

SMR and Ellen interview in their home Monday, 02/18/13 - President's Day exhaustion had already set in from my two overnights at the hotel the nights previous to this interview.....

AM:

If you wouldn't mind introducing yourself.

SMR:

Sure, I'm Stephen Raphael, I'm a lawyer and real estate developer in New York. And I also teach at NYU and this is my partner and wife Ellen Marks who will introduce herself.

Ellen:

Hi, I'm Ellen Marks, I am also an attorney and the wife of Stephen Raphael and a partner in our law firm. And we know you very well because you worked with us for several years

AM:

Right

Ellen:

making our practice much easier to deal with than usual

SMR:

and more fun

AM:

Thank you very much.

AM:

Do you guys want to talk a little bit about that. You hired me out of NYU when I, after I graduated from my Masters, you plucked me out. So do you want to talk about why you wanted me or...why you hired an artist.

SMR:

You only get a sense of a person by watching them work in what they do, and at the time you were working for the Department of Fine Arts at NYU and I ..every time I called you about something that I needed to get done I thought now this is really an intelligent and entertaining person that it would be terrific to have her working for me. And, then I thought we really did need someone to work on various legal projects, but it wasn't necessary to understand the legal aspects of it before // we could teach what those were and I spoke to you about it and I had no idea whether you would think this was a good idea or a bad idea and much to my pleasure you decided to do it.

AM:

And to mine, it was a good time. For how many years was it? I think it was three / four years?

SMR:

three years, three years

AM:

That's a long time, and thankfully they only hired me for a good salary and three days a week.

Ellen:

Well we were very flexible because I really have disliked most of the paralegals that I have hired during our practice and I in fact had taken the stand that I was just not going to bother with doing that at all, until Stephen convinced me that I would enjoy having you around. And, in fact, you were, not only fabulous to cheer me up everyday and to teach me how to knit.

AM:
Right, laugh.

Ellen:
But, also you were wonderful dealing with various annoying clients who I did not have the patience to deal with and the attorney general's office who you were much more charming to then I could possibly be. So we do miss you.

AM:
awe, it was fun, and because of the job we became friends and we went to Barcelona, well - Stephen and Ellen, well you two - I am talking in the third person and I don't know, anyway. But - we - you guys went on vacation to Spain and Barcelona and then I went and met you. So, now, we've traveled together, in a sense. And you guys took me to the most fabulous restaurant, I forget what the name was.

SMR:
You mean the restaurant with all the seafood...

AM:
Where they just started putting plates down in front of us. (Cal Pep)

SMR:
Yes.

AM:
At first, I believe, the first dish was snails.

SMR:
It moved very slowly across the plate.

Ellen:
And the people seated across from us, you and I, Allison, decided that they were probably in some sort of perhaps not particularly legal profession.

AM:
Maybe the Russian mob.

Ellen:
Maybe the Russian mob.
But they turned out to be ...

AM:
Surgeons, or the man was a surgeon.

Ellen:
The man was a surgeon, right.

SMR:
All from Turkey.

AM: Right.

Ellen:
He was really great.

AM:

We had some good run ins and then we met the Israeli in the hotel.

Ellen:

Art dealer.

AM:

Who vanished off the face of the Earth.

SMR:

It demonstrates that it's hard not to have a good time in BCN.

AM:

It's true, it's true.

AM:

So, back to work, would you - I don't know - I guess - maybe I'm not a quintessential artist, in that I can do office work or that I have the patience to do it - or that I actually like people and can have a conversation with them over the phone whether it's about work or not, but would you guys hire another artist?

SMR:

You know. This is an interesting question because I have a theory about hiring people.

SMR:

Which is that you can always bring people to do the things that you need technically to get done but what really is important is to find people who are intelligent and have a refreshing attitude towards things, if you do that and you're reasonably sensitive to their needs that works out a lot better. And I've always thought that one of the major problems in employment is the people insist on their employees having enormous amounts of experience, but in reality most people don't get experience until somebody allows them to get experience where it's sort of the chicken and the egg.

Ellen:

And I think that having an artistic sensibility and some standards for aesthetics is really significant and important in dealing with, with, people in general and in perhaps having some other point of view about legalistic things.

AM:

Right, so, because I am sure my approach to the law, or to the things that I was working on were probably a little different than your approach too, so you know its like that thinking out of the box perspective where, we, you guys clearly think outside of the box constantly, I know your ideas of solving problems are amazing and every problem can be solved, I know - we've experienced that together, but, but also, like an artist's point of view is to approach everything, one topic, from many ways. And I guess to just solve the problem, no matter what it is, it's like well, let's just deal with the problem and move on.

SMR:

Well, you know, basically, the way you solve problems, is you make its own box.

I remember years ago, we were in the Czech Republic, and we were working on a project involving the, some properties that the Czech Republic owned, they wanted to lease out to other people. This was shortly after the fall of the iron curtain and the velvet revolution, and we looked at these things and there were no answers to them because in the Czech Republic there were no laws that sort of told you how you did these things. So you had to, you had to do it backwards and you had to sit there and say well, alright, if I want this to work, what type of law do I have to develop, create, have someone do, in order to make this happen. But you know its the reverse of using what's there you have to think of what's not there and how to make it there.

