

Herman Miller

STACEY MILLER

ON BEHALF OF FATHER,
HERMAN MILLER

INTERVIEWED BY CHARLOTTE E.
ERWIN

May 19, 2012

ARCHIVES
CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Pasadena, California



Subject area

Seminar Day, alumni, students

Abstract

On Seminar Day—Caltech’s annual reunion event—May 19, 2012, for the first time the Caltech Archives and Library offered alumni/ae the opportunity to record mini-interviews with Archives’ staff. Nine people participated, including one alumni spouse and one daughter. These alums held bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees across several divisions, with engineering marginally in the lead. One former student who transferred out of Caltech came back to relate how well his Caltech years had served him in his later studies and career in psychology. Ranging from 10 to 15 minutes in length, the interviews typically relate stories or episodes from student years. Favorite topics include pranks and traditions, some of which have died out. Alumni also reflect on professors and classes which were memorable and on the unique intellectual stimulus that a Caltech education provides. Readers will find that the transcripts of the short interviews reflect the personal and colloquial tone at which the event aimed.

Administrative information

Access

The interview is unrestricted.

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Preferred citation

Miller, Stacey. Interview by Charlotte E. Erwin. Pasadena, California, May 19, 2012. Oral History Project, California Institute of Technology Archives.
Retrieved [supply date of retrieval] from the World Wide Web:
http://resolver.caltech.edu/CaltechOH:OH_Miller_S_alum

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CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ARCHIVES

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**INTERVIEW WITH STACEY MILLER
ON BEHALF OF FATHER, HERMAN MILLER**

BY CHARLOTTE E. ERWIN

MAY 19, 2012

CALTECH ALUMNI SEMINAR DAY

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

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Stacey Miller

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ARCHIVES
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Stacey Miller

Herman Miller, BS 1943; MS 1945; Eng 1948

by Charlotte E. Erwin

Pasadena, California

May 19, 2012

Begin Tape 1

ERWIN: Hello! You are live!

MILLER: Great. I am Stacy Miller. I am Herman Miller's daughter. He graduated in 1943 in aeronautics. He was in the Ricketts House. He worked his way through school because he could not afford—his parents, he had nine brothers and sisters. So they could not afford to send him to school. So he had to work his way through school. He worked in the arboreum?

ERWIN: The Arboretum? The County Arboretum?

MILLER: No, no, right here.

ERWIN: It's in Arcadia.

MILLER: No, no, no. Right here. The kitchen. What was it called?

ERWIN: Oh, the kitchen here!

MILLER: Yeah!

ERWIN: The Greasy Spoon is all I can think of.

MILLER: Where we had the lunch the other day?

ERWIN: Oh, the Athenaeum.

MILLER: The Athenaeum!

ERWIN: Oh, I'm sorry. Yes. The Athenaeum.

MILLER: He worked in the Athenaeum. And the chef liked him so much; he had to wash pots. The chef liked him so much that he gave him steaks *every day*. So my dad didn't have to pay anything, for any food, which was really sweet. He got married to my mom when my mom was fifteen. So they were married, sixteen years old, and she was here and she came every single day and brought my dad two peanut butter sandwiches, a big quart of milk—because my dad's six-three—and a big piece of chocolate cake. And they'd sit in the little secret garden. They called it the “secret garden.” I know where it is, but—

ERWIN: Is it Dabney Garden?

MILLER: Maybe it's Dabney Garden.

ERWIN: At that time, the campus stopped right north of Dabney, which would have been San Pasqual Street. Do you know where they lived?

MILLER: They lived on Grace Terrace, 106 Grace Terrace. And my dad worked on the wind tunnel project. He wanted – they wanted to have children. I'm the first child. I'm here today because my father just wasn't, unfortunately, in the mood to come, so I'm telling a story on his behalf, but my father needs to edit everything and make it his own story.

ERWIN: Okay. We will see that he has a chance to do that.

MILLER: Okay. So I'm telling you what I'm remembering from him telling me stories. He had worked in the wind tunnel with [Theodore] von Kármán. He worked actually eighty hours one week, so he had to submit his paper to von Kármán for his money. And von Kármán said, “I mean, I can't pay you that much money. You're making more money than I am!” And my dad

goes, “But I don’t think you worked as much, as many hours as I did, Mr. von Kármán.” Mr. von Kármán goes, “Well, I need to see the documentation.” So my dad brings out a whole list of documentation of the hours that he spent. I thought that was really cute that he actually stood up for what he believed.

ERWIN: For what he was owed.

