. Stanley did work but not…. In fact, the Village Independent Democrats did come later. I guess you really should talk to Carol [Greitzer].

HANSEN: I have seen things from her. But, as part of this, were there any political activists involved with the Greenwich Village Study group?

TANKEL: I don't think I remember. Mary Nichols. Mary at the time was working for Bill Passanante. Very strong, I mean Bill Passanante can not be forgotten in this story. In fact, she wanted me to work for Bill….

HANSEN: Let's talk a little bit about, you sort of alluded to this earlier, what it was like for a woman at this time and how you fit into all these things that were happening. You were painting, I guess.

TANKEL: Yes, I started painting.

HANSEN: You weren't quite as active as say, well, definitely as your husband, but maybe some other women. But what was all of that like?

TANKEL: Well, Jane and Mary were new women, there's just no doubt about it. They were both much more—like Bob Nichols was definitely on the right side, but Mary was an activist and you know she had these three children that she dragged around or whatever. We have wonderful stories about Mary's kids and she had this big Volkswagen that she dragged them around in. Who they were, definitely they were women that didn't fit into the categories.

HANSEN: Was that inspiring for you?

TANKEL: No. [Laughs] It wasn't because first of all Mary was too—how to say it without being critical?—I actually didn't approve of Mary as a mother. I think you'd better not put that in.

HANSEN: Okay. But it is an important point I think, to see how they were viewed by other women.

TANKEL: Well, maybe, maybe it's important but my children attest to it and maybe her children—they were scared, actually at the memorial, they did talk about their fear because their mother was threatened.

HANSEN: By whom was she threatened?

TANKEL: Robert Caro will tell you that story, that the children were fearful for their mother. Or for their own lives, in point of fact. And I don't know how much I disapproved, if that's a good word, but I didn't really think that was the way to go.

HANSEN: What about Jane Jacobs?

TANKEL: Wherever Jane was, I never saw her as a mother. I mean she was an active woman, doing writing for *Progressive Architecture*. She's very abrasive. I may be considered abrasive now, or aggressive, but I never thought that would win. She turned off as many people to her ideas as she turned them on. In fact, as you know, Lewis Mumford disapproved of Jane and Jane's vision. And actually, he shouldn't have, because he had very much the same vision. It was just she was so—in fact, at one point she had my husband crying, she was so unreasonable. Yes. Maybe this shouldn't even be published, but she was talking to him in point of fact, "If you write a press release you've got to do it this way, this way, and this way. You didn't write it right." But, she didn't say it constructively. She was saying to him, "You're stupid, you don't know how to write it." And actually, that may have been true, but the whole point of it is how do you work together to write it so it's effective. Not just saying, "Oh, you know, you never send a two page"—it had to do with a two page press release—"nobody will read the two pages." You know, there's a way to do these things. So, I did not think that was a way to win it.

HANSEN: What about people like Shirley Hayes and Edith Lyons and some of the other ones? How did you view their activism?

TANKEL: They were softer in terms of—they knew what they wanted, and they certainly wanted the right thing for the community, but it wasn't, the political fight was a very awful fight, and I shouldn't fault either Mary or Jane, because once you fight politically you start being angry…. How do we get people not to do the dirty tricks? I don't know. I have a fault with the woman's movement. I think that some of our big hazards have to do with—it's what's her name, who wrote the book?

HANSEN: Which book?

TANKEL: *The Feminine Mystique.*

HANSEN: Oh, Betty Friedan.

TANKEL: I don't know if that wins it. I mean certainly very important, certainly very important and it had to be said and maybe things have to be said, they have to be balanced. So, only if you hear this very strong thing does this other thing happen.

HANSEN: And you say that Stanley was a compromiser, so I am sure that there were lots of men who were also very difficult and very harsh.

TANKEL: That is true.

HANSEN: Well, Margot Gayle told me that when she was forming her various committees they would always get a man to be the spokesperson, just to make things happen, but the women, but it was always clear that the women were going to do all the grunt work.