AM:

That's sort of like the artist's process in general, ok I know what I want the end result to be, now how do I get there.

SMR:

That's right.

AM:

By the way, we are sitting in your living room, that is so beautiful and I'm facing you two, which is a good view, but this view is outstanding. Could you describe where we are?

SMR:

We are on 49th Street, and the East River. We are looking at the United Nations and we are looking directly south, from here if you look out the window you can see the entire East River, Queens, the, portions of Brooklyn, the first bridge you see is the Williamsburg Bridge, if you look all the way down - directly to the right of the United Nations, you can just see the first columns of the Brooklyn Bridge, which are just coming out, the catenary that you see over there. On the very right, you can see the downtown Manhattan area, you can see the little top of the Woolworth Building, and the downtown buildings beyond that. So you can really see all the way to the end, on a clearer day.

AM:

Clearer? Clearer than this?

SMR:

You can actually see pieces of Staten Island.

AM:

oh. wow. This is gorgeous.

So, Stephen, so, ok, so we are in your house, there are so many books in here.

It's, ok, if you're not looking out the window with the beautiful view, the rest of the walls are covered with gorgeous art pieces, books and your collections of toys, but in the office at Raphael and Marks, are also a lot of books, so - knowing you, I know the books you read and you can probably just describe every single building outside of this view, if we had enough time today.

SMR:

That's probably true, which is good reason to cut me off at that point.

AM:

No but, I mean the amount of knowledge that the two of you have combined is impressive. About the city, about real estate, about travel, about food, I mean it's endless, we could sit here all day, I'm happy to come back. Note: if you'd have me!?

SMR:

Anytime.

AM:

Thank you.

Ellen:

So you know that Stephen was on the Landmarks Commission too so, in addition to his, well both our general interest in architecture and buildings, his interest was from another aspect dealing with the landmarks preservation route, for a number of years. And so he intimately knows several buildings that he talks about as his buildings since he's on the commission.

AM:

I love it. Well, good because we need to save a little bit of the city, you know. And as you guys know, I'm getting kicked out of my studio in Williamsburg. I know you guys are fond of Williamsburg. And you know my point is is that artists are normally making new or helping out parts of the city and then, at some point, the rents go up and the artists are kicked out or the galleries are kicked out and we have to move on move down, and into Sunset Park, just and example, but maybe you guys want to talk about how it used to be in Williamsburg or in Chelsea or in the LES, or Soho - or Soho mostly, where the galleries were. And the changes that have happened since then.

SMR:

You know. There's really a very simple equation to this, artists live and congregate where there is cheap rent and decent transportation. And by moving into an area, they bring with them all sorts of other things. They revitalize the street life because store front areas that had sort of decayed over time become galleries, little restaurants open up to service people. People come to see the art, they need more stuff, so all of this happens and in fact there are a number of indicators in a city as to what is a new and vital area in the city where it happens. Many people have felt that the congregation of artists is a, a primary indicator. And I think that's true, i part because, it says certain things. It says that there's enough loft space, studio space at a reasonable rent to live there, it says that the area itself is vaguely convenient to Manhattan. And those are indications of what is a good area. And also, to some extent, probably tells you something about the safety of the area as well. I mean, I've had a theory for many years that if you want to scope out what are the next commercial areas in the city, is that what you do is you walk around and you look for stores that are owned and operated by women, who are actually in the stores. And my theory is very simple that when rates of crime in an area are too high, very few people want to have retail stores and particularly women who have to run these stores themselves don't really want to have to do it, so when we see that you see that you actually have a public validation of the idea that the crime rate has come substantially down. I think that the real problem in NY is that artists are very good at creating the areas, but they are very bad at protecting their own interests in these areas and that you know, I don't mean to be at all boastful about it but I think that it's probably a good basic course in real estate and how this works would help artists enormously in understanding this process and how to - in much the same way that I tell clients of mine who have restaurants that they have to be able at some point move from being a tenant to being an owner. Otherwise they're giving all the benefit of that to the owner at the end of the day.

AM:

Yeah. This is good advice and your giving away all the secrets. Thank you.

I guess the problem is with artists, is that we don't necessarily have the capitol, straightaway, to secure our locations. Which is part of the problem I'm having with my studio, you know, if I had enough money to buy a building I would buy the building and then rent out all the other parcels to other people, but I guess the best thing that most of us can do is get a cooperative together, which I'm doing now, getting a few people together, go rent a building with a long term lease and then knock down the price per square foot. But, you know, clearly that building is far away.

SMR:

Allison, that's I think a very intelligent approach to this. Many years ago, Ellen and I were approached by a group of artists, and artisans who, were in a building in the Gowanus area in Brooklyn. And they heard that the owner was going to sell the building and they came to see us to see whether they had any legal rights in terms of could they stay and so on. We listened to them for awhile and I said look, you know there's 16 of you, why don't you chip in together and buy this building. And they said, how can we buy this building? I said, well look, at that time the owner wanted 3 million dollars. And...

AM:

For a building.

SMR:

No, for the entire building.

AM:
That's cheap! Now....

Ellen:
It wasn't at the Gowanus Canal.

