THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **WILLIAMS S. LIEBERMAN (WL)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: Let me start, as I always do, and ask you where and when you were born and little bit about your family's background. You were known as Bill or William? I know your official name is William S. Lieberman.

WL: I use the initial because the S. is for Slattery, which sounds just ridiculous with Lieberman. I did have to change my name, my first name, to William from Billy, which was even more ridiculous. I was born in France. I tend to lie about my age; I actually was born in 1923. (I say 1925.) Came to this country when I was about six and a half. My father was a boy from the Lower East Side. His mother was Russian and his father was German; they met on the same cattle boat coming to the United States and fell in love learning English. Mom was Irish, Irish via Canada, where her family, the Slatterys and the other family, McGauley [spelling unconfirmed], they were given a choice -- this was because of [Charles Stuart] Parnell-- of prison or Canada, and they chose Canada. The Slatterys went to Boston.

SZ: Which I assume was one step up from Australia [LAUGHTER].

WL: They prospered with a department store called Slatterys, which is now defunct. My parents met...there used to be double-deck buses on Fifth Avenue, and Pop jumped

up to the second tier of the bus because of Mom. I think he had probably never seen anything like her and she certainly had seen anything like him.

SZ: Give me a picture of what that means [LAUGHTER].

WL: Then came the war, and then they produced me. We went back almost every year to France, spending some times just a few months and other times half the year, until the big war, the second war.

SZ: Your father was a scholar.

WL: A medievalist, an expert on something called the Council of Constance. There were two church fathers who were the Council of Constance, one called Jean Gerson and the other called Olivier Meyer. Pop himself led a very fascinating life, before and after his marriage to Mom.

SZ: He grew up on the Lower East Side?

WL: Yes. He was really quite bright. I suppose after Alfred Barr and my tutor, Wystan Auden [W.H. Auden], he was the smartest man I've ever known. He was fascinated by languages. He'd translate something into Latin and put it away, and then four months later translate it back into English or French; he wasted a lot of time doing that. He was, I suppose, handsome. He went to City College; I think he graduated in 1913. Before that he went to a public school called Townsend Harris--actually the same high school, I learned later, that [Alfred] Stieglitz attended. While at City College...he can play the violin very well. There used to be beer halls or dance palaces or something; he was a gigolo or a dancer who could play the violin. Mom, very Irish-looking, very, very beautiful, [had] in later life a tendency to put on weight.

They themselves were quite wonderful people. I was extremely lucky. For almost forty years we functioned really as a trio. The marriage then split. Mom did something people shouldn't do: she read other people's mail. Pop had gone back to a woman he had lived with before Mom, a Frenchwoman. They split; this is after the second war. Mom died at the time of the Seurat show [*Seurat Paintings and Drawings*, MoMA Exh. #629, March 24-April 15, 1958, May 1-May 11, 1958], where I helped René d'Harnoncourt with the installation. Pop continued to live in France. He died in December 1979, the month that I came here [The Metropolitan Museum of Art]. I discovered that I had three half-brothers that he and Paulette had adopted. My lawyer was slightly nervous about this, feeling that I would be financially responsible. I explained to her -- it was a woman, Lillian Poses -- that Pop was always kept. This rather unnerved Lillian Poses, and she looked at me rather angrily and she said, "You don't even know whether those three boys are white." [LAUGHTER] Anyway, I've never seen them. Paulette -- apparently [from] an old Jewish family, Kramer, which I believe can be tracked to the Crusades -- I've never met her, but she must be a wonderful woman, if she's still alive. I first went to The Museum of Modern Art in 1939, I believe it was either late spring or early summer, and the show was *Art in Our Time* [MoMA Exh. #85-89, May 10-September 30, 1939] the tenth-anniversary exhibition being done by Alfred Barr. I quite simply decided that I wanted to work there when I grew up.

SZ: Before that, you had this life that alternated between New York and Paris. Tell me a little bit about what you saw, what you were interested in that would prepare you for that kind of certain feeling when you got to the Museum.

WL: I, too, followed my father to Townsend Harris.

SZ: Which was <u>the</u> elite public high school, was it not?

WL: [Inaudible] I went to college at the age of fifteen. People shouldn't do that. But as I say, they always included me in everything, and they were really quite bright. My first museums...I don't remember what was my first museum, I think probably was the Louvre, but they would always take me to see something specific. Then one would talk about it, but not didactically quite naturally. Mom, being beautiful, attracted men, just as women were attracted to Pop. She seemed to attract people, artists and writers, much more than Pop did. I was I guess very, very bright. I looked quite different, extremely childlike, at least it looks that way in photographs, with very blond hair. I was actually, and unfortunately, much wiser than I looked and didn't realize that at the time, and I got away with murder on a lot of occasions. My first serious museum-going was at the British Museum. Pop was working there -- that's when the British Museum still had the library there -- and we lived someplace near the British Museum, I forget where, on a square. They had marvelous docents at the British Museum at that time. They were elderly men, I guess academics who really hadn't made it or had been disqualified for some reason or other but were absolutely brilliant. I was a teeny tot and I think they were appalled that there would be this monstrous little child following them around, but I still have little blue notebooks that I kept and got to know them and really owe them a very great debt. Later, back in Paris, they had some theatrical friend, a friend also of Clifford Odets, they found out I was getting extra spending money by taking people through the Louvre -- how I solicited them I don't know; I guess I just stood outside.

SZ: You were a teenager at this time, or younger than that?

WL: No, I was about ten years old, but suddenly I obviously had more spending money than I had been given. The first modern picture I remember, I remember incorrectly. I remember seeing *September Morn* at the old Luxembourg and buying a color

reproduction of it. My memory, which is very good, really excellent for things visual, I'm simply dead wrong about that. I know I bought or was given a color reproduction of it, but when I came here [to The Metropolitan Museum of Art], I discovered that we have *September Morn* here, so it couldn't possibly have been the same picture. I had never really seen anything modern until going to the *Art in Our Time* exhibition. In retrospect that's rather strange because a close friend of my parents was an artist called Adolf Dehn, who was extremely knowledgeable about modern art and by coincidence was a close friend to one of the advisers to Scofield Thayer. At that time, though, Scofield Thayer was already bonkers, but Scofield Thayer was the editor of *The Dial*; he owned it. He was very much a Lincoln Kirstein sort of person <u>before</u> Lincoln, and his collection was bequeathed here. I'm always fascinated by coincidences that way. Anyway, *Art in Our Time* made a tremendous impression.

SZ: Two more things before you get there. Still in things visual, I know also that I read somewhere that you had a great interest in the dance. Did it date back to that time?

WL: No. My interest in the dance begins really because Lincoln Kirstein commissioned me to do a double issue of *Dance Index*. It was the first thing that had been written about Picasso and the theater. I had been taken to ballet before, classical ballet, never what they called modern dance. My parents always took me to theater.

SZ: That's what I was going to ask you. Theater and concerts?

WL: Always theater. Pop played the violin very well and he collected violins. Theater a lot, and there were two family friends, one of them a spinster called Mildred White, who was particularly interested in theater. I'll never forget, my two first nights were the same season, I think. It was John Gielgud in *Hamlet* in New York and then a completely different production designed by Norman Bel Geddes, I think, with Leslie

Howard as Hamlet. The other family friend was a woman called Amy Oppenheimer, who was married to a man called Harry Oppenheimer. He was something in the cotton converting friends, it was called B&O or something like that; he invented something called Congo cloth. They were quite wealthy. Amy had a very keen interest in the visual arts, and my first exposure to modern writing was her reading to me Gertrude Stein's...either her Picasso or a book about Paris, I forget which. I was an avaricious reader always myself, but never anything like that. Why was I rambling on about that?

SZ: Because I asked you to [LAUGHING]. So you were back and forth from New York to Europe, it seems, while you were growing up. Also, it was during the Depression.

WL: It was depression. We didn't seem particularly hit by that. We lived at 133 West 11th Street in an apartment building that sort of had a Spanish stucco façade...; there was an apartment on every floor. It was sort of spooky, I was back in it years later and they had broken up the apartments.... The building's now torn down and some branch of St. Vincent's Hospital is on [that site]. But at that time, two other tenants were in the building, Bruce Bliven, who was a distinguished editor of what was *The New Republic* or something; and then Irene Lewisohn, who was really very interested in the costume and things like that, I think probably had some influence. Mildred White, whom I mentioned before, was interested in costume. Actually, I was interested in theatrical costumes before I was interested in theater or dance.

SZ: When you were in New York, did you come up here, for instance? Did you use the facilities of the city?

WL: To the Met? Yes. There was a woman called, I think, Helen Chandler, who did things for kids. This sounds so corny. She'd be speaking about the age of Queen Elizabeth

and she'd come out on stage as Queen Elizabeth. I mean, this wasn't a Rosamond Bernier theatrical performance. She really got people quite excited, the kids. She later turned up at Hunter College Model School, where I went. (Joanne Stern, incidentally, also went there.) The teachers at Hunter College Model were, I think, perhaps not licensed teachers, but that's probably why they were so good.

SZ: Bill, what was Hunter College Model School? I don't think I know it.

WL: Hunter College Model School was again for bright kids, elementary level. Joanne can tell you more accurately than I. It was some facility for people who wanted to become teachers attached to Hunter College.

SZ: Because the high school was, I think, all girls at that time.

WL: Yes, completely. No, Hunter Model was co-ed, and in my class there was Louise Nevelson's son, therefore Louise Nevelson knew me longer than I knew myself. Another friend of my parents was [Rufino] Tamayo, who at that time was teaching, I believe, at Dalton -- I didn't know it was Dalton then -- and somehow was on the WPA. How a Mexican could be on the WPA I don't know, but he was. He was friendly with a friend of my parents called, I think the name is pronounced Rambeo, I can't spell it, another Mexican journalist, and so communist he had been kicked out of Mexico [LAUGHTER]. Maybe socialist, I don't know. But I never saw any work by Tamayo. I still see Agra Tamayo when I'm in Mexico occasionally.

SZ: Did you have any sense at all at that time...this is all before you went to Swarthmore?

WL: I went to Swarthmore in the fall of '39.

SZ: Before that, did you have any sense at all of what direction you were going to take?

WL: No, but I walked into The Museum of Modern Art and knew that I wanted to work there.

SZ: So you walked into The Museum of Modern Art you said in the summer of '39.