TANKEL: Well, you know I don't know. Partially, the women weren't speaking up in amazing ways. There were many that weren't speaking up, and they were the drudge—I don't call drudge, but they were that part of the community that had to be heard, women had to be heard….

I think women were learning. I think learning in a very interesting way. I know we went to a meeting, after the Women's Strike for Peace, incredible example.

HANSEN: Do you know approximately when that was?

TANKEL: No.

HANSEN: Was it—

TANKEL: They went to Washington, it's all over the place, but I don't know when. When we left, and this may follow what Margot was saying, when we went they told us to get all dressed up. Now, I never wore white gloves and a hat in all my life. I mean I came back from Harvard wearing only black.

An influence in my life was a woman named Lucia Vertareli [sic?] who was an artist with Italian background. And she lived in Westbeth, too, but her husband, Ernst Hacker, was from Europe and he came here and studied with Stanley at Harvard and what did Lucia come with? Black clothes. Here I am at Harvard, I'm wearing everything the correct way that Jewish Princesses [do], because I was definitely a Jewish Princess, so I had a cashmere sweater, I had pearls, I had saddle shoes that were dirty. I took one look at Lucia: black stockings, black—you know. And where did she get it? She bought it in a mourning, an Italian mourning store. And wow! And the interesting thing is, she started to go to Lord & Taylor, my mother worked for Lord & Taylor, so I got all the stuff wholesale, part of my marvelous outfit had to do with my mother working for Lord & Taylor. Lucia

wanted to go to my mother to get all her stuff, and I started wearing black. Only black.

It was so wonderful, it was such a wonderful statement. It was saying—black stockings were like 25 cents—it was saying you don't have to wear cashmere sweaters. You could fit in. This whole idea of fashions at the time, very important. Stanley was in Europe and England and they just wrote about—what's his name?—direct ties. Did you read that fashion article? Well in England you know what the different regiments. So you knew right away when you were in England, the ties. A guy would walk in and you would know where he fit in, whether Oxford, Yale….

HANSEN: So, you came to the Village, you're wearing all black. I'm curious, talking about what women were starting to learn and think about and change. I think it was probably very different here than in other places. And it had a strong influence on all of these women being able to put their energy into these civic, or very sort of political, civic actions.

TANKEL: Absolutely. I mean, one of our role models and the thing that people don't understand, Edna St. Vincent Millay didn't write squishy-washy like things in her heart, she wrote the Sacco-Vanzetti poem. It really disturbs me that people don't see the politics, and it's there in all our art, in all our music, in all our literature. The politics is written, so we don't just sit and nod at a concert....

HANSEN: So, I am picturing your life. You were not directly involved in all of this, but I'm imagining that Stanley is going to meeting after meeting and coming home and telling you what happened. And you're having long discussions into the night—

TANKEL: Absolutely.

HANSEN: —about all the ideas and—

TANKEL: Okay, a very important influence in my life is Jane Austen. Isn't it interesting that it comes up now and how do we see it now as the kind of mode? But, I used to wake Stanley up in the middle of the night. He'd be sleeping and he was going to Harvard, and I'd wake him up and I'd say, "You've got to hear this passage, how funny it is. How it represents our lives." Just as you said, in terms of women, the sense that is so important is that Jane's is as the whole world knows, a woman without a man, without a husband . . I mean that's what you're looking for. And that's what we were fighting, we didn't know it again, but it did hit, it did resound, it did make me think.

HANSEN: So do you think then that this sort of activism by women for preservation in Greenwich Village was related to this larger movement?

TANKEL: I don't think so, not related like you're talking, not directly. But, it's just like Einstein: the unified field, all things are happening, all these ideas are happening at the same time, various connections are made.

The thing that's so interesting to me is that with my study with Einstein how many people resound to that. I'm not studying Einstein for the science, I'm studying Einstein for the philosophy. How eventually, hopefully, the people who have like interests do meet, do talk, do correspond, do get nourishment from the others of the same ilk.