AM:
Right

SMR:
That's right.
And there were 16 artists and I said, divide 16 into 3 million and I get under \$200,000 a space and said surely you guys can come up with this money or find a way. So, we'd have some discussion and people would say well, I can come up with my share of the money but I really doubt whether - and they would point to someone else - and say, he can't come up with his share of the money and so on. I said well, you know, you've identified a problem but in reverse, the real problem is going to be to persuade the owner that the 16 of you could come up with this money. And that's a hard sell ,because only to the ...

SMR:
these sort of fly by night people with small amounts of money, I said, here's the way I see it. There's 3 million dollars, we can get a bank to come in for about a million and a half of that - you guys have to come up with a million and a half. It's about 100,000 a person. So well, we think we can do that. I said so well, then let me tell you my view of how this should be done. We should enter into a contract put down a down payment which will be lost if we can't come up with the rest of the money. It would just be gone.

PHONE RINGS

SMR:
And, so, people said so well we don't want to lose our money, what if so and so - I said look, here's the point, if each person puts up some of their money, you will then be reassured that they don't want to lose their downpayment anymore than anyone else, you can build confidence in the group your in. The end result is that this building was condo-ed, 16 people all bought their spaces, 16 artists groups were able to maintain in a space that now, if you had to rent such a space, you'd pay 3x the rent and double...

AM:
Exactly

SMR:
It's this type of activity that really is very important to sort of postulate and maintain in neighborhoods like Bushwick, Williamsburg, and so on.

AM:
Yeah. My Dad's from Williamsburg, and now living in Williamsburg is actually more expensive than living in the Upper East Side. And I - you know - we were looking at studio spaces - not living spaces - just studio spaces in Bushwick it's so expensive already. Bushwick!

SMR:
You know the difference is, that when your Dad lived in Williamsburg he didn't have a father who was going to give him the money to buy his studio space.

AM:
Right, well my Dad was more concerned with building cars. Out on the street, because it was ok back then.

I was also thinking about, you know, all the artists that were really - jumped on that band wagon and had the money - like Donald Judd, for example, with his external steel structure space on what is it - Spring Street, that they just redid.

SMR:

Yup

AM:

You know, those sorts of spaces - and those artists were - I mean - I think first of all I think they were lucky, but they stuck it out - I mean that was a - not an easy time - and also there's the other artists who maybe just had rent stabilized apartments and you know living was just cheaper. So making was more ... possible.

SMR:

Well, also something else happened - it's sort of an accident, and that is - that the original artists in Chelsea and in SOHO needed to live in the same space that they were working in - these were not just working spaces. And they were willing to pay more in rent than the owners of these buildings could get from industrial uses. Not a lot more but certainly more.

AM:

Because the spaces were just bigger and they didn't think of breaking them down.

SMR:

Well, they were bigger and they had in a way an ideal opportunity to take a 2,000-3,000 sq ft space and live in it and have a studio in it. And then what happened was the laws changed so that if these buildings had more than 6 units in them they were considered to be what was called - interim multiple dwellings - and the artists obtained in affect the benefits of rent stabilization on these buildings. Today, that would be very difficult to do, the city laws don't really provide that in most cases and landlords have become aware of what that is and they structure their things very differently. And, of course in Brooklyn, most of the buildings are a lot smaller, industrially, a lot smaller than the ones that were done in Manhattan and you know I think that many artists who stayed did very well because at some point the owners of the buildings realized they couldn't make the tenants leave, so they would condo the buildings, and they would make better deals for the people who were in there. And also the area became so popular in terms of being an art destination that even people who no longer wanted to live there realized that their studio space had enormous value.

AM:

I would love a live work space like that.

I actually have a friend who has to move out of his live / work space in Williamsburg because his lease ran out and now they're literally doubling the rent. So, now he's got to - you know - figure out his situation and have his studio outside of his apartment and live in another space and it's extremely expensive that way, when your parceling off your life. You know to be able to support the fees of both is tougher.

SMR:

That's true, I think that - you know - the other thing that's happened is that 20 years ago all of Brooklyn was very inexpensive, now most of it is becoming much more, certainly Williamsburg, Bushwick, Greenpoint, the Navy Yard area, becoming much more expensive and probably some of the last areas where there is relatively inexpensive rent are out, the industrial areas, really out in Sunset Park, out towards Owl's Head in the 60s, and so on and probably in isolated areas of Bourough Park as well.

AM:

Who wants to travel that far?

SMR:

Well, actually Sunset Park isn't that far

AM:

No, true - the place I have a feeling I will end up is one express stop away from the Atlantic Terminal.

SMR:

Another area that I think people have to take another look at is Red Hook. Which was severely damaged in Hurricane Sandy, but does have a lot of available space.

AM:

I'm just concerned about the safety out there, still.

SMR:

Well - you know - it's just a matter of time.

AM:

A matter of time.

Right.

There's something else I wanted to ask you...

AM:

So, we've talked about real estate, what else? There are so many things I would like to talk with you guys about. And I feel like when I just let you go you bring out these things that I have no idea, like the laws about real estate that have changed that make it possibly more difficult for people without maybe the funds to buy spaces. Have it be possible to rent or buy or survive but I don't know if there are any other laws like that that have really changed but, have nailed the artist to the wall perhaps.

NOTE: TIRED here, clearly, what does any of this mean?