WL: Late spring or summer.

SZ: Before you went off to college. It was the new building.

WL: Yes. *Art in Our Time* opened with the new building. I'd never known the old building of the Modern. And for a bright youngster, it was fascinating. Look at the catalogue of *Art in Our Time* sometime. It was Alfred's universal idea. And then, of course, there were the films. At that time -- and remember, this was long ago -- people did not see old movies. I remember Edna Ferber once saying to Larry Aldrich, who was exclaiming how marvelous the things were at the Modern, the film program, and she said, "How many old films actually have you seen?" At that time, that would have been a good question. I don't know how many times I saw *Art in Our Time*. I remember it was an installation on all floors of the building. My parents were members of the Museum, so I made free use of their membership card. I at that time did not know anyone on the staff.

SZ: So it was just the impression that the exhibition itself left on you.

WL: Yes.

SZ: Anything about the building? Did it seem....

WL: It's just that I knew that's what I wanted [LAUGHING]. As I say, though, it was completely different from anything visual I had really seen before.

SZ: There was no modern furniture in your home or paintings or any of that?

WL: Well, there were, because of Paris. [Tsugouharu] Foujita had done my portrait when I was a kid. I think the first works of art I was allowed to acquire for myself, from a wonderful man called Charles Daniels, who is forgotten in the history of American art. Charles Daniels was an unsuccessful dealer; he was also a very great dealer. If you check the exhibitions of the Daniels gallery you'll be surprised at the breadth of his concern with the American avant garde. For instance, he sent [Yasuo] Kuniyoshi to France, supported many artists. He was down and out for some reason. He was really a very close friend of my parents, and I was allowed to buy from him my second and third lithographs, and that was Raphael Soyer's *The Bowery* and Charles Sheeler, a lithograph called *The Delmonico Building*. The title of that is incorrect and still is always used. It's a view from the Delmonico Building. I say my second and third lithograph because my first one had been given to me by my friend Monty Clift.

SZ: Who was a friend of yours from...?

WL: From both France and the States. Montgomery Clift; he was an actor. I knew him through a friend of my parents, a great photographer called Alfredo Valente. If you look through the issues of *Stage* magazine, he did the marvelous photographs for that. And Monty's first Broadway appearance I think was with Helen Bowland in something called *Jubilee*. He played Leon Prince, or one of the young Princes, and

the hit song from that was *Begin the Beguine*. Monty himself was very interested in the visual arts. I saw my first Rembrandt etching in Monty's home. They had an apartment, a rather large apartment, in the East 50s. Monty had a sister who went to Bryn Mawr. The print he gave me was a Daumier, which I seem to have lost, of something, I'm trying to think what. I don't remember.

SZ: I was going to ask you, why Swarthmore?

WL: When I first came to the States, I went to Friends Seminary. When a Catholic marries a non-Catholic, you have to raise your children Catholic. Pop couldn't have cared less. He himself was half-Jewish and, on the Russian side, Greek Orthodox, so that was fairly complicated.

SZ: So he was not religious.

WL: No. My Irish grandmother could never understand why church history, which is life blood...[LAUGHING]. No, not at all. Mom was.

SZ: So you went to Friends Seminary as a way to...?

WL: I really don't know. It's so funny, one of our volunteers' mother came up with a photograph of me playing in Washington Square with Marguerita Mori, whose father ran a speakeasy. She went to Friends Seminary. This volunteer sent my mother the letter [LAUGHING].

SZ: You were saying that your mother, having agreed to raise you Catholic, in fact didn't. Is that what you were trying to say?

WL: No, did. I think maybe as a neutral place, that's why they chose Friends Seminary. I did not choose that. I think, though, largely because of Friends Seminary I did choose Swarthmore, which was a wonderful experience, which had no art department when I went there. Then in my junior year someone called Robert Walker came. He developed a fairly good art department. At that time I was an English major, minoring in medieval history. I still don't approve of children in college majoring in the fine arts. I believe that very strongly. I think they should get as broad a humanist training as possible.

SZ: An attitude that is on the wane these days perhaps?

WL: Definitely. You have all these kids who know all about the Master of the Madonna with the Twisted Neck and know nothing of history or anything. It's very bad. Then I was graduated from Swarthmore with honors in...I wrote my thesis there on a man called Norman Douglas, most famous for his novel *South Wind*. I, however, wrote about his travel books, in particular a book called *Old Calabria*. At Swarthmore I had the very good fortune to have as my tutor Wystan Auden; we also became very close friends. I'd gotten an Austin fellowship to Harvard and was sort of at liberty the summer that I was graduated and wanted to work at The Museum of Modern Art, and Wystan wrote a letter to Monroe Wheeler.

SZ: Who he was friends with.

WL: Yes.

SZ: But you still were intending to go on in English, I assume.

WL: No, no.

SZ: Not at all.

WL: I say, even at that age....

SZ: When you were going to Harvard you were going to go up to the museum program.

WL: That's right.

SZ: I see. So you graduated from Swarthmore in '43.

WL: Yes. And we are about to celebrate our fiftieth reunion. Anyway, I worked for Monroe, and if you look at the catalogue of an exhibition called *Romantic Painting in America* [MoMA Exh. #246, November 17, 1943-February 6, 1944] in the credits I'm thanked as a staff member. Working for Monroe in the Department of Publications and Exhibitions, my first assignment was something ridiculous called Women in Defense Week -- remember, it was wartime -- and this was to feature feminist activities in the Army, the Navy, labor, sort of everything [Note: the Museum held a competition and subsequent exhibition *Magazine Cover Competition: Women in Necessary Civilian Employment*, MoMA Exh. #241, September 3-Sepember 26, 1943]. Alfred Barr I had not met yet, but there was a terrifying woman called Sarah Newmeyer who was the head of publicity there. Scared the shit out of me.

SZ: Why?

WL: She was a crazy redhead, really crazy. I could go on and on about her, but I won't.

SZ: I don't know much about her at all though.

WL: She got fired from the Museum when someone, I think it was from *The Saturday Evening Post*, was supposedly profiling the Museum and got so intrigued by Sarah Newmeyer and her crazy ways and wrote an article called "The Redhead and the Museum," and that really did her in. Alfred always had trouble in those years of getting free copies of Museum publications to give to people, scholars, and he really used to cheat in his wonderful way and get them as publicity. I think Sarah knew what he was doing, but certainly helped him. During that summer the Museum was publishing for the first time Alfred's *What Is Modern Painting?*, and me, very bright me, I knew all about bibliographic procedures, I had just done my thesis. I saw, I guess it was already in proof, galleys at least, and I announced to Monroe Wheeler that this did not follow correct bibliographic procedure, and Monroe said -- God, I must have been horrible -- Monroe said, "I think you better tell that to Alfred Barr."

SZ: He was going to let you have an experience [LAUGHING].

WL: So Monroe made the appointment for me [LAUGHTER], and I told Alfred Barr he was not following correct bibliographic procedure. That began our relationship. It was a troubled time, as I look back on it, for Alfred. He felt the carpet was being pulled out from under him, as indeed it was. Monroe and someone called John Abbott, Frances Hawkins and Ione Ulrich, known as Ione Sutton, really formed a little quartet, abetted by Stephen Clark, a trustee, to get rid of Alfred, as was done almost as I went to Harvard. I remember Alfred's good-bye party, and the staff had chipped in to buy him -- and remember, he was a great bird-watcher -- an Audubon print. And also, at that very time, [Saul] Steinberg drew for him a drawing which was a diploma or a certificate of excellence. I wonder where that is now? And then Alfred was kicked out. Then he phoned me at Harvard and we saw each other in the interim. I was going down to New York with a museum class, and we first thing in the

morning visited Wildenstein [Gallery] and were given the cream treatment, and in the afternoon was to meet Alfred. Alfred at that time didn't even have an office at the Museum. Jim Soby [James Thrall Soby] was the acting or titular director of Painting and Sculpture, and Alfred Barr used his office to greet the people from the Fogg. He asked me to stay, and I didn't go with them for the rest of the afternoon, wherever they went, and without telling my parents, accepted to come down and work for him. He was finally given back an office. Jim Sweeney [James Johnson Sweeney] had become....

SZ: You're going too fast for me [LAUGHING].

WL: I remember too much, I realize [LAUGHING].

SZ: No, that's what's for me so wonderful. The summer of '43 you were just out of college. What was it like for you, a young person coming into The Museum of Modern Art?

WL: I knew I belonged there, but I knew it before I went. There was a wonderful person whom I worked for specifically, she was under Monroe, called Frances Pernas. I remember we saw -- and this was exciting for me -- *What Is Modern Painting?* actually being made. I had never been at a printer's before. Some capricious person in the printer's or engraver's had put a bikini on one of the women from the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Frances caught that though. Another issue in the printing of *What Is Modern Painting?* was a picture by [William] Harnett that I believe Nelson [Rockefeller] had given to the Modern, and that was because there was a representation of a dollar bill or a ten-dollar bill and at that time it was illegal to make reproductions. There was someone called Frank -- I want to say Scavullo, but that's the photographer; it was an Italianate name -- who did the design of the invitations,

the book layout, all that, for the Museum; he was a friend. Also, someone called Allen Porter. But I guess I was really, friendship-wise, closest with Monroe, but intellectual-wise, certainly with Alfred. There was always friction between Alfred and Monroe. Alfred himself really didn't like homosexuals and was inwardly quite distressed that so many people he was close to were. He had hang-ups that way. For instance, his life really can be measured in terms of the School of Paris. He hated the French; he wasn't so hot on Catholics, either. All having to do, possibly, with his own upbringing. That book on him, incidentally, is terrible [Note: Marquis, Alice Goldfarb. *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: Missionary for the Modern*. Chicago: Contemporary Books Inc., 1989.]

SZ: Its whole thesis was the idea of mission. The tension between Monroe and Alfred, was that something that even in that summer you could sense?

WL: Yes.

SZ: This is a hard thing to do, to try to remember how you saw it then and then talk about it from your perspective now, but then, how did you see Monroe's place in the hierarchy of the Museum?