I was a Janeite. When I came back to the Village, and this is even later, this is when I started working, there's a whole group of people who meet periodically about Jane Austen. They have Jane Austen dinners, they have Jane Austen costumes, they have Jane Austen whatever. All of the sudden I went to one of these dinners and this is going to be also questionable, not fair, but I realized, that's not why I like Jane. I didn't want reproduce her history, her stories. I mean, on the contrary, to move on from there. So, I don't know where I fit in all this, to explain

where women fit in all this. Eventually, we all maybe meet and talk and hopefully make the connections and maybe we move on. When you think its positive, when I feel positive I feel that, but I don't feel positive.

HANSEN: I think a related idea is the idea of proximity and what that meant just in terms of the Italian renaissance in Florence and how just proximity of people to one another created this thing. I think, and maybe it's a stretch, but that the argument could be made in terms of the Village. Things were happening in Brooklyn Heights, but the sort of politics and the character of this place and the proximity of people to each other created this moment where a lot of activism flourished.

TANKEL: I think the interesting thing about Brooklyn is that it actually did not have the visibility of the Village. Because a lot of very interesting things were happening as what's his name [Otis Pratt Pearsall] will tell you…. Our visibility worked against us in most terms.

HANSEN: How so?

TANKEL: Because the personalities were so strong here. There was less individual super-star thing happening in Brooklyn….

Of course, we were so lucky to be in the Village. People were speaking out. We came from a place where people did speak out, we're bold. It wasn't Americana, it was international.

HANSEN: And so many of these strong personalities were attracted here for the same reasons?

TANKEL: International. I never realized that, but that's what brought us here, into this place.

HANSEN: This sort of confluence of like-minded people, there was again the proximity, there was opportunity to make all these connections, to form groups, to have meetings, and people who were connected politically and were sophisticated thinkers politically….

TANKEL: But people out there had a different view of what they wanted.

HANSEN: We should get back a little to this project, I know I'm getting off the subject too, but it's very interesting.

TANKEL: It is interesting. It's a lot of issues that you brought up. This women's issue all of the sudden I see why I thought it was important, but I never thought of it the way you were questioning me. Of course, what happened to me, my husband died in 1968 and I had to take care of the kids, I had no choice. Mary [Nichols?] had gotten me a job. We had met New Year's Eve, the Goodman's had a New Year's Eve party every New Year's Eve and the New Year's Eve of 1967-68. Mary tells this story, and I have never challenged her. My husband knew that he had a bad heart and Mary says—and we did not realize, the family, my children and myself, nobody realized this with Stan—but he was taking medication for his heart. I met Mary and Mary asked me if I would work, would I consider working for her. I always think this should be a very visible instance of how people get jobs, and I always told people how I got my job: influence. Let's name it, let's say how people got there. Not everybody—

HANSEN: But a lot.

TANKEL: A lot. How did people get there? So, it was a New Year's Eve party. Mary asked me if I would come to work for her. It was an interesting time in my life because all of the sudden I realized I didn't want to be a painter. I had fairly good responses to my artwork and I had studied in London, which was very interesting. To study art in London, the Slade School of Art.

So, while Stanley was working in Planning I was working with the arts community. It was fascinating. In England, I was drawing from Greek statues. In New York, I was painting whatever I wanted to paint. We just took red, white, and blue, yellow paint big canvases. We'd just draw…. Then I'd go to London and you'd sit down and you'd quietly draw from Greek statues. Incredible, the contrasts that were happening all over the place….

[End of Session]

INTERVIEWEE: Claire Tankel
INTERVIEWER: Laura Hanson
LOCATION: New York, New York
DATE: 20 February 1998

HANSEN: So we're going to talk about Save the Village for just a minute. It's particularly, given his [Stanley's] sort of humanistic view of planning, and he's quoted a number of times as talking about wanting to preserve the scale of the Village. The Save the Village efforts to change the zoning. Was he involved in the strategizing behind this?

TANKEL: Oh, absolutely. There used to be hundreds of maps, they're colored maps, all these maps that Greenwich Village Study. There used to be, I don't know what happened, and it may still be there. I was overwhelmed at a point and I couldn't deal—where is the map I was just showing you? [Points to map.] See, there, they had heights of buildings, traffic, where children lived. This group of people went out and produced volumes of this map.