SMR:

I think the main things that's happened is that New York has become more of a destination place in the last 20 years. You know, Ellen and I just went to see a movie over the weekend, a movie about Ed Koch, and the interesting part of that movie was how much of the city was really in terrible shape 30 years ago. High rates of crime, deterioration of neighborhoods, parts of the city up in the Bronx that were burning down and so on. And the lack of desirability of New York created certain opportunities that as the city became more desirable became harder to do. A classic example is the two largest universities in NY, Columbia and NYU, have had 10 years of enormous growth primarily because parents were willing to let their kids come to NY and go to college. Now, 20 years ago you take a profile of parents that say, oh yes I know Columbia is a wonderful school and so on but you know i read about this - people get killed on the subways, things like that - I don't want my children here. After 20 years of republican administration, I know people would be horrified to realize it was that long, but after 20 years of this and perceptions have changed that actually go back to the Koch administration, and in part were implemented then, and in the Dinkins administration, NYC is objectively safer than it was 20 years ago.

AM:

It is, in 1998, I came here and my parents said you're not going to NYU and we were walking down the street, a cop passed us and smiled at us and just kept walking, it was very casual, and they said, oh we get it, the city has changed. So, that was the beginning of that I think where it wasn't so scary to walk down the streets.

SMR:

Well, I think that's right. And what that has done has been to bring far many more students here and to give the universities the idea that they can expand in various ways. The backside of that.

SMR:

Is that the expansion of universities here has also sopped up a large part of what used to be lower rent apartments in the city.

It is certainly true in Morning-side Heights, it's certainly true in the East Village.

AM:

Yeah, you're right, maybe I should be interviewing the real estate director of NYU. I've heard that there are empty buildings, they just hold onto buildings and they are empty, because they have to because they don't necessarily want to use them and redo them, but they also can't flip them yet. It's one of these, have you heard this?

SMR:

I have not hear that.

AM:

That's what I've heard, I don't know, I'm going to have to investigate.
Maybe there are a few studio spaces.

SMR:

You know the problem for a university is always that you can't keep these things empty for too long because you do have pretty substantial carrying costs. But - you know - the problem, not only for universities, but in their capacity as housing for students, but is where faculty goes. Years ago, Columbia, I'm sure and NYU had a very simple idea. Is they owned a certain amount of property they would rent it out to people who want it and if they didn't they'd say look across the river, there's all of Brooklyn and you can come in and out and you can find a place to live. Today, finding faculty housing for every level of faculty at every not for profit university in the city is a major problem.

AM:

Yeah

I can imagine. But, you're teaching at NYU, I'm an NYU two time Alum, and you know, I love NYU, but at the same time they are taking over the city, downtown, but moving on from that I suppose - I don't know -

You guys are art collectors, and you're collectors of mine. I love you for that. And in Ellen's office...

SMR:

That just shows that one of us has good taste.

AM:

Who is it? No, I'm kidding. Look around the house, you both have your touch and I can tell whose is whose most often. But Ellen, in your office you have two of my pieces, that I love and I am so glad they are in your office, like looking at you, literally. Do you want to describe those pieces?

Ellen:

I guess the ones that are most in my mind are the more recent ones that we put out in our house in East Hampton, that you...

AM:

Oh, right.

Ellen:

That you did of your time in Spain. Which I do adore.

AM:

Right

Do you want to describe those? Or that one.

Ellen:

Well that one was a white-washed building and sun and sea, which totally extraordinary. And let me, back to my office I guess, they were boxes that you, that you built and put things in, they are quite extraordinary and fun to look at.

AM:

Right. Women with - I forget - the two specific pieces - I remember one - I can't remember the other one - I think I remember them both, but, specifically one was a woman looking down at her hand and I forget what they were. I think they're, I think they're called Little Creatures that Didn't Know what they were. But the little creatures are actually diamonds that I cut out of Tiffany's catalogues and so this woman is looking down at her ring, but it's raining in the background, so it's a collage of many different pieces. So that's that one and then the other one is 3D, so that the little creature who didn't know what he was is a diamond growing out of a flower behind a white picket fence, surrounded by other flowers. So they're sort of like, they're pretty but it's like there's a little edge to maybe...the other...maybe diamonds will take over your house....

SMR:

One of the things that we both liked in your art is that there is sort of a contrasting element that sort of brings you up short every once in awhile to understand what's going on and I think of that picture that Ellen referred to of a small town in southern Spain and your first look at it is - it's this white town and in a way you'd say it looks like many many pictures of white villages in the south of Spain or in Greece until suddenly you notice in this timeless sense there's this little TV antenna sticking up from this and it suddenly brings it all into play.

AM:

Right and I think that is, I can't remember the town that that's from, but it's from a white cliff village in Andalusia and I think it's the oldest street in Spain or something that, I honestly can't remember, but it's an old street in a Jewish quarter but it's at the top of a mountain on a cliff - you know what of those things and the street goes up in, - diagonally- it's a little abstracted but.

AM:

But you guys collect more than just paintings and you collect toys, I'm looking at a bookshelf of course, filled with books, and on top of the bookshelf are plants and vases and a lot of toys, but covering the shelf and then above that is salon style paintings and works on paper, a photograph, so this is just one wall, so you can imagine the rest of the apartment but I wonder how you guys, alright, why you collect? how you collect? What is valued to you and like how emotionally you respond to the things that you're collecting? And why you decide to purchase?

