

Anthony R. DeCorse
Narrator

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Interviewers

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Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please.

AD: OK, I'm Tony DeCorse and I was born November 16,1922.

Q: OK, and Where?

AD: Buffalo, New York.

Q: What was your educational background prior to entering the service?

AD: I went to The Art Institute of Buffalo, it was on Starin Avenue. I studied sculpture there, painting and from there I went to New York City. I got a scholarship at The Sculpture Center of New York. Since my education at The Art Institute of Buffalo, I've had many.many commissions through the years. When the war broke out, I went to Bell Aircraft. I worked there in the pattern shop and I also made tool and die, Because I was a sculptor, they figured I fit in that situation. Then I went to Curtiss Company and I made tool and die there,also. We were short of materials, I remember. The foreman said to me, "Tony, I want you to punch in and punch out at the close of the day, disappear." We were short of materials, that was it. So, in the meantime, I'm listening to President Roosevelt and this poor guy, he's in a panic because he can't get enough men to sail those Liberty ships, to supply the soldiers, you know, with food, arms, all kinds of stuff. I was a 4F because of my asthmatic condition. It would bother me once and a while. I couldn't stand what was going on, so I went to the Coast Guard and on a day my breathing was fine. Instead of 4F, they made me A1. Of course, the draft board was after me all of the time. So, they sent me off to 47 Broadway in New York City. I was on "stand by" pay. I went on two ships. I kept signing up and we went to Europe and the North Atlantic. Convoys. Out of almost one thousand ships, about one third of us got back. We were just lucky, you know? And why we were standing in convoy, it was the English Corvette ships that were like bucking broncos. They dropped depth charges, chase

submarines all over the place. I said, “ If I ever get back in one piece [laughs].” I almost was killed three times.

Q: What were your duties on this Merchant Marine ship?

AD: I was a cook on the ship. While I was at the shipping center, there was a piano there and while I was waiting to be called, I’d play the piano. One day, a man came up to me and said, “I’m, “, I forget his full name, “I’m Captain So and So, I’ll tell you what, if you sign on my ship, I’ll put a piano on the ship and all you have to do is play.” [all laugh]. I said, “Well, thank you, but I have to have a trade besides, that I can get a job when I get back to New York.” So, I recall so much, the day after the war was over we were in England and it was a girl singing [sings] “There’ll be blue skies over the White Cliffs of Dover.” Well, none of us had life jackets on anymore, because the war was over yesterday. I ran out on deck. I’m looking at the White Cliffs of Dover and it was like some sculptor had made that, it was fantastic! In the meantime, there was a man by the wheelhouse and he was screaming, he says, “Oh my God, water mine, water mine, what are we going to do, what are we going to do?” He was so-over here, he’s in one of these pictures here [shows photograph] on this side of the ship. I think that’s the starboard. Over here on the wake was the water mine. That wake was just enough to keep that from touching us. For the first time, every day of the war was a regular job, but for the first time, I said, “What in Hell am I doing, what am I doing here?” My face was white! So, they lowered a boat and at a great distance they shot the water mine. If you go to Naval Park, you’ll see a water mine there. There’s no explosive in it. It was like a horse chestnut with little prongs. When I got back to the States, I said, “Gee, I’m not going to take any other kind of a job unless it’s art or music. Even if I go hungry.” I didn’t. I had all kinds of opportunities, because of my training. I worked for Witmer & Ferris. We climbed buildings, we’d paint bulletins outside, you know, stuff like that.

Q: How many trips did you make across the Atlantic?

AD: Umm, I believe four trips. I signed on a ship, I was on the Louis Bamberger Lumber Company ship and then it was the George Meade. I sailed on that. I started out as an Officer's Mess. From there on I got to be 3rd Cook on the ship. Then, after the war was over, we were taking the boys back. Maybe, it became like a troop ship. I was in charge of the lower deck for the Commissary. I made more pizzas for the guys [laughs] and apple kuchens. They gambled like crazy on this-coming back. The ships were slow, very, very slow. Then I was trying to find my buddies that I went across on the convoys with. I went to City Hall, I went all over and it seemed like they disappeared. One man I do remember, a black fellow, he was from over on the East Side someplace. I never forget, his name was Basil Wilson. He was in his fifties, I was in my early twenties. He earned his living as a sparring partner. [laughs] When we went to Germany, Occupied Germany, the Captain of the ship told us, he says, “Some of the Youth are still around,

you know, trained in the German camps and be careful. So, you travel on shore three and four guys together, all the time. Don't go alone."