HANSEN: So, essentially by doing that they were talking about the Village as a place.

TANKEL: Yes.

HANSEN: And talking about scale, and—

TANKEL: Where people lived. How could you make decisions unless you know who lives where? Where do they need schools? Where do they need all kinds of projects. Where do they need parks? Where do they need playgrounds? There was a whole thing, they wanted to create an art center….

HANSEN: The Save the Village group that came together like Arnold Bergier, Doris Diether—

TANKEL: Oh, Doris is important.

HANSEN: —those were very different people than were involved in the study. So how were all these kinds—

TANKEL: No, I think there was definitely—

HANSEN: Overlap

TANKEL: It was not that separate, although, some of the work done was done separately. But they always brought their work out to the community. So, all these communities were invited to seminars, discussions, workshops. So, it wasn't closed, it was an open forum. That was the most important thing that Stanley was talking about.

HANSEN: And I would think that at the time zoning was really a foreign concept to the average person.

TANKEL: Oh, absolutely.

HANSEN: So, did they have kind of educational forums?

TANKEL: Oh, absolutely.

HANSEN: Did he see zoning, this effort to downgrade the zoning, as a critical piece?

TANKEL: Oh, absolutely. Oh, they were based on that. I mean part of the thing that was going to be was everything was going to go up stories and stories. I mean, NYU wanted to build everything up. In fact, one of the big quarrels was the Labor Library at the corner library there. Jane will never forgive Stanley for allowing that library.

HANSEN: What do you mean, his allowing it?

TANKEL: Well, the politics. Jane always felt that—

HANSEN: He was on the commission?

TANKEL: It wasn't the commission, was it? Did that come up later? Yes, I don't remember. But that may have been that they let it go.

HANSEN: So, why did he compromise on that? What was his reasoning?

TANKEL: Well, it was all give and take, all the time. To tell you the truth, I really didn't listen to a lot of that. First of all, it became such an angry—and Stanley was never angry. When you hear anything about Stanley—he just didn't fight like that. He didn't fight like that, he was a reasonable person.

HANSEN: Now, my sense, my just impression from reading about him, is that the fact that he took this sort of broad view, almost like a bird's eye view of what was happening, where as a lot of preservation battles are very site specific and therefore much more prone for people to get angry and sort of really intense about this one. Because it's a defensive position, whereas he was looking at this bigger picture.

TANKEL: Well, there's a reason why you're interviewing me. I'm learning, but I think that you have caught it. It's interesting, because that is not the way I was seeing it. I wasn't seeing it just as you described it. I saw it closer to the side….

One of the things that Stanley meant, too, was this is, as I said to you at the beginning, this is not a lonely individual fight. We're fighting as an example for what people have got to fight for. And the fact is that this landmark building is not the role of the people on West 81st Street, and too bad that those people were bought out. That they run at the Museum every Wednesday. They meet for cocktails, too bad….

[Pause in recording]

HANSEN: Okay, now I know you don't want to talk about the Greenwich Village Association, but I have one particular question. I read somewhere that in '62, and that was the time when Stanley was on the mayoral committee that was sort of the pre-commission, that he was taken off the Greenwich Village Association, and this article implied that the liberal voices were pushed out and the old guard came back in. Do you recall that?

TANKEL: No.

HANSEN: Okay. I just wondered if it might have had something to do with the fact that he was on this mayoral commission. Well, let's talk about the mayoral commission. That was with Mr. Van Derpool [James Grote Van Derpool] and that was appointed by the mayor to study the issue of landmarks law. Now why was Stanley chosen to be on that?

TANKEL: God knows!

HANSEN: Was it a surprise to him and you?

TANKEL: No, he took it naturally. Partially is that people must have realized that maybe because of the Greenwich Village Study, maybe because of his work with the Regional Plan Association, and he was working for Regional Plan at that time. It's quite possible, because of his work with Regional Plan Association, that's why he was selected. Regional Plan Association was a very powerful, political—on the right side. One of the most wonderful things about Regional Plan at the time—Kim Morton was the president, very interesting man, comes from the Kim Morton background, the architect. His mother was a musician. His grandmother was one of the first women landscape architects in America. Blueblood, whatever you call it. Princeton breed. Marvelous character, Kim. Kim was president of Regional Plan, which was full of the most important people in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and maybe the world. Rich people, do-gooders, very important people. The Durst people….