WL: Monroe led a very glamorous life. A great party-goer. He made a point of knowing people. Glenway [Wescott] contributed a tiny bit to that. Monroe, though, he was the person who knew Mrs. Murray Crane and [inaudible]. Monroe had lived in Paris, where he apparently knew my parents -- this was all established later -- when he ran something called Harrison's of Paris, and I don't remember one thing about that at all. Verna Harrison was in my class at Swarthmore, and she subsequently married an editor called Wilder Hobson. Verna I think at one time was Alfred Barr's secretary. Verna Harrison was really the most beautiful girl one had ever met. I say

Harrison and Monroe and all that. Old man Harrison was the American governor of the Philippines that just milked that country of millions and millions and millions. He was married several times, and one of his daughters by some marriage was Barbara Harrison, who married Glenway's brother, just to complicate everything. There was something wonderfully solid about Alfred. He could be intimidating, not when you got to know him. People like myself and Dorothy Miller really subjugated, and I don't mean that in a negative way, our lives to him, Dorothy perhaps too much. I mean, she married his best friend. Dorothy and I were never particularly friendly, but I always laugh when people say they can't work with someone else. Although we were never intimate friends, we certainly did some spectacular shows together. Alfred demanded complete loyalty. I think that's why he really did not retain old, old friendships. I guess the really longest old friends he kept were Dorothy, certainly, and then, until he got sick, me.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1

WL: ...were terribly close, and that all broke up. Then about me and Alfred, if you follow that chronology that Marga [Barr] did, it gives you a very accurate....

SZ: And I will, I'd like to do that with you, but I'm still trying to get a little clearer picture of the summer of '43, because certainly in the history of the Museum that had to be a critical time, because shortly thereafter what happened to Alfred happened and things changed somewhat. When Monroe sent you in to tell Alfred that you were criticizing his methods, did you have a relationship with Alfred, or was that your first real contact with him?

WL: First time I laid eyes on him. Alfred did sort of awe people in the beginning. I mentioned Frances Pernas before. The first time she came in contact with Alfred, the story she told herself, she was typing, and it was when typewriters had those little tables they were on, and somehow she managed to upset the table [LAUGHING] and the typewriter fell into smithereens on the floor.

SZ: But after that contact you obviously established some kind of a relationship so that two years later you would come back.

WL: Yes.

SZ: I guess what I'm asking you is, did you yourself have a sense that Alfred was going to have the trouble that he had in the fall?

WL: I knew something was wrong. René d'Harnoncourt (who always, incidentally, defended Alfred, no matter what people tell you) was named the director of, I know this sounds funny, manual industry, and there was a rumor that was a sort of new man around town. If I remember correctly, and this I know just from either Marga or Alfred, it was they who introduced René to Nelson, and then René became quite heavily involved with Nelson.

SZ: Do you think Monroe ever had an idea that he might like to run the Museum?

WL: Yes, very much so.

SZ: Do you think that played a part in what happened to Alfred at that point? Did he have that kind of influence in 1943?

WL: Queens can have a vicious streak. Monroe had that, especially if he thought somebody was anti him or anti what he was. Monroe was always charming; he could charm anyone. I mean, Alfred was a very, very great man, and I think Monroe deeply resented that. Whether that was conscious or not, I don't know.

SZ: One has to think too that Monroe was head of Exhibitions and Publications at that time, and I guess the excuse with Alfred, or at least what I've heard, was that he didn't produce his writings as on time so therefore he couldn't handle all the duties that he had.

WL: Alfred wrote best under pressure. You take the very first catalogue he did, the first loan exhibition, at Fogg in modern art -- this is years later, mind you -- his introduction, probably written in a week, was the definitive text that was used by the kids. Alfred, as I said, worked best under pressure. About writing he was dilatory. He wrote like a dream, really a master of prose, taught me how to write well myself -- and it's Alfred who taught me that, not Wystan. Alfred's methods of writing were strange. The only thing I didn't help him with actually himself was the Matisse volume during the years that I was Alfred's skin, really worked closely, and he was happiest if he had chosen pictures and there was a layout and then he wrote to that layout. That has become so much a part of me that I'm happiest doing that myself. Alfred's *Modern Masters* that Alfred and I did together, that's what I mean by "writing to layout." He would be given or I would be given a word count for how many words we could use in those little entries and then we'd write and then always figured out what would have a widow and get rid of that so it would look better from a typographical point of view. Monroe fancied himself a great typographer. Monroe's chief contribution to typography, though, is to align everything on the left; that would always be the same [LAUGHING]. Alfred was what? Running the Museum. Alfred was running the Department of Painting and Sculpture, he was collecting prints, he

was collecting drawings, he had a finger, certainly, in Architecture and Design and Photography. I expect a man with so much work and so many other pressures -- he had to do the whole social bit -- to be able to take off, say, a year to write a book, it's a miracle he was able to write the very great things that he did. Some of the most interesting things that he did write, it's really their layout and presentation -- take *Cubism and Abstract Art* -- that are most important. Alfred believed, as I do, not too many labels in installations; if you do it well you can make people learn more from the way you've installed than you can by writing a label for each individual thing. People say Alfred had great difficulty with writing. I happen to know that's not true, and he really enjoyed it. But he was at the Museum every day. You can't write with your telephone ringing every time, all these duties, trustees phoning, often about frivolous things. One trustee in particular, Mrs. David Levy, loved heckling him about not writing. If you look at some of the early press releases...not early: look at the one he did when Miss Abby [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller] gave us her Toulouse-Lautrec prints and also the Picasso illustrations to *Bouffant*. That press release is great, great prose. I don't think Alfred is even credited for that. He intimidated that way Jim Soby by going over, perhaps too much, what Jim Soby wrote, especially when Jim became the art correspondent for whatever it was, the *Saturday Review of Literature*, I think. He became offended with Lincoln when Lincoln <u>didn't</u> show everything. His relationship with Lincoln is quite strange.

SZ: Strange in that...?

WL: There's an element of truth in that dreadful book about the Warburgs, the patron saint thing [Weber, Nicholas Fox. *Patron Saints: Five Rebels Who Opened America to a New Art, 1928-1943*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.].... Lincoln published *Hound & Horn*, a magazine Alfred always looked up to. But Lincoln didn't bend himself to Alfred's intellectual will but then snapped back, and I think Alfred felt

betrayed, just as when Edgar Kaufmann began acting sort of independently; Alfred didn't like that so much. Alfred hated my involvement with, say, the Junior Council at the Museum, because it wasn't something directly involving him.

SZ: So that a little bit also of what you meant by demanding absolutely loyalty.

WL: Yes. But for instance it would never occur to me not to work on a Saturday or Sunday for Alfred. Or the Bryn Mawr lectures, I'd go on the little train with a slide that had just been made, and proud to do it.

SZ: I want to go back, since we're circling around this too, what then would John Abbott and Frances Hawkins, Ione Ulrich, and Stephen Clark -- you mentioned them as a foursome -- what would have been their motivations to want Alfred deposed, or demoted at the least?

WL: Ione Sutton has mellowed. She just gave a Jacques Villon painting that I actually got for them in honor of Alfred or his memory. At the time, though, she was treasurer...they all wanted power, I think. Frances Hawkins was a misfit. John Abbott, of course, married and divorced Iris Barry.

SZ: Did you know Alfred well enough at that time to have a sense of how all this sat with him, to know it from him personally?

WL: No. Never discussed, absolutely never discussed. In the years that I was his skin, as I said, there were troubles with Tory [Barr]. She was left-handed, and I remember the astonishment of his discussing those problems with my mother, who said something quite simple, I suppose, that left-handed people are left-handed and you don't try to...something that Alfred must have realized, but with Tory, she was

encouraged to draw, etcetera. In the living room there was a nail, and on that Tory could hang her own drawing. Then Alfred of course got terribly upset when Tory became an artist. I'll never forget, Caresse Crosby gave her a show in Rome and I happened to be coming back at that time. I stayed over a day to see the opening of the show at Caresse's and brought Alfred back a catalogue, and he sure didn't like me doing that. It was very strange.

SZ: Was that the great connoisseur in him, do you think?

WL: I don't know. Tory certainly was exposed and was, as I said, encouraged, and then when she became an artist it was really a disappointment. Never, never complained about Marga. I don't think he ever realized how completely dependent he was on Marga either. Greensboro [the Barr's summer home in Greensboro, New Hampshire] of course meant much to Alfred and he was very dependent upon it. I don't remember his mother at all, but she must have been quite a woman.

SZ: Did you ever go up to Greensboro?

WL: No, I didn't. I don't know why. I guess because Dorothy was almost always there, although she had her own country place.

SZ: I want to ask you one other thing about 1943. You said something about some of the Museum's war work. Is there anything else you can tell me about the Museum and the war. I guess it was just the summer you were there....

WL: They did *Artists for Victory* and they did that big [Edward] Steichen show [*Road to Victory*, MoMA Exh. #182, May 21-October 4, 1942]. They did the Woman Defense Week [*Magazine Cover Competition: Women in Necessary Civilian Employment,*

MoMA Exh. #241]. The Latin American collection formed by Alfred, Lincoln and, later, me, but much later me, was an extension of the war effort. During the war years there was also that Australia show [*Art of Australia*, Circulating Exhibition, 1941-1945]. There was the British show, *Britain at War* [MoMA Exh. #130, May 22-September 2, 1941]. No, *Artists for Victory* was the name of the exhibition here [at the Metropolitan Museum of Art]. I forget the name of the Steichen show.

SZ: *Road to Victory*.

WL: Yes. I'll never forget typing a label for that. It was to be printed and I wasn't so hot at typing, but I thought if I put enough spaces in that would do it all for the printer and be indicated. I had no idea. One quickly learned. There were the parties in the garden. You must remember about Alfred, when he did his books or his exhibitions (and youngsters forget this), there were no definitive catalogues. There was no one who had already done the work for him. It's all pure Alfred. That he was able to make such a brilliant synthesis of everything.... There were mistakes, things like that, but they're insignificant. I still, when in doubt, say, in an installation, think of what Alfred might have done. It's a good frame of reference.

SZ: What kind of a teacher was he? Was it just from being around him and helping him, or...?

WL: Helping him. I learned about installation.

SZ: Which we'll get to, all of that.

WL: He was so right that you must never install symmetrically unless you're making some kind of point. Different eye levels -- when Alfred did that, no one was doing it. He

himself said on one occasion that he was happiest hanging pictures. I think that's probably true. It sort of sounds as though he were an interior decorator manqué, which is not true at all.