Q: Now, was Basil Wilson on the ship with you?

AD: Yes, he was my shipmate, yes.

Q: What were his duties?

AD: I think he was a deckhand. That's what he was. I even offered to, when he went on shore, he went on shore alone. I said, "Gee, let me go with you." "No, no," he said, "I can take care of myself." And, he could, you know.

Q: Now, were there many blacks on the Merchant Marine ships?

AD: Umm, just one black fella, but there were all different nationalities. The Bosun on one of our ships, I think he was Puerto Rican. He liked to make wall hangings. That was kind of his hobby. Out of all kinds of cloth. He used to give me blocks of wood, because, if they needed cabinets on the ship, things like that, wooden, he made those things. All I had to carve it with was a boat knife, which is used for ropes and tying off. When I came back, I remember Ullbrich's Bookstore over on-I forget what it was on-Main Street. They gave me a one man show. The drawings I made while I was on the ship and the water colors I did. They gave me [unclear-10:27] and the blocks of wood I carved were like wave formations. Things I painted, people said to me, "Well these are-what are you? A caricature artist? What is that supposed to be?" I said, "No, wait a moment, I've been on ships where the swells in the water were forty and fifty feet high. You couldn't see the ship across from you. You couldn't even see the mast on the ship." So, that was a good start. I started having one man shows and in 1955, I had my own modern gallery on Elmwood Avenue, up on the second floor. These were artists who were interested in the modern concept. Also, when I was a little boy, about four or five years old, my father read a letter from, to my mother, from his uncle, who was Emile Bourdelle. Now, Emile Bourdelle was the assistant of Rodin. The man who created "The Thinker". My father took me to the show. I saw these bronze pieces, I went crazy. [laughs] I started touching them and my father stood in front of me so the guards wouldn't see me doing that. When I got home, my Dad said, "Anthony, here's a block of clay you can play with." My father was also an artist. He was from Italy, he's a beautiful wood carver. The first thing I made was a female torso. When my mother saw it, she was, aah, she was excited. She put it in a cabinet where there was glass for her other things she collected. And, I think, after a few weeks or so, my Dad sent the piece-he wrapped it up and he sent it to his uncle. In a few months later, the piece came back and it was heavier. Bourdelle had cast it in bronze. He said to my father in a note, said, "Christy (sp.?), your son is a sculptor." From there on everything I-I worked for sign companies, I worked for- Of course, my hero, when I was sixteen years old, was Pablo Picasso. Now there's a picture over here of the bison I made when I was fourteen years old. At the Museum of Science and it was a

competition. I won the competition, out of one thousand drawings, mine won the prize. When I was sixteen, I read about Picasso. I went to The Art Institute of Buffalo. Mr. Bell, I'll never forget him. When I showed this little book of people that said, "40 Years in the Workshop of Picasso." So, I was called into the Principal's office. "Don't you bring that back here to school or you gotta leave." [laughs] I said, "OK." Then there was another student that got the same treatment. He brought a book of Van Gogh. In other words, the Principal didn't want the students cutting off their ears [all laugh], stuff like that. My teacher was Jean McKay (sp?) Hendricks when she got married. She was my great friend at the Art Institute. She looked at one of my sculptures and said, "Why don't you take one of your sculptures to Stanley Kraska?" I said, "Who was that?" He's making the cement animals for the entrances of the park Zoo. So, when I took my sculpture to show him, he was very impressed. He said, "You can get these pieces started in clay and I'll finish everything. I can use you." But, being sixteen years of age, I wasn't old enough to be in the WPA (Works Progress Administration). He suggested he put me in connection with the NYA, National Youth Administration. That was wonderful. They sent me to the Museum of Science, Buffalo Museum of Natural Sciences. They had suitcases that would open. They would bring them to schools for the kids to look at. It was a cotton field or mining or-I made all the wax animals for that and the figures. My friend, I'll never forget him, Vince Vacanti, he was a pharmacist and he was out of work. He made little furniture for me, out of wood and stuff like that. It was wonderful, you know, you're, at that age and I'm getting paid for my work! How wonderful that was. The Flatiron Building downtown, in Buffalo. I painted some murals for the old Post Office Building. Big panels depicting young people doing electricity or carpenter work or sports. Big murals, I painted for them and it was great. My father was so pleased with what I was doing.