So, here's Kim and he's president, and here's Stanley, a man of the people. My husband was from the wrong side of the tracks in that group. It was such a remarkable, wonderful story, because they chose him to do the work of the Second Regional Plan. And here he came with this common denominator, and Kim came with the power and they had the elements. It was so wonderful.

HANSEN: So, was he recruited by Kim to be the director?

TANKEL: Yes, he was. But, he had done this very famous study. It was a wonderful study.

HANSEN: Oh, the "Race for Open Space," that study—

TANKEL: Yes, very important study. There's where he brought in pictures. You know, usually when you get these studies you get maps and graphs, but he brought in poetry and pictures. That influenced a lot of the people he selected, because the people that you select have the same vision. And of course one of the wonderful pictures used for the study is the Eugene Smith picture of the children walking idyllically through the forest. Now, Eugene Smith is a very interesting photographer. I love his work because he photographed the effects of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. That was the last great work of this great photographer. And in a way, this idyllic picture of this white little boy and little girl walking through the forest—but he did let them me use that. I mean, his estate let me use that picture for when I struggled to get Stanley's park. So, that study was a very—in fact, that is the beginning of the environmental movement, so it's not only what we're talking about….

HANSEN: And, again, represents a very broad vision of how all of this fits together.

TANKEL: Right….

HANSEN: You mentioned that Stanley and you had thought of what they were doing here as a model for other communities, but was he involved in these efforts to go and visit other places like New Orleans and Charleston and Boston who had been pioneers in preservation law and that kind of planning. Did he do those kinds of trips?

TANKEL: Oh, absolutely, all the time.

HANSEN: As part of this committee?

TANKEL: No, as part of life.

HANSEN: But, I think that this group was, as they were formulating the law, they were talking to, and looking at these—

TANKEL: Oh, absolutely….

[Pause in recording]

HANSEN: So, after the mayoral committee the law passed and Stanley was appointed a commissioner on the very first commission.

TANKEL: Vice-chair.

HANSEN: Okay, now he was very young, much younger than the other—

TANKEL: Yes, I think so.

HANSEN: So, again, was that a surprise to you?

TANKEL: No. Quite frankly I mean I really feel that we thought he knew what he was doing. And we believed at that time that if you did the right thing (isn't there a song or something, "Do the Right Thing?") and if did the right thing, people would recognize it.

So, it was not a surprise. It was this kind of reaffirming, if you worked hard enough and sang so long enough your dreams will come true, you know.

HANSEN: Was he sort of considered a representative of the Village?

TANKEL: I think it was broader than that. Oh, definitely broader than that. I mean, all of the sudden, as I said to you, I really do believe it happened because of Regional Plan. Not just Stanley alone, not at all.

HANSEN: But certainly all the things that he had been involved with here [Greenwich Village] and getting a lot of experience in issues in preservation.

TANKEL: Yes.

HANSEN: Did he remain involved in these various groups, or did he have to stop?

TANKEL: Oh, that was one of the things that wore him out. Everything. He was involved in everything.

HANSEN: It sounds like it was non-stop.

TANKEL: And the thing is that so many people felt close to him so that a lot of the stuff was informal. You know, the informal kind of network was just so, that was so important…. This is something that Stanley thought of very strongly, all these social issues. In fact, that's one of the things that Stanley said, one of his great speeches that he made, which I use as a quote. At the end of it he said "Listen, we've got to bring the social planners in. We have to bring the broadest picture in what we're doing." He says, "I don't want to talk to these people, I need them myself."

HANSEN: He was saying this as part of this early Commission?

TANKEL: He was saying it as part of Regional Plan Association and what they should be doing. Which meant he broke this into whatever the Landmarks Commission was. That was his view of things, yes.

HANSEN: Was he involved in helping to draft the legislation?

TANKEL: Oh, yes, definitely.