SMR:

Well, you - know- collecting is sort of a mysterious process. Like all of these toys that are here all originated with a small cylindrical toy about 4" high and about 2" 2 1/2" wide that was a turn of the century bank and you put money in the top and it just sat in there and ..various quarters. And Ellen and I were in an antique store oh 30 years ago.

AM:

This started with Ellen?

SMR:

And we saw this one thing and it was \$5. And what I liked about it was the lithography, the lithography was very colored and it was very interesting and I didn't know very much about toys at the time except this seemed like an interesting thing , so we bought it for \$5 and the entire, the rest of this collection ultimately metamorphized from this single thing. Now, if you ask me what it was about this that attracted me, it was probably the artistic process of using lithography to do this and the simplicity of the toy. It was a cylinder and it was very easy to deal with and the figures were of the same type that you would find in folk art figures, some fun. Then as we started to get more involved, we both learned a lot more about toy

making, how it came about, its importance in NYC , it was a major industry in NY, how this developed in France and England, and then we started to pick things that we particularly liked and also by almost by selection to not pick things that we didn't like, for example it sort of a silly thing, but there's a very large group of people who collect banks, mechanical banks, we've seen hundreds of them. Ellen and I can not get our heads around mechanical banks, we really

AM:

I know, this shelf has a lot of animals and almost like a Calder looking, no not Calder....yeah.

SMR:

The rabbit?

AM:

No.

Ellen:

The acrobats.

AM:

The acrobats! Yeah!

SMR:

Yeah

AM:

Yeah

Note: Calder acrobats at Whitney?? website images, etc. <http://whitney.org/ForKids/Collection/AlexanderCalder/8336195>

Ellen:

You see, actually, we started collecting these toys because when I first met Stephen his major collection was stamps.

AM:

Yes, I know that collection.

Ellen:

And he has books and books and albums of stamps

Ellen:

He once in our wooing stage, he gave me an album and said here you can start collecting stamps, now my problem.

Ellen:

My problem with stamps is that it's just sticking these things in albums and some of them...Some of them are quite lovely, but they get put away and you never see them again and they're tiny and of course now, many years later I would have to wear my glasses to even make them out at all.

AM:

I know they're very cool, but they're in a book, on a shelf perhaps and on your walls I don't see that many stamps here,

Ellen:

And to Stephen, they're more than just the aesthetics of the stamps they represent a major amount of his knowledge of history and they've been a really extraordinary in that way. But one of the things that we

both like to travel and one of the activities since we have sort of varying likes of things when we travel. I like the country, I like to walk, Stephen likes the city and museums it was important for us to find something that we really like together and one of the things that we found that we really love doing was rummaging in antique shops and actually the first toy I remember I buying was in England in some country town which was a toy of these two mice that were dressed and you could wind them up and they were from the very early 1900s and they danced and one...

SMR:

It was called Waltzing Matilda.

Ellen:

It's called Waltzing Matilda and I think that was our first...

AM:

I love it.

Ellen:

toy and for awhile we decided that we - this was something that was really fun and we ended up being attracted to a lot of animal wind up toys.

AM:

I see some here!

Ellen:

We have many of them here.

But then we then, we went on and discovered various other kinds of toys, some of them are Martin toys which are French, which I particularly like because they have amazing clothing on them and you get these toys that wind up and have these wonderful movements and they are both sculptural as well as being aesthetically beautiful and wearing costumes that are over 100 years old.

Ellen:

Which is really amazing.

AM:

And rare to see.

Ellen:

And rare to see.

AM:

This little one, the little man, I don't know what he does but he's looking down with a yellow hat, the fisherman's hat. Perhaps he's fishing? Actually.

SMR:

Oh, Now this toy. That's interesting. That's a Martin toy.

AM:

Oh ok.

SMR:

It's called The Reaper. And he has a scythe in his hand. Now, but if I were to show him to you, Ellen if you just grab that toy for a moment.

Ellen:
This is a test.

SMR:
Yes, I want you to look at this man's face

Ellen:
and see if you recognize him.

SMR:
and to tell me if, if, he looks similar to anybody you can think of.

AM:
you want to take this..

Ellen:
An artist

AM:
Van Gogh!

Ellen:
Yes!

AM:
Wow, look, ok, I have to admit I'm looking up his shirt, it's - these little, metal, everything is metal on the inside and then the clothes are linen, so he's wearing linen color linen pants and a blue linen shirt and his hat is actually part of his structure, it's metal. And his face is painted - this is so beautiful, it's heavy.

Ellen:
And he moves when you wind him up, the scythe moves from side to side.

AM:
Oh, it does, so his hips twist too.

Ellen:
Yes, and his hips twist.

SMR:
Yes and you see the interesting thing is the.,...

Ellen:
And he walks.

SMR:
See.

AM:
It's a little frightening.
When he's moving and he looks like he's going to cut

SMR:
The interesting thing is that ...

AM:
I really like him.

SMR:
Did the toymaker know that he was making a toy that looked like Van Gogh? Probably not.

AM:
Oh, that's great.

SMR:
On the other hand, ...

AM:
Over there he's not scary.