Q: Could I go back to your military experiences just a little bit?

AD: Oh, sure, please. I'm Sorry.

Q: That's OK. No, it's very interesting. You said, in the form that you filled out for us, about learning where to throw your garbage.

AD: Oh!

Q: On the ship. Could you tell us about that?

AD: On the ship, we had to be very careful, yes, and of course, it was-we never knew where we were going. Maybe, we were one hundred or two hundred miles offshore and then they'd open up the orders to see what we were gonna do. And, at that point, at night, we had to be careful how we opened up the hatch doors. For lights, you know, we could've got killed. The garbage, yeah, we had to get rid of it, but, very carefully. [laughs]

Q: Why'd you have to check the direction of the wind?

AD: They told me about it and I told them I thought they were pulling my leg, you know? But, they weren't. I threw it in the wrong direction and I was covered with it. It was like Russian Dressing. [laughs] We had good times. There was one fellow on the ship. His name was Herbert-no, Hubert, Herbert. He was a black guy. He was a big, tall guy and he was in the Mess department I was in. He'd wait on tables and stuff like that. He was in a production, I guess in New York City, of a play called "Anna Lucasta", something like that. In Bremerhaven, I saw a ship being worked on, a passenger ship. In fact, you could see the welding going on all night. Since I didn't smoke, I used to get cigarettes in the shop on the ship and trade it for Rhine wine and stuff like that, on shore.[laughs] Guys would buy/trade cameras and they'd give me chocolate and I'd trade it for different things with the people there. I don't think a lot of those people knew, in Bremerhaven, what was going on in the ovens and stuff. This is hard to believe, you know? Because, their history books talking about Hitler, he was like, our president, you know? He was great honor and all kinds of stuff like this. One man came up to me and he tried to sell me a lamp with a shade, he said it was guaranteed, he says it was made out of a Jew. So, instead of getting angry, I said, "Well, I don't really-can't use a lamp in my home. I use candles." This guy walked away muttering to himself. But, a lot of these people didn't know what was going on. It's hard to believe that. I met some wonderful people in Germany, you know.

Q: Now, this was at the end of the war?

AD: Yes. This was Occupied Germany. This is Occupied Germany.

Q: Now, were you still in the Merchant Marines?

AD: Oh, yes.

Q: What years were you in the Merchant Marine?

AD: 1945

Q: OK.

AD: Yeah, when I left Curtiss to join, that's where they sent me.

Q: Now, were you ever under attack by submarines?

AD: Oh yes, oh yes! The Corvette ships, they were small and they'd heel over this way. These guys must have been like cowboys to run these ships. They dropped depth charges, they were chasing submarines all over the place, that's what I remember. I remember whales, I remember porpoise. When we'd go to port, the port Captain would guide us to the harbor we were going to, but the porpoises were ahead of us. They'd show us where the sandbars were. Amazing, just these animals were just. I did a lot of artwork when I was on the ship. A lot of times, I remember when we went to Antwerp, Belgium, we were late because we were in a storm and the ships ahead of us were sunk.

In Holland, this was Holland now, so on the way back from Holland, we were attacked by a Messerschmidt airplane. My two buddies, we were mid ship and this plane swooped down at us. The other two guys got killed. If one guy hadn't fallen on me, where I hurt my [looks down toward leg], slammed on the deck. I would have been dead. That was the second time I wasn't wiped out. The third time, the last time was the White Cliffs of Dover. That was scary as hell. I was just, you look at each other and say, "Gee." For years, water mines are there and land mines were there.

Q: What was the life like on the ship, what kind of food did you have? You being a cook.