SZ: Let's just maybe for the rest of today, tell me then, you went off to Paul Sachs's course in the fall of '43.

WL: Did my first museum show. I guess I was president of the museum class.

SZ: He'd been doing that course for a number of years by that point.

WL: It was very funny, I arrived and was interviewed by him. I had on a double-breasted suit -- remember, I didn't know anything about Harvard -- and a batik tie. I quickly realized I was wrong. Uncle Paul called me Mr. Lieberman, so I turned around that way. The final coup de grace was that he said, "Mr. Lieberman, what do you collect?" I said picture postcards, and I thought this little man would just fall off his chair. Then he said, "Do you put you're an Austin fellow?" and I said, "Yes, you gave me the fellowship, I didn't." [LAUGHING]

SZ: Which meant that in general to take his course was not to think of a career but was it more for collectors to take his course?

WL: It was supposedly to train museum people. A lot of that is myth. One of the first photographs of me that ever appeared, and you'll see it on the late literature about Paul Sachs, is me giving a paper on Steuben, you know, Corning. But I wanted to know how to frame things, how to hang things, how to mat things, and you heard the history of the great American fortunes. I did get to know most of the workmen at the Fogg and did learn what I wanted, but it was very much of a gentleman's course. I

was seeing quite frequently Uncle Paul's niece. His brother, Arthur Sachs, lived in France, and Marian lives in France.

SZ: What was Paul Sachs like?

WL: He was a magnificent fraud. A little man, a little man's psychology. I don't think he ever taught anything but the museum course. He was quite wonderful, fitted in with an era at Harvard. I remember when I was there he was still living in Shady Hill, that marvelous property. Then, when he gave it to Harvard, they didn't even wait till he croaked and they tore it down. Netta, his wife, was sort of jolly. She somehow identified herself with the Empress Josephine. I know that sounds odd.

SZ: Directly related to his size?

WL: I've no idea, really no idea. And of course Alfred was very friendly, I never understood really why, with Agnes Mongan, who worked with Sachs.

SZ: Was it a valuable course for you to have taken?

WL: It certainly made me think differently, not necessarily correctly. I'd never thought about the great American fortunes and things like that, or of the value of connections. I guess I was fortunate I never had to worry about things like that, but it certainly gave one another perspective. It sure was different from Swarthmore. At Swarthmore, if you had a bar with beer you got expelled. My first communication at Harvard was that if I gave a cocktail party for more than twenty people would I notify the house master. I realized that I had changed schools. [LAUGHING] Uncle Paul always liked to think of Alfred as his product. Actually, I don't think Alfred ever studied with Uncle Paul. Alfred owed much more to someone called Frank Jewett

Mather, whose course in medieval art I think must have made a very deep impression on Alfred. Apparently, Frank Jewett Mather encompassed everything of the Middle Ages, not only the art, but the history, or as Alfred once said to me, "paintings on walls, paintings in books" -- meaning, of course, illuminated manuscripts -- they were much more universal, and I think that extended to Alfred's interpretation, which is certainly valid of modern art, really including everything. Before I knew him, Alfred was a very active reader in current literature. That somehow stopped. I don't know why. Did you ever know him?

SZ: Alfred? I just knew him to say hello to him.

WL: The last years were really difficult.

SZ: While you were at Harvard did you know you were going back to the Museum?

WL: Yes, but I didn't know concretely until Alfred offered me that. I realized, and my parents did later, that I learned more working with Alfred than I would, say, getting a doctorate. Remember, Alfred himself didn't get a doctorate; that came much later, with the Picasso book.

SZ: That explains what you said before, that your parents would have preferred had you stayed.

WL: Yes, sure.

SZ: And your feeling for modern art, was that something that you nourished while you were at Harvard?

WL: Since '39 and *Art in Our Time* really lit the light that still burns [LAUGHTER].

SZ: I might stop now, because it's a logical place and I think we can pick up next time, unless you want to go on a little bit longer. Is your watch fast?

WL: Yes, it's fifteen minutes fast.

SZ: So you prefer to stop now?

WL: Whatever you want.

SZ: We could just go on a little bit. I'm just trying to think if there's anything else from your two years at Cambridge that might...I guess Philip Johnson came after. No, I think he was '40....

WL: I remember going to Philip's house in Cambridge.

SZ: The one he built?

WL: This, of course, after he had presented his thesis. Philip was not always Alfred's friend, you must remember, although Alfred certainly defended Philip, and Philip today forgets that he's Alfred Barr's creation. I think the trustee that Alfred was closest to intellectually, though not in friendship, was actually Philip Goodwin, whom people tend to forget. I must reread Marga's chronology. It was in *October*, wasn't it?

SZ: Yes. And if you can't find it I can just xerox it for you [Note: "Our Campaigns." *The New Criterion*, *Special Issue*: Summer 1987].

WL: That would be heaven if you could.

SZ: Would you like me to do that? Then why don't we stop today.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**WILLIAMS S. LIEBERMAN (WL)**
INTERVIEWER:	**SHARON ZANE (SZ)**
LOCATION:	**NEW YORK, NEW YORK**
DATE:	**APRIL 27, 1993**

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SZ: Just from some of the things we talked about last time, I just want to pick up on a couple of things. The original coordinating committee, or at least the one that was pretty much in existence when you got there full-time, was Wheeler, Barr, d'Harnoncourt, Ulrich and Abbott.

WL: I'm not that sure it was called the coordinating committee at that time.

SZ: But in any event, it was....

WL: ...the equivalent of the coordinating committee was Ione Ulrich, Frances Hawkins, Monroe Wheeler, René d'Harnoncourt and Alfred.

SZ: I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about Abbott at that time, his place in the Museum, the way he operated and how you saw him in terms of the power structure. I know he really was out soon thereafter, but from what you said last time and from what I believe I've read, he certainly had a hand in Alfred's ouster, if one can call it that.

WL: There was John Abbott, too [on the coordinating committee].

SZ: That's who I mean.

WL: At that time, I believe, divorced from Iris Barry. What about them?

SZ: He's one person as a personality who's not....

WL: There was some outside organization that evaluates efficiency or something like that--the group or the man did have a name which I've plumb forgotten--was called in to do a survey of how the Museum was operating and what could be done to improve how it operated. They came up, I believe, that Abbott--John Abbott now, not Jere Abbott--that John Abbott was sort of the best person, from an administrative point of view and everything.... I never really knew John Abbott. He died by slipping in the bathtub. I did know his former wife, Iris Barry, quite well, who I believe had been brought to the Museum by Philip Johnson as a librarian. She had been discovered, of course, almost barefoot in England by Wyndham Lewis and was a rather accomplished woman of popular letters. She wrote a biography, for instance, of Lady Montague Wortley, I think it's called, the woman who introduced to England the vaccination from Turkey. Then, of course, she became a great film expert. Alfred, if indeed during the downfall remained during that committee, certainly did not have a controlling voice; it would seem to me that Ione Ulrich, who now is sweetness and light, and Frances Hawkins really did. I may be wrong; that's my impression. Monroe, although he was Monroe, paid great attention to the ladies. For instance, there would be boxes of chocolates, flowers, always, on Valentine's Day, even to Dorothy Miller, whom he loathed. Things like that. I would say Abbott's own downfall, to use that word, was really his own incompetence, especially after he was

no longer intellectually backed by Iris Barry, who really was on the ball, she being, I think if you'll check, being considerably older than he. Curiously enough, she left a drawing of a woman by Wyndham Lewis to the film archive at the Museum, which is very, very touching, except that drawing of a woman is in no way like Miss Iris Barry. I've never understood that. There is a drawing by Wyndham Lewis of her which passed at auction a few years ago. I think it was through the Modern, and they did not acquire it. Frances Hawkins ran sort of the business-operating side of the Museum, and Monroe was willing to let her do it. Ione Ulrich ran the financial side in her own really "elerian" fashion, to the extreme that she would go--and this you can check--in the old days, the Museum published a fairly good *Bulletin*, which Alfred thought very, very important. It changed formats slightly and it didn't fit her bound theories, and for a while she had each *Bulletin* (and this was in the days before Xerox or anything like that) retyped so they could be bound uniformly. That's really bonkers.

SZ: I did read in some of the minutes that she was always after people for phone bills that couldn't be accounted for.

WL: Yes. At that time she herself was always in intense physical pain. There was something internally wrong, I don't know what--not cancer or anything like that, but something probably feminine, that really caused her acute pain. That later disappeared, either through operation or through cure, and that's really when she changed into the nice, rather motherly person she is. The husband, George Sutton I believe was his name, I can't attach a face to; he must have been pretty anonymous. I do know he was considerably shorter. I simply forget the name of the advisory service that came in.

SZ: But I think the guy was Dartmouth, is that right?

WL: I don't know.

SZ: I'll find it and put it in anyway.

WL: Remember, old Miss Abby was very much alive in '43 and '44.

SZ: Does that mean that she really had a strong presence there at that time?

WL: Even if she wasn't particularly active at the time, it's exactly what you say. If she said to something or no to something, people would listen; it didn't have to be an official meeting or anything.

SZ: Wasn't that one of the things that particularly wounded Barr, the fact that she apparently concurred with the [decision of the coordinating committee regarding Barr]?

WL: I would think so. That he never mentioned to me. As a matter of fact, when he hired me, I think I told you, it was actually she who hired me. It had all been arranged, but I first met her, at her request, for tea in the penthouse, the old penthouse. As I said to you I think before, she had always been interested in prints and became really quite irritated that a print room was not established. Although the Museum was perhaps her consuming interest, or at least it would appear to be to those who knew her at the Museum, she didn't know too much about the inner workings. For instance, a print room needs space, you need boxes and people to handle the boxes, a place to wash your hands--all that being expensive. I think Abby was also quite influenced by Edith Halpert of the Downtown Gallery, who really hated Alfred Barr I think.

SZ: Because?

WL: Well, they knew more than she did. She tried to cover up the Harnett scandal; she was, of course, wrong. Although she introduced Miss Abby to a lot of things, even took her to a speakeasy, I think she was quite upset that, unlike Miss Abby, Alfred and Dorothy didn't think of her as the key to the avant garde. You must remember her husband was a painter, Samuel Halpert, who had studied in Paris with a Frenchman, the great painter [Albert] Marquet. There was correspondence between him and Marquet that seems to have disappeared. He committed suicide, I think largely because of Edith Halpert's nature. She and I, I guess it was because I was a baby, got along like a house on fire. You must prod me, because I just rattle on.