SMR:
He was a French toymaker
And he undoubtedly had seen pictures of Van Gogh so that you have this influence that's there and not necessarily apparent.

AM:
And what year is this from?

SMR:
1915, 1916....

AM:
Oh wow, ok could we start at the beginning, do you know the name of each toy?

SMR:
Well, I know pretty much where they're from yes.

AM:
OK, so this is one, like the books, this is one shelf of many, I mean I've been to your house in the Hamptons and there's a bookshelf that actually has no books in it, or does it? I can't remember. And it just...

SMR:
That's right. It just has hundreds of toys.

AM:
It just has hundreds of toys.
I, I think my mouth dropped, when Marianna and I walked there our mouths dropped, we just were stunned by how many, by the quantity, but also by how cool each one was and it took everything in our power to not start playing with them.

SMR:
Well, the test of these toys is that we have grand children and that over the years, without telling the grandchildren, be careful with these toys....

Ellen:
We have told their parents....

SMR:

We've told their parents that, but never-the-less they look at these toys, they pick them up and realize that these are little works of art.

AM:

Yea, it's so obvious when you look at them. I mean, like that little bear, that fuzzy little bear with the

Ellen:

tambourine.

AM:

Yeah with the tambourine.

Ellen:

Or well, or something.

AM:

OK, so, tell me about the acrobats, because that's really a cool one. Do you know.

SMR:

Which one were you...

AM:

The one on the far left.

SMR:

Now that toy is a form of toy, it's called a gravity toy and what it does, I'll show you what it does.

AM:

Oh wait! you might be attached.

SMR:

Alright, Ellen, maybe if you

Ellen:

I'll bring it to you, don't worry.

SMR:

Just bring it over here and be careful with the frame.

Ellen:

Oh, yes Stephen.

This is not a wind up toy.

AM:

Right

Oh so it's

Ellen:

And it's very old

SMR:

But watch this. See if we can....

AM:
So there's, now there's - oh - do they start at the top....?

Ellen:
And they

SMR:
Well if you put them, if you put the bar.

Ellen:
If you put the bar at the top.

SMR:
You've got to be very careful getting it in and out.

AM:
Yeah, right.
It's a stick that goes on

SMR:
One more on the righthand side. You've got to get it a little further...alright...

AM:
This is very cool.

Ellen:
So, it descends down this toy.
Level by level.
from gravity and from the momentum of it woops

SMR:
I have to play with those bars a bit.

AM:
They look like they're having fun.
And these are also, so these are also painted metal. Two figures going down.

Ellen:
And they're probably from the turn of the century

SMR:
Oh, easily

Ellen:
Or even probably the end of the 19th Century.

AM:
Wow

Ellen:
And the paint, I think is original. Or not, but I think so.

SMR:
It is. Ellen, if you put that back and just bring, I want to show Allison an interesting toy with an extra...
If you go all the way over onto the side, see that blue, right here. This, yup, bring that over.

AM:

And, I might have to mention that these toys, there's a lot of these toys and none of them have any dust on them.

SMR:

Well, we try to....

Ellen:

I take no credit for that.

SMR:

This is very interesting, this was a - a model of a traveling pretzel...

AM:

Wow

SMR / Ellen:

baker / maker

AM:

OK, they are on a bicycle, tricycle actually

SMR:

They are on some sort of a tricycle.

AM:

Stephen is winding up the tricycle.

SMR:

Let's get this moving, and this when this moves it the guy moves back and forth to do this. And this fellow is the fellow who would theoretically open this up and take out the pretzels that were the...sort of a pretzel vendor...

AM:

I like this one too.

SMR:

Yeah, and you see the pretzel on this side

AM:

Right, and I like that all of these have these, I mean they are mechanical, every single one of these. I wonder why the guy in the back is wearing all black....though

SMR:

Well, I think he had to do, deal with the....

Ellen:

Oh, He's dealing with the fire.

SMR:

The fire and the sparks and the

Ellen:

And he has some kind of asbestos suit on.

SMR:
That's right

AM:
Oh, I see.

Ellen:
A late 1900 asbestos suit.

AM:
Got it, wow.

SMR:
There's a toy there, here, which is as far as I know is the only one in the US. See that fellow over there that looks like a football player, don't move it, you can see it there.

AM:
He looks like he's kicking a ball in a pink shirt.¹⁸

SMR:
Inside that box.

AM:
OK, He's standing on it

SMR:
There are a series of little footballs

AM:
OK

SMR:
And you can make this toy - he bends his foot, and he kicks it.

SMR:
It's got a Harvard blazer on it.

AM:
Yes, that's what that is.

SMR:
I think, I think it may be the only one of its kind in the US.

AM:
So, it's pink because maybe it's a little bit faded because it was red or crimson, excuse me.

SMR:
Exactly

AM:
That's a cool toy.
Have you tried it?

SMR:
Oh yeah, I can make it work.

Ellen:
We also have a general.....

SMR:
Actually, General Butler

Ellen:
Oh, I'm sorry, General Butler.

SMR:
I like toys that have some history to them, - this toy is , is very interesting because here

AM:
He's a little off balance, there he goes.

SMR:
Here is General Butler.

SMR:
Now general Butler is known generally in the Civil War as the person who was in charge of the occupation of New Orleans and in the south they used to refer to him as Spoons Butler, because the myth was that he made all the people in New Orleans turn in all their silverware, their silver and turned it into ingots to pay for the war.