MILLER: Yeah! For what he was owed. I thought that was really cute.

ERWIN: That’s good.

MILLER: And I remember that he also saw Einstein when he was here. He told me, “Oh, yeah, Einstein was on campus. He was just walking around all the time.” I said, “Well, dad, why didn’t you ever talk to Einstein?” He goes, “Well, I mean, what am I going to say? I’m just a little kid.” And I go, “Yeah, but you’re a very smart man!” He goes, “Well, I don’t know. In those days, you just—you didn’t say anything. You’d say, ‘Hello’ and that would be it.”

ERWIN: Did your dad grow up in Pasadena?

MILLER: No, he grew up on a ranch, and then in Long Beach, California, and then decided, just on his own, that he wanted to be an engineer. So he started in aeronautical, then he went into nuclear engineering. And he’s in *Who’s Who of America* [*Who’s Who in America*] and I can’t remember the year that he’s in *Who’s Who*, but he must have been in for, I think, for the work on the wind tunnel, but my dad needs to edit that part of the story, too.

ERWIN: Okay. Well, I’m not – I don’t have a perfect recall of what was going on during those years, but of course, that was World War II and jet propulsion was being developed, that is to say, how you could use a jet engine to drive an airplane. For one reason, because it was important to be able to land and take off airplanes on shorter runways, and you couldn’t do that with a non-jet-assisted take-off. There was a strategic reason for developing jet engines then. Now, do you think he was involved in that work?

MILLER: Yes! He was. He was with JPL, and he was also with Los Alamos.

ERWIN: He was at Los Alamos as well?

MILLER: Ah ha.

ERWIN: After the war? During the war?

MILLER: Um, it must have been during the war because he didn't have to go into service because he was doing this, because he was doing some very important war effort. And as a child, I never knew what it was. He just always said that it was just kind of secret work. So we really never knew what my dad did.

ERWIN: Yeah. Right! Well, that's impressive. So where did he go after he left Caltech?

MILLER: He went to General Electric and became a manager at General Electric. I think this is an important piece to the story, that some of the people from JPL that were working there knew that he was leaving. They actually followed him into a new position—which he's going to have to edit, this part—without pay, just because they wanted to. I'm recollecting that he's saying that they actually came over because "They trusted me. They liked working with me." He was like a manager, like a teacher.

ERWIN: Okay. Good! You know, if you can get him to write this—

MILLER: I will.

ERWIN: And then submit the written statements, we can incorporate them or attach them to what you've recorded today.

MILLER: Yes, I'm going to do that. And I'm really happy I at least had the opportunity to start this, because he wanted me to just keynote some things that I remembered to help him. Okay, great! Well, thank you so much!

ERWIN: Thank you so much for coming. This is a nice start.

MILLER: I really appreciate it. This will be really fun.

[Tape ends]

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS ADDED BY STACEY MILLER

The GE-ANPD News

October

know your management

design and projects — part one

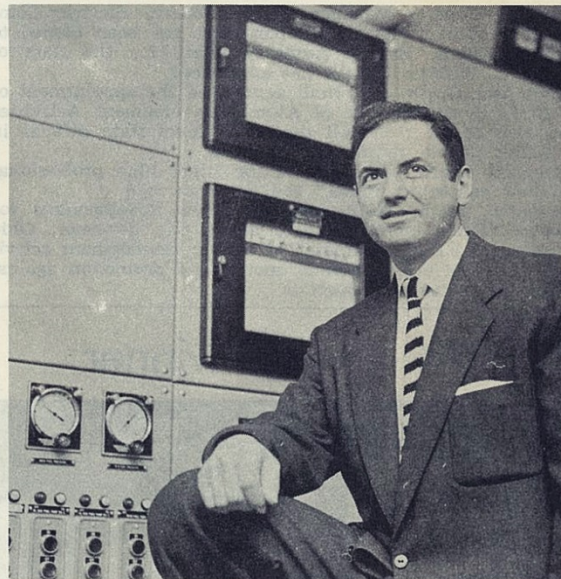
Mr. H. Miller - Mr. Herman Miller's professional career has been exclusively devoted to Aeronautical Engineering. After receiving his Bachelor's degree in Engineering from the California Institute of Technology, he took his Master's degree in Aeronautical Engineering from the same school. From 1941 to 1945 Mr. Miller was in charge of the operation of the research and development facility of California Technology—the GALCIT 10 foot wind tunnel, and during the next five years acted as Chief of Aerodynamic Development for Southern California's Co-operative wind tunnel, in addition to a year as Lecturer in Aerodynamics in the Graduate School, CIT. Prior to joining the ANP Department in 1953 as Manager—Idaho Engineering, Mr. Miller spent two years at the Arnold Engineering Development Center as Chief of the Transonic Tunnel Branch and as Assistant Chief of the Propulsion Wind Tunnel.