AD: Oh, the company- had the ship's, the Stewards would make the menus out and the food was good. They had a Baker, there's a 2nd Cook and Baker. I could never have made a Baker because of my asthmatic condition. You had to work with flour, terrible. So, I was happy being a 3rd Cook. I made salads. I made breakfast. I remember the Captains on the ship, they would love kippers in the morning, a little fish I guess they were. I was always afraid of when I served in the Officers Mess, that I would stumble and get hot soup on somebody. It didn't happen, but we weren't sailing, we were in port. This one guy, Engineer, he was tough. He carried a knife in his boot all of the time. He was an Engineer, he was from the South. Of course, he didn't like Yankees too much. Who did I spill it on? Him. [laughs] I said, "Aw, this is the worst." But, then I met a radio operator. I met some great guys on the ship. They even let me take the wheel, in the wheelhouse. Because I wanted to. They figured, well-and that was great. I remember when we went to Boston. One of the Officers invited me to his home. Of course, with my asthmatic condition, I was always well when I was at sea. [laughs] it was wonderful. The air was fresh and no pollens and stuff like that. But, when I went to this fellow's home, all the things that irritated me were in the city. I had to sleep on the ship. That was all right.

Q: What kinds of things did your ships, the two ships you were on and four voyages you made, what were some of the things you carried on the ships?

AD: Oh, ah, what I was always worried about, we had tanks on our ships. I said, "My God, if they ever break loose." I remember one incident. There was a soldier, when we became a transport to take the soldiers back from the war, there was one poor guy who begged them that could he fly back? He got so seasick and terrible. They wouldn't grant him this thing. He was just a regular soldier, you know. So, when a hospital ship was across from us, we were gonna lower this guy and take him to the- he died of pneumonia. At the same time, on the hospital ship, there were nurses there. All the crew went over to the starboard side and the ship was doing this [indicates tilting]

The Captain comes out with a rifle and he said, "Everybody spread out." And he's ready to shoot somebody. So, they all did, they spread out. I remember going to a place called Barry, England. Which was on the southwest coast. This is Welsh country. For the first time, I heard, on a Saturday night, they would roll a big upright piano in the square and these people would sing. They had no music education, nothing. You should hear these

Welsh singers, they were-it would melt you. These were coal miners, stuff like that. I managed to call Henry Moore, a sculptor I always admired. Toronto has full, beautiful work he did. He invited me to his studio and I said, "Gee, I appreciate that but, I gotta stand by, I'm a cook on a ship, you know."

Q: At least you got to meet him.

AD: No. I talked to him on the phone.

Q: Oh, OK.

AD: He invited me there. A late friend of mine, Joe Bilinski (sp?), who was at State, Buffalo State. For years taught sculpture. He went to see Henry Moore. Henry Moore wanted to hire him as his assistant, but Joe said, "I'm-I got my own work to do. That's what, I want to get at my things." That's the first time, at one of the fair's there, in Barry, where I ever had tea already made with milk in and the sugar in. It was a good thing, because it was chilly in that part of England. The coast there, the waters there, were rough. I remember Le Havre, France. I wanted to meet Picasso, but we couldn't get ashore. There was bombing going on, on shore. Also, I brought this [looks through photographs] ah, here it is, for this piece of work [shows photograph] before I went away. I made a sculpture. It was inspired by a man by the name of Paul Robeson, who was a great American singer. I heard him sing in the first production of Showboat. In the late thirties, I believe it was, He sang "Old Man River", well, this started me off with this piece, to build this piece. I like a sponsor for this piece, made it. This is Paul Robeson [indicates photograph] I met him in 1943 after a production of Othello. He was my friend. I said, "I like to sing. Being on the ocean, I met different nationalities and I want to be able to sing all those songs." We had breakfast the next day, after this production he was in. I was working at a cafeteria in New York City, I think, Silverman's. He met me there, we had breakfast and this cafeteria was a place where all kinds of artistic people would go to eat. I met, I met, also, the late Fiorello LaGuardia, when he became Mayor, the news reels said, "Well he says I hear talk about putting a fireman in the fire department and police in the policeman-was all campaign talk." and he says, "The hell it was." I called him up on the phone and I told him and he talked with me, I said, "I'm a student at the Clay Club, the Sculpture Center of New York. This is what I do." He said, "Where are you now?" I said, "I'm at Silverman's. I make pans of beans and potatoes and all kinds of stuff." He says, "Will you be there all day?" I says, "Yeah." I says, "OK." So, he called me, he has a briefcase like this [indicates size with hands] he brings it in and I see him and what he showed me was, he was, I guess, a World War One pilot. It was funny, he had pictures of him with his goggles on [laughs] it was great! I even met the brother of Gertrude Stein, who was a collector of Picasso's, Matisse's, all these people. Her brother, he called himself Homer. When he came to the cafeteria, he dressed, he'd have a Roman toga on [all laugh] and he'd recite his poetry and stuff like that. I met some wonderful peoples in Manhattan. It was a great place. I even saw the first