SMR:
So he was not well like in the south, but!

SMR:
Recent history revelations have turned out that General Butler who was a lawyer before he became a General, is actually responsible for the emancipation of most of the slaves in the United States, and he is in this sense that when he was a General in the Virginia campaign, these slaves from Virginia would come into his camp they would run away from their owners - and this caused Lincoln an enormous dilemma because on the one hand the abolitionists would not want him to give back these slaves on the other hand there are still the slave states in the Union, Maryland and Delaware, and others and so he couldn't simply say that they were emancipated at this point so you had to find a legal formula that would allow the slaves not to be returned and yet at the same time, not at the same time treated as tantamount to being emancipation, and the background of this was that there was a General John Fremont who ran for President in 1856 on the Republican, he was the first General and his view was if you came into these camps you were emancipated, and in fact he took the even further view that if the Union only captures some area of the South, all the slaves near - well, Lincoln could not deal with this in 1861. Butler came up with a different theory, he said, these slaves are property, but they're contraband. They are the property of the people who are fighting against the US Govt. and just like in treason their property is forfeit and contraband so I can now take these slaves and I can ask them to work and all this. And this formulation allowed Lincoln not to return the slaves to their slave owners in Virginia, which would have been a terrible thing.

SMR:
And yet at the same time to be able to delay the emancipation proclamation to - until the point when the Union was winning the war,

SMR:
and that's General Butler.

AM:
So, he's a balding man with a very thick mustache and very large black shoes.

SMR:

There is a variation of this toy in which he has a series of spoons. That was for the...

AM:

Oh, that's great.

SMR:

Spoons Butler.

AM:

So what does he do, he walks..when you spin, when you turn

SMR/Ellen:

He walks, right.

Ellen:

A wading walk.

AM:

Well this wasn't mentioned in Lincoln. I'm just kidding.

SMR:

No, but in the NYTimes, which you may recall, runs a- every couple of days - was running a column on the Civil War for the last..

Ellen:

It was actually in the Magazine section - there was a huge article about it.

SMR:

Well this is because it was this column that they run consistently.

SMR:

Well, it's, it's to me....

Ellen:

It's using artistic license

SMR:

Creativity in the law.

AM:

So law and art are not so far apart.

SMR:

One would like to think so.

Ellen:

Yes

AM:

That's really wonderful, I love these, yeah so he's wearing an uniform and he's got little brass buttons.

SMR:

Yup

AM:

Not silver, of course.

So, what else did I want to discuss with you guys.

Or what would you guys like to discuss?

I feel like my lack of sleep has really affected my brain during this.

SMR:

Well, you know the other thing about these toys, I like a lot of them from their history, but I also like the aesthetic of what they look like and sometimes just the shape of them.

AM:

Right. But you guys have made a big commitment to collecting one thing, not really, you're still collecting stamps, and collecting toys. But that's a commitment in keeping with toys. Most people just buy what they like - Oh, I'll collect a toy or two or five, but you've been consistent.

SMR:

You know.

AM:

Is it a burden or is it still.

SMR:

Well the problem with collecting is that collectors have no sense of limits. And what you have to do, is seriously in collecting, is you have to simply decide that - you're going to impose arbitrary limits on yourself as to what you're going to collect and not collect because every field of collection is just too vast to deal with and if you don't do that then your collections lose any sort of coherence.

SMR:

Now that doesn't mean that after you've been collecting something for a long time you may not get tired with it and decide to collect something entirely different.

SMR:

I know I've done that with stamps on occasion, I've had stamps, I've collected them, I've learned all I could from what they've done and I've sold them and

SNEEZE

and collected something else in that area.

SMR:

But, you know, I think, when it comes to works of art, a lot of things we like, sort of suggest the wrong collections. Ellen and I like Venice very much and we learn a lot about Venice. And we like representations of Venice, which a lot of what is here does.

AM:

Right and I saw, I saw some of the postcards, the series of postcards that are framed together. Are those from Venice?

SMR:

No.

SMR:

The post cards that are there actually are very interesting, they were at one time a sketchbook of an American artist, up on Cape Cod.

And you know it's sort of an interesting thing, because on one hand you have the sketchbook and it's sort of difficult to - want to separate the sketches, on the other hand it's the problem that we talked about before that when they're in a book it's hard for anyone to see them and these are really you know ...

AM:
They're really beautiful.

SMR:
- very beautiful watercolors.

AM:
And they're very small. I mean his sketch book was tiny but they're really detailed and there's like watercolor and pencil marks, they're great.
So we talked about by the way, I don't know, I was thinking about Lincoln and the rhetoric in there and I know you know a lot about words and you know - you are your own dictionary. I mean your dictionary matches up with Webster's, but you can be a reference for, Stephen specifically, for the knowledge of any word. Or its origin really.

SMR:
Allison, this increases my temptation to embroider on all of this.

AM:
How?

SMR:
Well, to some extent we must always remember what Mark Twain said when he addressed the Explorers Club at the end of the 19th Century. He said, gentleman I propose today to talk of the customs and habits of the natives of northeastern Brazil have any of you been to that distant and far off land? And when no one raised his hand he said, very well then, I may speak freely.