At Idaho, Mr. Miller proposed and supervised the design modification of the ANPD Idaho facility.

As Manager—Design and Projects, Mr. Miller is charged with providing advanced and product designs for both components and complete Aircraft Nuclear Power Plants, and for successfully completing specifically assigned projects. Engineering Design, drafting and standards services are also supplied by Mr. Miller's section.

Mr. Miller is a member of the Institute of Aeronautical Sciences and of the Nuclear Engineering Division of the American Chemical Society.

A resident of Rossmoyne, Mr. Miller and his wife Joane are the parents of three children: Stacey, 11; Loren, 8; and Kris, 2.



H. Miller, Manager—Design and Projects Section

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TULLAHOMA, TENNESSEE



St. Louis Office
Room 210, 522 Olive St.
St. Louis 1, Missouri

31 October 1950

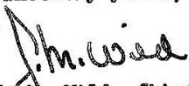
Mr. Herman Miller
Southern California Cooperative Wind Tunnel
950 South Raymond Street
Pasadena, California

Dear Mr. Miller:

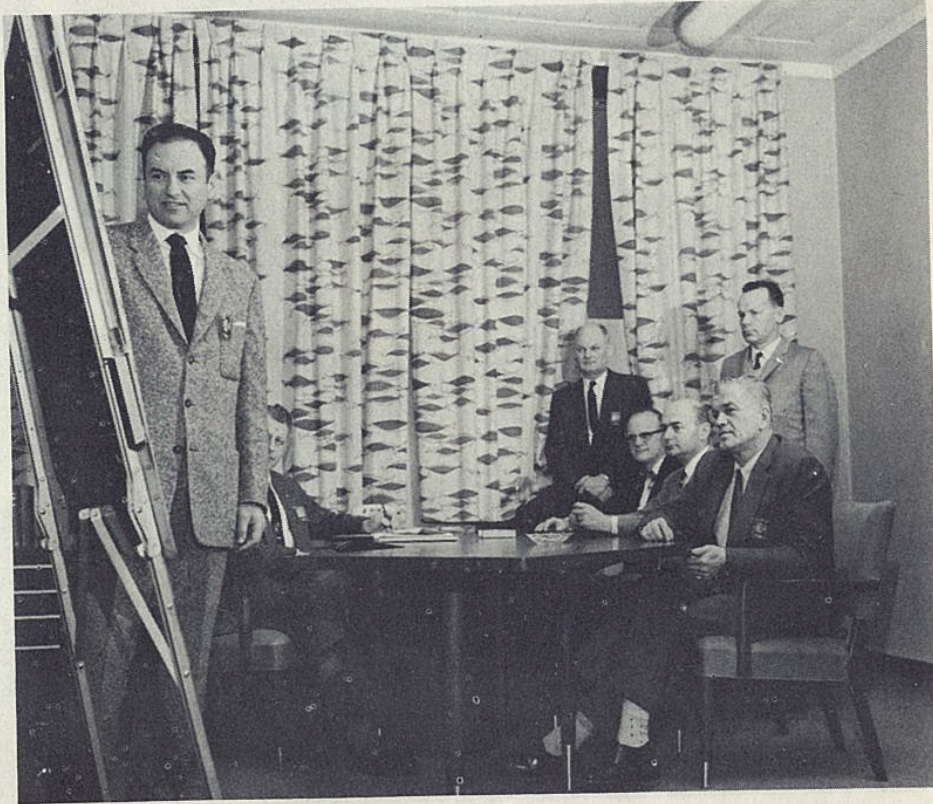
I have just talked to Major Dodge who has just returned from his visit to the West Coast. He has informed me that you may be interested in possible employment on the staff of the Propulsion Wind Tunnel. I should very much like to discuss this matter with you in the near future.

I am planning to be in Los Angeles on or about the 15th of November and would like to contact you at that time. I would appreciate a short note indicating what times and places would be most convenient for you.

Sincerely yours,


J. M. Wild, Chief
Propulsion Wind Tunnel

JMW/ffk



Herman Miller, Manager—Design Section, has spent his whole professional career in aeronautical engineering. He is shown here conducting his weekly staff meeting. Like other engineers who have