production of “The ThreePenny Opera”. Which they did in Buffalo years later at the Richford Hotel. It was called the Off-Broadway Theater, up on the fourth floor. Through Gus Macharis (sp?) who designed the [unknown-32:40] I used to work there. I was the intermission piano player there. I made a tragic and comedy mask for the theater there. It was great. I met some wonderful people at the Sheraton Hotel. You couldn’t phone people who came there to perform in Buffalo. I met Liz Taylor. There was a table where the employees would have their lunch and supper. She peeked in the side door and she said, “Do you mind if I sit and have lunch with you? Since I don’t like being noticed all the time.” I says, “Yeah, sure.” I met The Kingston Trio and I met Two-Ton Tony Galento who fought Joe Louis [laughs] , he had the most gentle voice you ever heard. I think his sophistication was barroom brawling, that’s what he liked to do. I met some great people. I was with the Sheraton Hotel six years. Which is unheard of, because part of my job was playing that piano and putting rolls on and I didn’t have to pump it. Besides playing. I made up a drum set to play along with it. Scott Joplin, I had a lot of his music. I still love it, ah, what will I say now [pauses] I forget the kind of music.

Q: Ragtime.

AD: Ragtime! I even had a Ragtime band some years back. Eli Konikoff, a very famous trombone player, he was part of my group. It was Jack Maslin (sp?), it was Bill Riley, who played tuba. My Union looked after me. I was in the Union when I was eighteen years old. I’m still a member. Also, I worked with Doc Severinson, one year. They called me up, they used to call me from the Philharmonic and say, “Can we sell you a subscription?” You know, to the concert. I said, “Well, I earn my living as a musician mostly.” The lady said, “No, no. Call your Union.” So, I called the Union. I said, “What’s going on?” This is Thursday now. I talked to the President (of the Union) and I says, “What’s happening? Am I in trouble or something?” “No, no.” he says, “This is Thursday, you’re going to meet Doc Severinson at the Kleinhans Music Hall Friday at twelve o’clock and you’re going to be in a concert Saturday.” I said, “WHAT?” He says, “Don’t worry, just show up with your small instrument that you play.” So, I showed up. I’m there with my little button accordion, which fit in my sea bag when I went sailing, perfect. So I can hear the guys in the-

Q: So, you could play the accordion when you were on the ships?

AD: Yes. My button accordion is this big [indicates size with hands] so it fit in my sea bag perfect. The guys in the orchestra were saying, “What in hell is he going to do with that toy he’s carrying?” When Doc saw me, he said, “Oh, you’re a godsend, you should see what they send me sometimes.” He said, “OK, can you play “All Day Long?” I say, “I don’t know it.” He looked at me and he says, “OK, what do you do?” I says, “Well.” and his program was called “A Night in Old Italy”, with the Philharmonic I said, “So, how about if I sing “Way Marie” and I do an Italian mazurka and a tarantella and wind up with “Santa Lucia ”?” Fine. He treated me like he knew me for 20 years. I

used to watch him on The Johnny Carson Show. I said, “Gee, this man is-people love him and he’s so- he communicates with people.” He could see that I was worrying about something. It was not worrying about the Philharmonic. Here’s what happened. The night of the concert, a lady came up to me and said, “Mr. DeCorse, this never happens. You’re on this list as an accordion player. There’s no such thing with the Buffalo Philharmonic.” I said, “Aw, that’s nice.” After I finished the last song, “Santa Lucia”, people stood up and applauded like mad. Doc had mandolin players with me and guitars and bass. When I got my applause, he opened the microphone, now three or four weeks before, Luciano Pavarotti was singing there and that’s what was worrying me. I said, “Oh my God, I hope I don’t get some of the same audience. What the hell can I do?” When I finished my last song, he said over the microphone, “And eat your heart out Pavarotti.” [laughs] So, that was wonderful. I’ve been on that stage three times as a soloist. So, anyway. What else can I tell you?

Q: Well, you mentioned that your ships were called “The Rust Bucket Brigade.” Why was that?