HANSEN: Did he talk to you about that?

TANKEL: No.

HANSEN: I'm curious but this is kind of a personal question—

TANKEL: Go ahead.

HANSEN: —when you all would be up late at night discussing all these things did you usually agree with him? Or did you argue with him?

TANKEL: Well, that's a very interesting question, because we used to talk all the time. We tried to be at dinner including with the children, so the children heard these conversations. Not that they'd become planners or anything, but it was the time of the high school revolution and my son and daughter were part of it. It was a little before they were in high school, but we got a letter from Josh's school, junior high school, saying, "Your son refuses to stand up and salute the flag." And around the dinner table Stanley did say to Josh, "You know, you could just stand up. Don't make a big thing out of it." But, it became a big thing for him, for Josh. That in a way, it was negating a lot of stuff. But he saw it, it would effect one's life. It's right

down there in your report. This principal says, " We want you to know your child is not saluting the flag." So, we spoke about these things….

I respect my children more than anybody and in fact I think I've learned more from my children…. My children have shaped me more, whoever I am now, as far as a woman, as an activist, as a preservationist, as an historian.

HANSEN: Now, how old were they when he died?

TANKEL: Oh, thirteen and fourteen, I forget.

HANSEN: So, they were old enough to be listening to these conversations and to have an opinion about them.

TANKEL: I don't know, you'd have to talk to them. We don't talk a lot about it. I think it's very sore. My husband died overnight; there was no opportunity to talk about it. They went to bed one night, and they woke up the next morning and their father was dead. It was terrible. It was terrible.

HANSEN: We were talking about when he was on the Commission. What were his relations with the other Commissioners, like Geoffrey Platt and at the Planning Department? Like Jack Felt and those people?

TANKEL: Well, of course Jack Felt was the premier developer and real estate and there were all these stories about who these people were. Who you have dinner with, it effects what you're thinking, what you're designing, what you're doing. I think that Stanley always had a good relationship with all them, because he was not confrontational. He tried to win you over. He always tried to win you over to whatever he thought the right side was. But the others were much stronger. I think that if any measure that Stanley kept them as honest as they could be.

HANSEN: There was one quote, I forget who it's from in these papers, something to the effect that he was the spirit—

TANKEL: Kim.

HANSEN: Okay, so there was an appreciation for his sort of inspirational qualities.

TANKEL: Absolutely.

HANSEN: What about Mayor Wagner? Did he have contact with him? Did he talk about him?

TANKEL: Oh, all the time, sure. And the governor, you know, Rockefeller.

HANSEN: That was through RPA though, not necessarily the Commission?

TANKEL: Not necessarily the Commission, no. RPA. But when people start dividing these things it's—let's be realistic. Let's be realistic…. I don't know how to measure it, influence. One of our problems today is that the people that we taught influence are now using it against us. This decentralization. I was at Bed-Stuy at these important meetings, I couldn't believe it. We did think that if people controlled their education community that they would do the right thing again. But the mixture of politics and money—

I'll tell you this quote, I'll quote myself. It was so disturbing, because I was at one of these community meetings where they were talking about curriculum, what kind of curriculum should happen. Jackie Onassis was famous at that time, she was a horseback rider, and the little group that I sat in on wanted horseback riding…. I love horseback riding, and my children went horseback riding. We did

it, and my daughter even used to horseback ride through Central Park. But, it was such a revelation as to what becomes important. To them it was an important, socially significant, that's the way you made it. It wasn't if you did hard work and learn—they wanted that, too, English and Math, but what else? There were all these attributes of a good life, and they weren't prepared to make a great decision on any of these things. So, I wrote a form of plea to decentralization, it's that we didn't prepare for this…. We know what makes good education. We know it happens in prisons, we know it happens in the fields, we know it happens everywhere if you make it interesting. If we don't know what happens in the field, if we don't know how corn grows can you imagine the wonderful excitement, if kids could really go to a cornfield and know.

HANSEN: And you were saying that earlier about history as well.