SZ: I want you to rattle on, but I do want to complete this whole circle of things. You talked a little bit about Soby, when he came in, as it turned out to be, kind of an interregnum thing--anything about that you remember, his influence, how he got on with Alfred? Because really what I'm also getting at is how this plan evolved and whose idea was it, really, to find a way to reintegrate Alfred into the Museum and keep him.

WL: I think everyone would deny it, [but] I believe it was René d'Harnoncourt. Alfred never realized that René was his best friend. I don't mean socially, I mean intellectually at the Museum. René fully realized the tremendous value of Alfred and actually went out of his way to avoid pitfalls for Alfred. Alfred really never adjusted to René. One of the things I remember terrifyingly at the time of the fire, which had something to do with the air conditioning and some worker drowned in an inch or two of water, I was in René's office with Alfred--I mean Alfred brought me into René's office--and Alfred actually accused René of murder, which of course must have

deeply upset René. Alfred did have certain blind spots. As I said to you I think the other day, for instance like [Chaim] Soutine; but I think he secretly thought it was Monroe Wheeler's invention.

SZ: I certainly have seen it written that it was Soby's plan to keep Alfred, that it was René's plan.

WL: Soby was a prince. He was wealthy, and in those days it would seem extremely wealthy. He had a taste of the good life, so to speak, at Hartford. He was quite handsome, always immaculately tailored, the sort of men's tailoring that's so good that you sort of admire the way it moves and everything. He also married several times. The last wife I remember was Melissa [Melissa (Wadley) Childs Soby]. As I think back, he must have been a heavy drinker. I say that because that sort of person, at least in my experience, seems to me a heavy drinker. During the period that Alfred was definitely out, if Alfred had to receive people, he would ask Jim if he could use his office, and Jim always obliged. Jim has been called a gentleman scholar. He certainly was a gentleman; I don't think he was too scholarly. As I said to you before, everything he wrote, really, was supervised by Alfred, which he was appreciative of. So often people who receive goodness like that aren't; Jim certainly was. There was a son, or an adopted son, whom I never met, who wasn't quite right in the head or something or was on drugs or was the equivalent of on drugs at the time. It probably wasn't drugs; there was something wrong there. Never met him, but I do think it was something that Jim worried about. Jim was really close to Alfred but not so close to Alfred. Jim certainly did do or would have done everything he could for Alfred or to protect Alfred. I don't think that he stood up and said, "Look, you fools, Alfred Barr <u>is</u> The Museum of Modern Art." He did not have that sort of backbone. He came to the Museum having already written on the early de Chirico, which was subsequently, of course, revised. In other words, he wasn't an unknown

at all in the art world. I believe it was Chick Austin [A. Everett Austin] who particularly shaped Jim's early artistic life. Alfred and Chick, although they saw each other frequently, were certainly never close.

SZ: So Soby's tenure at the Museum as the director of painting and sculpture was, what I'm assuming you're saying, was really intended to be an interim thing.

WL: In retrospect it was an interim thing. In retrospect, though, I don't think the trustees knew what they were doing or were looking ahead. I really don't. You might want to check whether Jim even got a salary. I'd never thought of that before.

SZ: But he did resign.

WL: Yes. He stayed there as head of the acquisitions committee and all that, and he and Alfred would always have lunch--<u>always</u> have lunch--before the meeting, and Alfred would rehearse him in Alfred's wonderful way; Jim, I'm sure, was never under the impression that Alfred was manipulating him to do this and this and this at the meeting. Alfred would say, "Well, there's a problem which really it's not important to discuss," and then of course Jim just wouldn't discuss it, and Alfred could quite effectively kill a work of art that way. The trouble is, Alfred was always right. At the table, Jim would sit here and Alfred would sit here and members of the committee would sit here.

SZ: You mean they would sit next to each other and members of the committee would sit perpendicular to them.

WL: They would sit here, the committee here--this was blank--Dorothy Miller would be hovering someplace here in case works of art had to be moved by workmen, and I

was somewhere here in the back. Presentations were made that way.... This in here was open, and of course when Alfred was made director of the Museum's collections, he then assumed directorship of film, too, so people like Dick Griffith would have to present films. That was rather difficult, to present a film, but it was sort of a ritualistic routine that they went through.

SZ: Would they show the film, or it was just a verbal presentation?

WL: No [it was a verbal presentation], and sometimes really not coherent. A photograph or a print you can hand around, or a painting could be schlepped in, a sculpture can be rolled in. The committee always had a list of purchase funds. I say that because that's fairly unusual for museums. Alfred encouraged it to be a working committee, as indeed became all the separate curatorial committees at the Museum, curatorial committees. I mention this because here are visiting committees that are just spun sugar. It's very nice, the chitchat, but they're not working committees.

SZ: And here the control is....

WL: Curatorially. In the beginning it was very difficult because I had worked with, say, a print committee and I was used to their responses, or a drawing committee, or when I was director of painting and sculpture, a painting and sculpture committee. There's not that sort of exchange here, nor is there in most other museums.

SZ: I want to save that for a whole separate discussion, but that's interesting. Back to the same period of time, tell me a little bit about Sweeney and what happened to Sweeney in that short amount of time when he came in.

WL: Like René d'Harnoncourt or like Soby or like even Andrew Ritchie--very much <u>unlike</u>

Monroe Wheeler--those men were brought to the Museum, really, by Alfred. Sweeney's first thing, long before I went there, was that *African Negro Art* show [MoMA Exh. #39, March 18-May 19, 1935], which must have been in the late middle '30s. Sweeney, again, financially independent, at that time slightly overshadowed by his brother, who was at Harvard, in charge of, I don't know what it was called, the poetry room. Sweeney later surpassed his brother in fame. Sweeney jumped at the job of director of painting and sculpture when it was offered to him, and to my knowledge (I may be inaccurate), he was the only person who ever had a contract at the Museum. You might want to check that. That contract did spell out that he was top banana, which the Museum itself, I'm now speaking from Sweeney's point of view, did not honor, and that eventually led to his resignation. He came in with some really spectacular acquisitions, largely pictures that had belonged to René Gaffé, a Belgian collector that I knew later fairly well. But it included things like the [Marc] Chagall *I and the Village* [1911], the [Roger] de La Fresnaye *Conquest of the Air* [1913]. These pictures had been kept in the United States because of war, and after the war was over, Alfred had gone exploring what was available for purchase, and although those pictures had been chosen by Alfred himself, it was during Sweeney's brief tenure here that they entered the collection. Sweeney was Catholic. This had nothing to do with his personal life; it did, strangely enough, affect the way he saw pictures. At that time Alfred's closest, oldest friend was Peter Blume. The Museum had already acquired [Blume's] *The Eternal City* [1934-37], and one of the first things Sweeney did was take it down and really considered it an anti-Catholic statement. He was particularly violent about this to my mother, which in many different minds is flattery; obviously Irish Catholic, as was Sweeney, there was some sort of rapport between the two. Sweeney was affected by a J. P. Morgan nose; visually he was very, very good, and it must have upset him. He was [inaudible] by a wife called Laura, who was almost hysterical about defending him, when he needed no defense at all. For instance, during wartime they had done a Miró show [*Joan Miró,* MoMA

Exh. #157, November 19, 1941-January 11, 1942]. It was very, very good, and the book accompanying the exhibition reproduced a lot of things that weren't in the show. The reason they weren't in the show is that it was wartime and they couldn't get here. When I did the big Miró show [*Joan Miró*, MoMA Exh. #641, March 19-May 10, 1959] several years later, Laura took it almost as a personal affront. She and Marga never got on, absolutely never. I do remember vividly Sweeney saying to Nelson--Alfred's title was what?, director or research at the time--that he didn't think that any research was needed on anything as current modern art.

SZ: He said that to Alfred.

WL: No, he said that to Nelson. I was there. I remember it vividly. Nelson was particularly nice to me when I came to the Museum. Nelson also gave rather lavish gifts upon occasion; for instance, when I wanted my own apartment, he heard about it, and there was a check, completely spontaneous. He did make regular contributions financially to Monroe; why, I've never known. None to Alfred ever that I know about, although Nelson gave so much anonymously I may not be correct there. But I know he did to Monroe. When Sweeney came, he also insisted, and I believe this is in the contract--if you could get a copy of that contract it would be fascinating--that he, Sweeney, be a trustee. Then Andrew Ritchie. Alfred and Marga had been nice to Andrew Ritchie when he was a lecturer at the Frick Museum and really helped him in his career. Again Ritchie, when he came to the Museum, wasn't nice to Alfred. That's when the ridiculous thing began. If we did a show, Alfred would have to be the person, or Dorothy, to consent to something that belonged to the Museum being in the show, and in the acknowledgments you have the Museum thanking itself for lending pictures, which to the outside world simply didn't make sense.

SZ: I think it was Russell Lynes that in effect the coordinating committee, the way it was

composed and the way it operated and the way it sort of closed in during Sweeney's tenure, it was as much to exclude Sweeney or to make sure that Sweeney didn't take on the kind of power that, obviously, Sweeney was looking for. Does that seem correct to you?

WL: Possibly. Russell's book is so inaccurate [Note: Lynes, Russell. *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of The Museum of Modern Art*. New York: Atheneum, 1973]. I'd say it seems possible. It was very necessary there be something like the coordinating committee just for an exchange of information on what was going on. The Museum has always been very bad at transmitting information. For instance, when I was made an assistant curator, it was decided at such a meeting, and I was never told. When I was made associate curator, again, I was never told. It just became par for the course. It broadened a tiny bit when Porter McCray years later did become a member of the committee. I think as I told you, I really campaigned for that. Porter, whatever his kvetchiness, is a man of broad vision--not the intellectual clarity of Alfred at all, but....

SZ: Since you mentioned Nelson, Nelson's presence I guess was felt then during this time, because his mother was old at that time, and he came back after the war. So tell me a little bit more about how through your eyes he felt about....