AD: Oh, in the article there [indicates newspaper clippings] if you want to read the article also. When my buddies and I used to go into the New York harbor, going out on ships, lot of those ships, they didn’t have time to paint them. A lot of them were rusty. Because a lot of them didn’t come back. Our black joke was “Here comes the Rust Bucket Brigade.” [laughs]

Q: Now, what that leads us into, why don’t you tell us a little bit about this sculpture you made and that’s, I guess, why you called it “The Rust Bucket.”

AD: Yes.

Q: Could you tell us about that, where is it and why is it there and so on?

AD: Well, this is at Naval Park now. [shows photograph]

Q: If you could hold it up to the camera, Wayne can get it.

AD: Right. Of course. This was the -this piece is this here [indicates photograph] I built this piece at The Center For the Arts.

Q: Could you hold that piece up?

AD: Oh, I’m sorry. [shows photograph]

Q: Now, what is the material that that’s made of?

AD: This is bronze.

Q: Bronze. OK.

AD: I studied bronze casting. I made this at the College there. I've been like a credit free student for many, many years. They still invite me to-all I have to do is pay for the materials.

Q: Now, what College are you referring to?

AD: Buffalo. University of Buffalo, The Center For the Arts. All I had to do was pay for the materials I used. Now, this piece, I cast there. Also, I needed a piece to put it on. Although I had-the first article about my money was this. I was getting the run around, in fact, it's in there and nobody could listen to me at City Hall. The Merchant Marine was kind of [shows thumbs down], they talk badly about us. Now, in my collection, in my sea chest, I have a letter from Ronald Reagan, a copy. Where in 1988, he got us benefits. He was on our side. That was wonderful. I go to the VA and get my medicine there, what I need and talk I to a lot of those people. The second article that came out said that the people of Buffalo were sending me monies for-to build this monument. Nobody else would help me. Then, when City Hall saw this, they wanted to be in on it. I showed my model to the late-the Ex-Mayor Griffin. Jimmy Griffin. He liked what he saw. He put me in touch with the-James Pitts, who was President of the Common Council. I went to him and showed him and he said, "This is beautiful." He said, "How much do you need?" [laughs] I said, "Well, \$10,000.00 would do it. I need African black granite, the way I designed it." He said, "I don't know where the hell I'm going to get the money. But, you'll get it." And he did. He came right through. That's how this got built.

Q: Now, you said it's in the Naval Park. For those that don't know, where is the Naval Park?

AD: Oh, the Marina Basin.

Q: In downtown Buffalo.

AD: Where the ships are. Those two big ships. They got my monument in the most wonderful spot. There's a little mound there and in back are the two ships. A Destroyer and I guess-I don't know what kind of ship.

Q: It's a Cruiser, I think.

AD: I also wanted, in my article, to have a bench where people could sit down. When I called them a couple of weeks back, the man who's in charge of the park, he says, "Tony, we're putting a second bench in there." I said, "Aw, that's wonderful."

Q: Now, could you tell us about this? [show photograph]

AD: Yes, this here piece, um, when the dedication came to this, Colonel Cunningham was there and he said, "Tony, my son is a Merchant Mariner, would you put something on our wall?" I said, "Sure, I'd be glad to." Once again, I raised the money for that and

then this is cast at the Center For the Arts. We put the piece up. Well, Fathers and Sons, that says a lot.

Q: Umhmm.

AD: The son is looking out towards the sea, this is me, looking into the past.

Q: Now, who posed for the son? You told us earlier.

AD: Oh, I posed for the father.

Q: Right.

AD: This fellow was Bob Fisk (sp?), he lives out in Silver Creek. He was a Merchant Mariner also.

Q: So, is that monument up yet?

AD: No. They're making a new building in the Naval Park, which will be a museum. This will be there. Because this was on the wall before, they moved everything in front. Also, let me see. [looks through papers]

Q: Now, did you ever stay in contact with anyone that was on the ship with you?

AD: After, I couldn't locate anyone. Just, I went to City Hall. I looked all over and one of the fellas was at the Art Institute, Don Burns. I remember him. I used to see him in New York. He was a painter, a very good painter. That's it. I lost, especially my friend, Basil Wilson. He was quite a man. At the VA Hospital, before we got involved in Iraq, you couldn't talk about the war to these people. They would be in tears. After that war started, they wanted to talk about it. They feel related to what's going on. I met great people at the VA Hospital, just wonderful.

Q: How do you think your time in the Merchant Marine had an affect on your life?

AD: Much.

Q: In what ways?