TANKEL: One of the great women in New York was a woman who ran the Floating Foundation for Art, Maggie Sherwood, who brought photography into the prison. She took this little floating barge up to—what's the prison at Sing-Sing?—and she got the prisoners to take photographs. She did a book of photographs by them. One of the most moving statements is a prisoner who said, "I was more than a nothing." How can we make people feel that they are more than a nothing? [Begins crying] Now, why do I have to cry? I don't know.

HANSEN: Because, it's poignant.

TANKEL: It's so poignant. It's so poignant. You go into an inner city school and they can write—I mean I work with Teacher's and Writers Collaborative. *Nobody Knows Who I Am*. It's a famous book. How do we make people realize that they're—Andy Warhol says we're all famous, how do we make them all feel like

that's true? We don't, we just don't let it happen. People get so involved. But historic preservation will keep it going.

HANSEN: You think?

TANKEL: Only if we know these examples. I really want Doris Friedman's family, and I've thought about it often, to write about her. I can't, I've undertaken too much. You know they are following up with the Indians. Ric Burns' group and, Joe Siegel, is that name familiar? You know, Ric Burns is doing a film, and they did follow up. I got on the phone with him, and I couldn't stop and he can't listen. They'll do it.

I can't stop, I feel like I'm this historic machine, you know. And I feel lucky, because I think that we were at this wonderful point. But Doris Friedman's example is what is the Department of Cultural Affairs supposed to do with the cultural institutions? The Department of Cultural Affairs is supposed to oversee the American Museum of Natural History, and the Planetarium. They're supposed to defend this building, and they didn't even make an attempt. You know, at least put it up for competition….

HANSEN: I'm going to interrupt you just we can get back to this real quickly. I want to talk a little bit more about when Stanley was on the Commission and the Historic District designation for the Village came up. You said earlier that he was a compromiser and that he made some people mad, some of his old friends in fact. Tell me about that, what happened?

TANKEL: Yes. Oh, we know it, I mean, Jane [Jacobs] was just furious. I mean I don't even think they even talked again, she was so angry.

HANSEN: Why did he want to compromise?

TANKEL: Because, he was with all these people who know the real estate. All of the people with the money, all the people with the power. How could you persuade these people with the power and the money and everything to give it up? I mean they were so scared stiff that all their investments, all their, you know, their wildest dreams about the city would never come true. This would be a literal example, and it wouldn't be little, it would be a powerful example. So people couldn't just do with their property just what they wanted to. Don't forget, we're from a point where people thought that they could do whatever they wanted with their property. America thought that it's your property, you could do whatever you want with it.

HANSEN: So, he was afraid of losing the whole battle.

TANKEL: Yes.

HANSEN: Was he also concerned, like Harman Goldstone, with the vulnerability of the law, itself? There was a—

TANKEL: See, these are legal questions. To tell you the truth, I can't stand the legal questions. I went to court to hear this thing against the Planetarium and I really feel they missed it all….

HANSEN: No, but I can understand how people like Mr. Goldstone and others were worried that this would be a chance for anti-preservationists to just completely destroy the law, which had taken years to put into place.

TANKEL: They have.

HANSEN: Okay, but I mean, at this time, the idea of compromise. You're saying that Stanley's idea of compromise was a little bit different than this worry about the law. His was more about education, in terms of helping people understand.

TANKEL: He might have worried about the law, but we would not have discussed it. And if he discussed it with me, I probably—I have a lot of distrust of the law….

HANSEN: Okay, the two arguments that were in the press frequently were Whitney North Seymour was saying that the Village was a place and the character and the street patterns and all of this was one thing and Harmon Goldstone was saying, "We're going to break it up so that we only get the really excellent pieces of architecture." Now where did he come in?

TANKEL: Okay, you have to know the backgrounds of these two guys. I mean Seymour is from a very wonderful—his father was a very incredible lawyer who would understand this. Harmon Goldstone would—their backgrounds are totally different.

HANSEN: And Stanley was sort of in the middle of those two—

TANKEL: And you could speak to Seymour's son, he's right here. It's the father I'm talking about mostly. It would be important to see his position because he was really a very interesting man….

HANSEN: Well, let's stop here….

[End of Session]