WL: Nelson was stationed in Washington at a townhouse. Actually, the Rousseau *Sleeping Gypsy* (1897) was to fit in Nelson's townhouse in Washington, but it didn't fit, so it really came rather quickly to The Museum of Modern Art. Nelson was a very great man, sort of broadly if not well, and had a genuine interest in the fine arts, although sometimes misguided. He did follow Alfred's advice in acquisitions, Dorothy's and mine. Alfred sort of resented that Nelson would ask me on occasion, and I learned that it was just easiest to tell Alfred the minute Nelson had asked me

about something. Remember, as I said, I was terribly young at the time. Nelson, however, I think supported Clark in the ousting of Alfred. Nelson himself was very young at the time, and did support Clark in the ousting of Alfred. I think he later he realized he was incorrect. You must remember, it was Nelson...I don't know whether the Museum admits this. It goes way back to Lillie Bliss's bequest. They didn't meet the money they were supposed to, and it was Nel who forked it out of his own pocket. Has anyone told you that? It must be documented sometime. Absolutely anonymous, never gets the credit for it. What went wrong at the end with Nel is that he really thought he was doing good and sharing with the public when he began making these reproductions. It was his sincere belief that he was. And of course people, including me, were absolutely horrified. The name Rockefeller, though, is a magic name, and, say, an artist's widow or something he'd write, "Do I have permission to make a tchochkes?" And of course a letter from Nelson Rockefeller, they were delighted to receive the letter, etcetera. And the real disaster that way, not something you sold in a boutique, but was one of these goddamn tapestries he kept having made. He wanted one of *Guernica* and Nelly van Doesburg, who was sort of responsible as the middle woman for Nelson's tapestries, got permission from Pablo [Picasso] to do the tapestry of *Guernica*. Unfortunately, they used a color reproduction that appeared in one of the Abrams books, so there are beige tints and slightly blue tints. This is because there was a color ektachrome, a very bad color ektachrome taken of a black-and-white painting. There are no blue tints, there are no beige tints in the original. So these indigent nuns or whoever fabricated these tapestries made this whole invention. He saw absolutely nothing wrong [with this]. He himself, like his mother, was interested in prints. When I found what's called the [Ambroise] Vollard Suite, which is completely inaccurate, I got a complete suite for Nel, which he wanted, strangely enough, bound as volumes of books. I don't know what's happened to that. The illustrated by him passed largely at auction. A few of the prints he kept, and in a marvelous bequest he made to me and to Alfred, he did

include one Matisse lithograph that we particularly needed. When we did the Nelson Rockefeller exhibition [*Twentieth-Century Art from the Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller Collection*, MoMA Exh. #892, May 28-September 1, 1969] there was on the first floor a little side gallery where the printed stuff was shown. Nelson of course came to love René d'Harnoncourt very well, who I think understood Nelson better than anyone else. Nelson's first sex was with Iris Barry, incidently, in an office in the Museum.... One was very, very fond of Tod, who was a very shy person and who remains even today a wonderful person. Happy comes onto the scene really very late, when Nel was not particularly active at the Museum. Did you know [Frederick] Kiesler's big piece.... The tape I did on Nelson's collection.... Kiesler is a terribly important person. He did the 8th Street Playhouse and all that, but also, he's a great architect and a man of ideas.... He did this extraordinary piece. Alfred flipped when he saw it and actually wrote a poem about it that was published in *Harper's Bazaar*. Nelson saw the piece, never had heard of Kiesler, immediately got the point of it and bought it. It's quite a wonderful piece--it's called *Galaxy* (1947-48)--and it was featured in one room in one of Dorothy's American shows.

SZ: Nelson brought René to the Museum, right?

WL: No. Nelson met René, I believe, at a small dinner that Alfred and Marga gave. Then he went to the [Bureau of] Indian Affairs, then, through Nelson, came to the Museum [Note: d'Harnoncourt worked at both the Indian Arts and Crafts Board and the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs during this time]. I believe his initial title--you can check this--was absolutely miserable; I think it was director of manual industries. Much later, when Nelson recommended Hightower, that recommendation bore weight because some people remembered that he had recommended René. Of course, the two men were in no way comparable.

SZ: From '45 to '49 you were Alfred's assistant.

WL: Yes, and skin, really.

SZ: In that period of time, tell me a little bit about what you did and how you started to develop your....

WL: Alfred had been demoted to the library, which at that time was this way, toward 54th Street. The garden is here; you couldn't see the garden. This was the library. This part of the library, very thin, long and narrow, was cut off for Alfred's office. This part of the library, which had been, somehow, the photography collection, was lopped off for me, so I would have to go through the library to get Alfred, or this way. Alfred's first assignment to me was to go--I know this sounds ridiculous--through every book and magazine in the library. At that time things were smaller, and I did it. Alfred had insomnia and would come to the Museum fairly late, usually about eleven o'clock. I happen to be an early riser, but Alfred, though, would stay at the Museum until about six or seven. For his secretarial work--I believe my first title was secretary--but for secretarial work there was someone. At one time it was Nika Pleshkova, at another time it was Olive Bragazzi, Faith Rugo. There was a succession. Like Dorothy, I was unswervingly loyal to Alfred; it never occurred to me to be anything. In some ways Dorothy and I were both servants, very willing servants. Alfred liked his phone calls being fended, and I would do that, except that woman whose name I couldn't remember but whom you seem to have remembered, who kept phoning a psychiatrist or something like that. I forget her name; you mentioned her yourself. She would just hammer about getting through to him. Alfred at that time was doing a series for Penguin Books on American painters. You commissioned Lloyd Goodrich to do one, I believe, on Hopper, Jim [Soby] to do one on [Ben] Shahn, someone to do something on Morris Graves. It was the equivalent to a series that Penguin was

doing on European artists. They were sort of long pamphlets; they were very good. Alfred, of course, was a marvelous editor, and I think--I don't think, I know--was responsible for the success of that series. One that he was pushing particularly was a Philadelphia painter called Frederick Watkins, and I don't know whether that got off the road; I have a feeling it did. At any rate, a few years later, Andrew Ritchie did a Watkins show at the Museum. Alfred was putting the Picasso book into form. Do you know the book I'm talking about?

SZ: Well, the major one he did.

WL: Yes. You know how that was written? There was a layout from what had been an exhibition catalogue, and Alfred had to write to fill in the spaces. Try and get a hold of a copy of the exhibition catalogue and the *Picasso: 50 Years of His Art*. That's how it was done. In other words, we used the same plates. There were a few additions. That was the first thing that I really worked quite seriously with Alfred on. Our relationship was interrupted by about a year and a half, or maybe it was a little less, when I developed hepatitis in France. This was a time when people didn't know anything about hepatitis; remember, this was long ago. I was in a room at the American hospital in Paris and was put on a milk and eggs diet. Christian Dior was alive then and said, "Billy, you were born in this hospital. Do you want a plaque also saying that you died in it?" I had to sign myself out of the hospital, which is very spooky, and Dior got me a man called Ugner [spelling unconfirmed], a professor at the Sorbonne, who analyzed the hepatitis and predicted the symptoms that would develop, and indeed, they developed almost immediately. But I was away from the Museum for that period. I'd always been interested in drawings and prints, largely because of Jacob Rosenberg at Harvard.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2

WL: ...drawings and prints because of Jacob Rosenberg at Harvard, not so much Paul J. Sachs, and certainly not Agnes Mongan. It became apparent, which began almost immediately when I arrived, something had to be done with the print collection, and so I began putting that in order.

SZ: Because it was something that was interesting to you and because Alfred had...

WL: No, because Miss Abby was hammering away that it be done. I don't think it would have been on Alfred's...it certainly would have been a priority but not a top one for Alfred. Then, based on her holdings, I turned that collection into the greatest collection of modern prints in existence. Then I was raised from assistant curator to associate curator to full curator, and somewhere along the line I also became a curator of painting and sculpture. I forget what that date is.

SZ: We have all those dates. The official titles are, in '49, associate curator of prints, in '53, curator of prints, then in '59 it was curator of prints and drawings--that was for that part of it--and then we can go on from there.

WL: There was curator of painting and sculpture.

SZ: Within that time?

WL: Yes. Not the directorship.

SZ: In 1960 it says department director. No, not the directorship, but you were also

curator of painting and sculpture?

WL: That's right.

SZ: In 1967.

WL: That late?

SZ: According to this.

WL: What does it say, director?

SZ: "In 1967 he was appointed curator and in '69 director of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture."

WL: I guess that's right then. Is that a press release?

SZ: Yes, for *Art of the Twenties* [MoMA Exh. #1277, November 14, 1979-January 22, 1980].

WL: My God. That's when I came here, you know.

SZ: I know, I worked on that. In any event, that reflects the Museum's official record. Now whether it's totally accurate or not, I don't know. Oftentimes there are a lot of...but here I have another note, "in '67, curator of painting and sculpture," so it must be that.

WL: I actually think my first title was secretary to Alfred, and not assistant.

SZ: When Alfred told you to go through every book and magazine that was in the library, he was educating you?

WL: Yes. I didn't realize it at the time. As I say, you must remember everything was smaller then, including the literature; it was certainly a job, but...it made me immediately familiar with the sources, though, things like that. I think Carolyn Lanchner will tell you, when I began working on the collection that for years the only entries for so much were my handwritten index cards. Have you gotten to know her at all?

SZ: I do know Carolyn, yes.

WL: She's a marvelous person, really wonderful. It was Alfred who suggested that I direct the *Modigliani* exhibition [MoMA Exh. #474, April 10-June 10, 1951]. Miró, I accepted directing that only if I was allowed to do eventually a Max Ernst show [*Max Ernst* MoMA Exh. #680, March 1-May 8, 1961]....

SZ: The Museum's holdings in prints when you started during this time, before you became curator or assistant curator, consisted largely of...

WL: Miss Abby's holdings, some of which were in duplicate, almost all of them coming from Edith Halpert. Although Edith Halpert claimed that she was a great defender of American art and all that, she made her early bucks selling Abby Aldrich Rockefeller European stuff. She somehow knew Vollard, I don't know quite how, maybe through her husband. Vollard, like many Frenchmen, was always intrigued by a young American girl, as was [Constantin] Brancusi.

SZ: Did you study her collection?