AD: Much. Well, I said, "I survived this and I'm never going to take another job doing carpenter work or anything like that. I want to be in music and art and that's it." All my jobs were connected and I never went hungry [laughs] My wife, she's a puppeteer.

Q: Is this her? [shows photograph]

AD: Yes, that's her. That's Jean. I met her in the 60's when I was at the Sheraton Hotel. I worked there six days a week. I met her at Fantasy Island on Grand Island. I was with a friend of mine that was in show business. She was like Gypsy Rose Lee. [laughs] She, her name was Ann Bang-Bang Arbor. She'd do a strip, but she'd be making these funny comments while she was doing the strip. I worked at Frank's Casanova and in those

early days-and that time, Calypso music was coming in. Harry Belafonte and people like that. The Easy Riders. So, I went to an agent and I said, "That's what I want to do. I want." The guy said, "Only Black people do Calypso music." I said, "No, that's not right either." I finally found an agent and he said, "Well, you can't use your name, Tony DeCorse, as a Calypso singer, what can you come up with?" I said, "Awright, how about calling me Prince Invader?" Good. He says, "That's great!" So, they booked me into Frank's Casanova on Bailey Avenue. My boss, Buster, he called up my agent and he says, "What in the hell are you doing? What's this guy doing? What's he supposed to be doing?" The agent said, "Calm down, in two to three weeks, all hell will break loose. Calypso is in now. Harry Belafonte, see?" So, OK, the boss is calming down. So, then I was there seven nights a week for seven months. I think. I needed work. I didn't care whether I worked for a whole year after that. I met this Ann Arbor, kind of a classy exotic she was. She was my girlfriend. Through her, I met my wife over at Fantasy Island. I was so poor, I couldn't even afford a key for skates in those days. But, she drove a white Cadillac. What did they call it? The top rolled back or something.

Q: Oh, retractable hard-top?

AD: Yeah, or something, no, I think it was, yeah. She'd pick me up where I was living, over on Elmwood. She liked to take me out for milk shakes and stuff like that. This was her big kick. When I took her to the Albright, the [unknown-49:13] Albright Gallery, at the time. She was so pleased that I introduced her to art and things like that. Back in the days of-I remember how the Kennedy Administration-I met a lady by the name of Nina Freudenheim, she has a gallery now, she commissioned me. She wanted to feature fashion with Jackie Kennedy's pillbox hats. So, I wrote "Main Street USA", I had a trio and everything and it was just great. I met some, I never wanted to leave. Even when I came back from New York, I was there off and on, maybe twenty years. I saw the Museum of Modern Art, I met a lot of people. I met Al Hirschfeld, you ever hear of him? He did caricatures.

Q: Oh, yes and drawings.

AD: I met him once in Times Square. It was winter, it was Christmas. I knew who he was. I said, "You're Al Hirschfeld." He said, "I am." He says, "Let's get out of this cold, damn cold." So we went in a place across the street. You sat at a counter with [unknown-50:36] stools. It was like a conveyor belt. It was Christmas time. You ordered. I ordered, well all they sold was spaghetti and meatballs. So, here comes the plate with green spaghetti and meatballs. I told Al, I said, "See? Aren't they a smart business? It fits the Christmas season." He said, "No, that's spinach spaghetti you're eating." [laughs] I had a wonderful time in New York, but I had no place to do anything. When I came back to Buffalo, my house was filled with stuff, you know, through the years. It was wonderful to get back to Buffalo and just have-I traveled all over New York City. I met Burl Ives. I went on his houseboat on the Harlem River, I believe it was. My friend said, "You like

Burl Ives, don't you?" I said, "Yeah, I'm a folk singer, that's what I like to do. I sing in different languages and everything." So, we got to his houseboat at ten o'clock in the evening. He's drinking and he's with his guitar. He sang 'til ten o'clock the next morning, he didn't repeat one song. I said, "Oh, do I have a long way to go!" He was just wonderful. I wanted to meet Woody Guthrie, but I never could run across him. He wrote, like, the Dust Bowl ballads. When I went to Arizona to live. I worked in aircraft. They made these trainer planes for Chinese [unknown-52:29] pilots at the time. That was kind of interesting. I made structural work out of wood and ladies, they made canvas around the-it was built with canvas, too.

Q: OK. Well, that you very much for the interview. Very interesting.

AD: Thank you for inviting me.