AM:
I love it - I love how we got a joke in here.
I beat Fred to it.
That's great, I think it's because you read- both of you read so much.
I know that when you go on vacations you carry loads of books - did you ever?...

SMR:
You know I hate to say it?

AM:
Oh no, it happened, you have nooks or something.

SMR:
No, we -

Ellen:
just for travel.

SMR:
just for travel.

Ellen:
Only because they charge for all these extra bags, we used to carry

AM: Right

Ellen:
An entire suitcase

SMR:
of books.

Ellen:
of books

SMR:
and now it's too expensive to do that and we just carry our kindles with us.

AM:
Did you really carry a suitcase of books?

SMR/Ellen:
Yes

AM:
Wow, I love that, because I actually need to read books and Stephen actually just passed me a book, Victoria Ocampo, *Against the Wind and the Tide* - by Doris Meyer and I will read it- even though it's heavy. I read heavy books.

Ellen:
You gave her the Ocampo book?

SMR:
Yes, we have two of them.

AM:
Oh because you wanted to read this?

Ellen:
No, no, That's ok.

AM:
Well I will return it.

Ellen:
No, we have two.

AM:
I'm good at it, usually

Ellen:
We bought two by mistake.

SMR:
This is very interesting, we visited her house

SMR/Ellen:
in Argentina

AM:
Even better, I should read this is in Spanish perhaps, I don't think I'm a - it's a little thick for that.

SMR:
Well this is...

Ellen:
She's an early feminist. from Argentina, she's very interesting.

SMR:
This is a woman who knew everybody from the 20s and 30s and 40s who was involved with art and literature in Europe and the US

Ellen:
and architecture.

SMR:
A really amazing person.

AM:
And this is where Stephen, where both of you impart your knowledge on me, so that I can read it by myself and collect the knowledge on her. I know you don't read one book at a time. So, what are you guys reading now?

SMR:
Well at the moment I'm reading 4 or 5 books on mathematics and physics.

SMR:
The reason I think I'm reading them is to make sure I stay up ahead of my 14 year old grandson.

AM:
OK
4 or 5 books on the same topic?

SMR:
Well, they are on various aspects of mathematics.

SMR:
One of them is on prime numbers and another one is an interesting book on measurement and approximation which is something I am very interested in because I think it is a set of skills that used to be taught in schools that are not really taught very well anymore and the consequence of that is that - young people don't know how to approximate answer so that when they do the calculations on their computer or their calculator, they have no idea whether the answer is right or wrong other than the fact that they put the numbers in. It is very important to live in a world where you have an idea of what things approximately are. For example this is a small thing and not so stupid is how big is an acre?

SMR:
We talk about acres all the time, does anyone really know what an acre is? But if I tell you that an acre is basically the size of a football field from one end to the other, not including the goal posts, once you frame that in your mind, you'll never forget what an acre is.

AM:
Right. Or a gram is a paperclip.

Ellen:
I'm reading, I have three books that I am sort of in the middle of all of them, I'm reading Katherine the Great, which is a wonderful book, I'm reading a book by I think her name is Kathleen Moo, about a, which is about her travels and her working with children in India, it's quite wonderful, and then we both read mystery books.

AM:
Oh you do.

SMR / Ellen:
OH yes, all of them.

Ellen:
Vast numbers of mystery books.
And I am always looking for some piece of new fiction that I find is wonderful.
I can't remember the last thing I read that I particularly loved.

SMR:
Allison, I have a question for you.

AM:
Yes.

SMR:
As you look out on that skyline, and you see the color of the skyline what part of the world does it remind you of?

AM:
I don't even want to say it, Spain.

SMR:
Exactly, isn't it amazing that sort of chromatic pinkish / orange color.

AM:
Pinkish orange to yellow to green to blue. It's gorgeous. I know we've sat here for a long time, the sun has already started to set. This is really beautiful and you know, I've been up here before and the last time looked out I remember seeing that tiny little island. What is that. Because clearly, it is very small, it's - you can't live on it, it serves - there's things on it.

SMR:
OK, that island that you're referring to actually, while we were in Burma, amazed people because the name of that island is Un Tont Island, spelling?

AM:
This one!

SMR:
Yes, and it was named after the secretary general of the United Nations,

Ellen:
From Burma

SMR:
in utont, who only secretary general from Burma and once a year a group of Burmese dignitaries come out to the island and have a little ceremony on it - on the island.

AM:
How many of them fit on there?
Approximation

SMR:

10.

AM:

10

SMR:

See what I wanted them to do was to put a giant golden Buddha on the island.

AM:

I think that's a good idea, maybe that's an art installation we can arrange.

I like that island.

You guys are the best. You spent so much time with me on this, on the radio show today. I appreciate it, I really enjoyed this. Did you?

Ellen:

As did we?

AM:

A comfortable President's Day.

SMR:

Allison, I've got to tell you, if you were Lou Grant or somebody like that I wouldn't spend more than 5 minutes.

AM:

Well, I'm certainly not on the top of my game today. But, maybe the next time. I'm sure this will spin off into many shows.

Ellen:

It will.

AM:

Thank you so much for spending time with me.

Ellen/ SMR:

Thank you. It was fun.

AM:

Thank you and see you soon.