WL: Sure. Remember I said to you in the beginning, during Alfred's time and most of mine there weren't definitive catalogues or anything. The work wasn't made easy for you. One studied and one learnt a tremendous lot. Also, I began sending out all those questionnaires. I understand they've discontinued it, but one thought it was terribly important if one was dealing with works by living artists and if a Museum of Modern Art owned works by living artists. So the questionnaire was two-part; there was one about the artist and then one about the specific work. Sending out the questionnaires, one learnt a lot too. For instance, originally there was no date on the questionnaires. It never occurred to me; I'd never done anything like this before, so naturally one learnt that if you filled in as much information as you could yourself, it was easier for an artist--look at the questionnaires sometime; they must be in the files--to correct or to add, but just to show them that you had done something. Then very often an artist would not know that you had acquired a work or what work it was. So later on in sending out questionnaires one enclosed a photograph of the work. That worked fairly well with the exception of one artist called, I think, Quirk, who hated what Alfred got and wrote to some trustee a long tirade. Walter Quirk, that was his name.

SZ: Before we really talk more about building up the print collection, I want to go back to these same years because two other things of some significance were happening at the Museum and I just want to mine your memory for any of this. One was sort of the reestablishment of the photography department.

WL: When I came back from Europe, [Edward] Steichen was in. There had been a big brouhaha with Beaumont [Newhall], which I really didn't know about, I really didn't. When I came to the Museum, this is years before, it was Nancy [Newhall] who was

running the department. Steichen was a grand old man, in many ways a fraud, but certainly a personality.

SZ: A fraud in what sense?

WL: *The Family of Man* [MoMA Exh. #569, January 24-May 8, 1955] show was his conception, but he didn't take the photographs. He really didn't.

SZ: But did he ever claim to?

WL: No, but it was "Steichen presents," etcetera, and then of course for the book, the reproduction rights hadn't been cleared with the photographers. That's a whole mess. It was I who suggested that his great fan Grace Mayer come and be his assistant or whatever.

SZ: You knew her from...?

WL: My tutor had been Wystan Auden, and Wystan was redoing--this was long ago, when I did the *Dance Index* thing on Picasso--an edition of Henry James's *The American Scene* and wanted illustrations, and Wys asked me to help him get the illustrations together, which I did. I had really never set foot in the Museum of the City of New York, but I realized they had an archives there, or something, and I was fairly well known, although I was young, in the print field, and made an appointment to see Grace Mayer, who produced a number of images which were exactly what I was looking for, of the old Turkish Room at the Waldorf-Astoria, things like that, even some view of Newport that was used. Grace and I became fast friends, and then it turned out that she was Steichen's..."married" to Steichen. She's done a brilliant biography of Steichen, incidentally, which Steichen's widow has nixed, which

is too bad. One must remember, Steichen was trained as a painter, and Stieglitz's great European acquisitions and activities with European avant-garde is because of Edward Steichen. It was Steichen who chose the Rodin show that Stieglitz did; it was Steichen who chose the Matisse show which has the Picassos, not Stieglitz, just the way later, after Steichen, there was someone called Marius De Zayas who helped Stieglitz [Note: these exhibitions took place at Stieglitz's 291 Gallery in New York]. Marius De Zayas, incidentally, married into the Harrison family that I mentioned to you.

SZ: Barbara Harrison.

WL: I forget the name of the Harrison. I think it was Barbara [Harrison] Wescott's sister. I'm not sure. Then Steichen's estate in the country, I think it was in Litchfield, Connecticut, and a funny collector that I invented, Larry Aldrich had the adjacent estate, so I saw Steichen growing those flowers, whatever they were, ad nauseam. I mean, I care very much about the life and death of a rhododendron or whatever they were [LAUGHTER].

SZ: Delphinium.

WL: Delphiniums, yes. This is nothing to what we were talking about, but I studied some of the Steichen photographs for old *Vanity Fair*. Look closely at the lighting and look closely at the paintings of George Bellows: it's the same sort of theatrical lighting, and when you see George Bellows's lithographs, also in black and white, the lighting of the two...someone should make a study of them. But let's get back to the Museum.

SZ: Okay. The other department that was kind of arranging and rearranging itself was

the Department of Architecture.

WL: Architecture and Design. There was John McAndrew, then I think there was Ernestine Fantl. Ernestine Fantl left and went to England and became Ernestine Carter and a firm supporter of Churchill, and, I believe, women's fashion editor for the *London Times* or some newspaper. Ernestine Fantl, though, was quite important, and I think people tend to forget her completely.

SZ: Important in the sense of...?

WL: Of the department and the articulation of it. The *Machine Age* show was Alfred's idea [Note: *Machine Art*, MoMA Exh. #34, March 5-April 29, 1934]; other people, of course, get the credit. And it may be Alfred who also launched the words "international style." There's Henry-Russell Hitchcock hovering around all of this, and indeed, the younger Philip Johnson. Philip goes off the deep end and becomes a Nazi. All this is recorded in [William L.] Shirer's book, if you look at *Berlin Diary* in the index. And then Alfred saves him, literally saves him, and of course I don't think ever gets the credit for that. Philip had great difficulty passing his architectural examinations, and if he ever did, it's really the only reason. Mrs. Resor brings Mies into the picture. She commissioned a house someplace out west that was never built. Alfred also advised Mrs. Resor, Mrs. Stanley Resor of J. Walter Thompson, buying some very, very good pictures, including the famous de Chirico, the girl rolling the hoop down the street. Those pictures, of course, were supposed to come to the Modern and never did. Mrs. Resor herself [was] a wonderful woman, warm, very much like Miss Abby. Her daughter married Jay Lochlin, new directions. Jay Lochlin's first female date was Mrs. Donald Straus. The whole thing gets so complicated [LAUGHING]. It's surprising that Jay Lochlin was not more concerned or involved with The Museum of Modern Art. Certainly [he had] the same intellectual

awareness. Jay's corresponded so much to Alfred's visual awareness. Indeed, Jay wanted me to do a book on Paul Klee drawings, which I never did. But to get back to Architecture and Design, then there was John McAndrew, at that time a single man. And Edward Kaufmann, Jr. comes into the picture. [Frank Lloyd] Wright has been commissioned to do for his father Falling Water and the Kaufmann offices in Pittsburgh. Edgar, his mother and John McAndrew go to Mexico, literally as a threesome, and Edgar enters the picture at The Museum of Modern Art. I think the *Useful Objects* show had been initiated before Edgar, actually, but he took that on [Note: there was a series of *Useful Objects* exhibitions between 1939 and 1949]. Those were changed to *Good Design* [Note: *Good Design* began in 1951 and became an annual exhibition through 1955]. There was a little round label saying "Good Design," and of course things got more expensive. Then that sort of fleshed out when some clever entrepreneur made a little round label set in a square and lettered it--letter design [LAUGHING]--as a commercial thing. According to Alfred and Edgar, it was the time of the arts of India show [*Textiles and Ornamental Arts in India*, MoMA Exh. #576, April 11-September 25, 1955], which was taken over by Monroe and credited to him, although it couldn't have happened without Edgar's intellectual conception of the show. Edgar did not attend the opening. The same thing had happened with, I believe, the *Henry Moore* show [MoMA Exh. #339, December 17, 1946-Mar. 16, 1947], which was Sweeney's departure from the Museum, Sweeney not attending <u>that</u> opening. Sweeney got quite friendly with Georgia O'Keeffe after Stieglitz's death. Alfred and Stieglitz never got on together; although Alfred admired Stieglitz, Stieglitz always thought Alfred stole his fire. After Stieglitz's death, Sweeney became quite friendly, in a husky sort of way, with Miss O'Keeffe, and for a long time, that Stieglitz collection, which is now here at the Met, was on loan at the Modern. [To] get back to design, Philip, in the meantime completely reinstated, he's even done a synagogue someplace in New Jersey,...heads the Department of Architecture and Design for a while in a sort of

grasshopper way.

SZ: How did he get back to the Museum in that capacity?

WL: Alfred.

SZ: Was that part of Alfred's and Edgar's difficulties?

WL: I don't think so. If you were loyal to Alfred you had to be unswervingly loyal, even intellectually. Edgar did not buy that. I remember a terrible fight, really, that he had with Marga--this was during the Flexner lectures [given by Alfred] at Bryn Mawr. There was always a last-minute slide to be delivered, and of course I delivered it. But going down on the train with Edgar and Marga to hear the lectures, which unfortunately-- they were transcribed, but by someone who didn't know how to work a machine--all that's lost. If you can, the outline of those lectures, Rona [Roob] must have them. It's brilliant. It begins, "Modern art must be abstract"--that was one whole lecture; "modern art must be realistic"--that's another whole lecture; "Modern art must be propaganda"--another whole lecture. Brilliantly conceived, and [they] would have been Alfred's great book. But going on the train, they were speaking about something, I don't know what, and Edgar really blabbered, "You and Alfred are always telling me what to do."

SZ: That was, I assume, a huge mistake.

WL: I think so. Edgar was subsequently extremely generous to this museum [the Metropolitan], I think more out of spite than anything. I didn't stay on good terms with Edgar, largely because of his interest, it's funny, in Frida Kahlo. I mentioned this Mexican trip; he bought quite a few Mexican things, including that wonderful portrait

of Frida with her hair cropped. I'd always been interested in Mexican art and at the Modern did a small show of the Mexican holdings [*Mexican Art*, MoMA Exh. #1204, March 16-July 2, 1978] exclusively the Mexican holdings. You could never thank donors enough, so various donors whose works...that was really the last time I had to written to him. But I saw Edgar almost until his death; the last time I saw him was in Venice, when he was really going blind. But it was Philip who brought in Arthur Drexler. Alfred admired Arthur Drexler, really didn't like it. Arthur was brilliant. Arthur was also ambitious in a way that Alfred or Dorothy or me would never be ambitious. I mean, our ambitions were always for the Museum itself. Arthur was really pretty much for Arthur. Again, Arthur did not get an architectural degree; he flunked, despite his brilliance, which was considerable. Then someone called Wilder Green comes in, I believe as director of exhibitions at the Modern.

SZ: He came in actually in the architecture department.

WL: Yes, and then switched. Wilder didn't get on with, I believe it was Hightower, and they made him a director of the American Federation of Arts. I suggested to Roy Neuberger, then the top trustee there, that they hire Wilder, which they did, and where he worked brilliantly. Arthur had the knack of finding very bright people like Wilder, or like Emilio Ambasz, or like Stuart Johnson, who works under me now. But the minute they grew into a separate identity, Arthur really didn't like that, and it really happened time and time again. The *Art of the Twenties* show, where I tried to combine all media,...remember, this is the show that Alfred wanted to do as the opening show [*Paintings by 19 Living Americans*, MoMA Exh. #2, December 12-January 12, 1930], and it became the four Post-Impressionists [*Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, Van Gogh,* MoMA Exh. #1, November 7-December 7, 1929]. That is as much a tribute as I could make. Arthur Drexler was the only curatorial department head I had trouble with.

SZ: It was not a collaborative....

WL: Since they had never published a catalogue of their collections, it would have been difficult to remember what they had acquired had I not always been at the acquisition meetings with Alfred. I don't think Alfred intended the Department of Architecture and Design to become the sort of monstrous thing that it is now. There was a very good woman called Greta Daniels who did a tremendous amount of dirty work for which she doesn't get credit. There was a very destructive woman called Mildred Constantine, who came in through René d'Harnoncourt. She was always slobbering that she didn't get enough money, etcetera. She actually conned Philip Johnson into giving her a monthly stipend, and there was trouble when the administration found out about that. She's still alive and, I presume, kicking. Like many architects, Arthur Drexler really didn't respond to what I call works of art. For instance, John Szarkowski's first exhibition was American landscape photographs [*The Photographer and the American Landscape*, MoMA Exh. #728, September 21-December 1, 1963], something like that, and the installation was done by Arthur Drexler because John was, I guess, frightened or inexperienced. From my point of view Arthur just destroyed that show by making an interior architecture, wooden beams this way and wooden beams that way. I guess wood was supposed to be the equivalent of nature. But the installation really dominated the visual stuff much too much. What else about architecture and design? You might want to go back to the chair tester. There was something, I forget who invented this, where one tested chairs to see whether they would survive harsh treatment and all. It's amazing to look at it.

SZ: You mean there was an actual body.

WL: It was a thing [LAUGHTER]. Curt Valentin, of course, plays an extraordinarily important role in the history of the Museum, indeed, in the history of the appreciation of modern art in the United States. He's a very good friend of Dorothy Miller's, and of mine. I mentioned before that I'm an early riser. Curt would always be in his gallery by at least nine o'clock in the morning. He, too, had insomnia. It's very funny. He drank heavily and really slept because he would get just drunk, and anyone he was with, one helped him undress. Sometimes it was Dorothy Miller, sometimes a docent at the Museum called Ruth Olsen, with whom he had a brief affair, and sometimes it was me. [INTERRUPTION]. I said to Curt, "It's terrible. Can't you count sheep and fall asleep?" He said, "Billy, I would count artists's widows" [LAUGHTER]. He was very generous to the Museum, of course, upon his death. He left, I think, twenty-five drawings and prints, the great [Max] Beckmann *Deposition*, things like that. About Alfred, we must go into Varian Fry and--what was that committee called?--about getting the artists out during the war. The Friends Rescue Committee [Emergency Rescue Committee]. Varian's book is called *Surrender on Demand*; for background information, Mrs. Pierre Matisse. There are two other books that were written about all that.

SZ: Actually, my eleven-year-old son is reading a biography of Varian Fry.

WL: There's a biography?

SZ: Yes, I'll bring it.

WL: Don't bring it, just give me the name.

SZ: Next time I will. I'm going to stop for today.

WL: Sure. I'm sorry I rattle on so much.

SZ: No, it's fabulous.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: WILLIAMS S. LIEBERMAN (WL)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

LOCATION: NEW YORK, NEW YORK

DATE: MAY 4, 1993

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

WL: You had asked me about architecture and design.... There is someone, and I can't even put a face to him, he was called Eliot Noyes, and I think he must have been still at war when I came. There also was someone called Betty Mock, who I think did a book about bridges, and then, what is the name of the architect who did Asia House? He's done a lot of museums, a close friend of mine. Anyway, I'll think of his name. He married much later another girl who was in that department, and she was pretty fabulous.

SZ: Who was that?

WL: I can't think of the name. I will. It was the first time I saw anyone wearing red heels. I remember it vividly. She also had a link to Wyndham Lewis, curiously enough, as did Iris Barry. She, however, was an American girl. I'll remember both names eventually. Anyway, I thought about that later.

SZ: They were there...?

WL: In my beginning.

SZ: I wanted to talk about the beginning of the Junior Council, which was in 1949. I think

that the Junior Council was really formed...it was the same year you were appointed head of the print collection, but I think that was afterwards; I think it was in the spring that the Junior Council was formed and in the fall you became the first curator or assistant curator of prints. Were you with the Junior Council from its very beginning?

WL: Yes. It goes back to Blanchette Rockefeller. In the beginning, when she became associated with the Museum, it was all sort of vague, and Alfred sort of put her in my charge. What do I mean when I say that? It's funny, we were just speaking about auctions. There were a lot of good print auctions in those days, and we'd go together and together decide what might be gotten at auction for the Museum's collection.

SZ: You and Alfred.

WL: No, me and Blanchette. It was a way of his not being heckled by Blanchette, it was a way of me getting to know her. Alfred, I realize, must have planned this. Then, about this time, and I'm sorry I'm so bad about dates, one of the Rockefeller advisers, I forget whom, but at that time and for quite some time later, wives of Rockefellers were always sort of advised about what to do. That's one of the things that really wrecked Happy. She just couldn't stand it. That is, of course, much later. But in relation to The Museum of Modern Art, someone in the Rockefeller office suggested to Blanchette the idea of a Junior Council. This is about the time we were going to the auctions; I was sort of bringing her in. And that's how the Junior Council came into being. I, if I'm not mistaken, had just gotten back from Europe, too, a protracted stay in Europe, and that all sort of bubbled for the first time. I stayed with the Junior Council, I think, for its first decade. After that, they needed two staff advisers. One was Liz Shaw--I think she was then Liz Bolt--and I'm sorry, I plumb forget who the other was.

SZ: I know that later on Wilder Green became one.

WL: That's much later. While I was with the council, they did postcards and greeting cards and calendars, particularly the calendar. Remember, everything was much smaller. They didn't do all the Museum's postcards and greeting cards, but they did bring in some good stuff. They also ran an art lending service. This was not the first art lending service the way the Junior Council thinks it was in retrospect. The first art lending service I know of was actually started by someone who became a trustee of the Modern, and that's Mrs. (Florene) Schoenborn, who as Mrs. Samuel Marx in Chicago, at the Art Institute, began an art lending service. Anyway, that idea was taken by the Junior Council and was quite successful for many years. Long, long ago, there were many people who were afraid to go into a dealer's gallery; they were just intimidated. There weren't that many galleries and there weren't that many people walking around. They sort of felt safe if there was an imprimatur of The Museum of Modern Art. The Junior Council's choices for what went into the Art Lending Service were screened curatorially. With the exception of me, other curators really just thought of it this way and didn't cooperate too much. An exception there was a bride of MoMA, Alicia Legg, who later commandeered the guest house and the stuff was assembled there. This was after I'd divorced myself, not from the council but from the Art Lending Service. This was also the time Blanchette was beginning the guest house. This all meshes, at the same time. The Art Lending Service was a success, but it became, really, outdated. It was apparent within a few years that it was no longer necessary. It was an interesting step. However, it had gotten rather big; they were beginning corporate work--this was before corporate work was being done by all these fake curators around town--and it really got to be too much. What the council did was extraordinary, and this was really under my goosing, were three or four actually open shows, the only open shows The Museum of Modern Art ever did. That began with prints, and it was very successful. It was

printmakers under the age of thirty-five. It was called *Young American Printmakers* [MoMA Exh. #547, November 25, 1953-January 31, 1954] and it was open to anyone. I was the sole judge, as, really, I prefer to be today. I think if there's a single juror in anything, at least the mistakes are consistent and there aren't compromised decisions. Anyway, *Young American Printmakers* was a success, and the all-time sale, since the prints were multiple, was a print of Jonah and the whale, sort of in blue, and I forget what artist did it. Since they were multiples, you could have more than one, and they sold something like twenty or twenty-five of them. A curious after-fact is, the poor artist had a heart attack afterwards. It was a very successful show, though, and I'm sure there's a checklist of it. Then I graduated them in media. Then the next one was *Recent Drawings USA* [MoMA Exh. #601, April 25-August 5, 1956], and if you look at Andy Warhol's chronology in The Museum of Modern Art publication, that was his first showing in a museum, although they don't credit the show itself, and certainly not me. I think it's also the first time that Ellsworth Kelly shows. There was a very strict definition of drawing for that show, and that was that it had to be in a single color. Most artists, of course, submitted stuff that was black on white. One artist withdrew when he heard that it was a jury thing, and that was Edwin Dickinson, an artist I greatly admire. Then the third show, and you can check all the dates of that, is *Recent Painting USA: The Figure* [MoMA Exh. #707, May 23-August 26, 1962]. By this time, these open shows had gotten very, very popular, and I think one had to tour that. Then, *Recent Sculpture USA* [MoMA Exh. #644, May 13-August 16, 1959], with which I had very little to do, that was really trucked around the country. In other words, interestingly, those are the only four "open" shows the Modern ever did. I was not the single juror for *Recent Painting USA*. It was me, Dorothy Miller and I plumb forget, someone else [James Thrall Soby]; it's possibly mentioned in the catalogue. The catalogue for that, to save money, if I remember correctly, was also a Museum *Bulletin.* The catalogue for *Recent Sculpture USA,* I don't even remember what it looked like. To get back to the Art Lending Service,

extraordinary things were sold, in retrospect, and indeed, I did a little show, which was in the auditorium galleries, which at that time had some very good shows -- I did Jacques Villon's first one-man show there [*Jacques Villon: His Graphic Art*, MoMA Exh. #540, September 8-November 15, 1953]; that had nothing to do with the Junior Council -- but it was a retrospect of five years or seven years or something like that of highlights, and included, interestingly enough, [Jean] Dubuffet, Jasper Johns, etcetera. Remember, there was a price limit; I think in the beginning it was $500 and went up. All that should be in the records, though. Then someone on the council thought that... television was new, brand-new, and the first painting that the Museum ever televised was something by Edward Hopper that had to be brought to the TV studios. I remember the heat was just impossible. Why do I mention that? Someone on the council was interested in art reportage and it was happening on beginning television, interviews with artists, etcetera. The film library couldn't care less about it. The Junior Council began an archive of artists' interviews or films about art that were made for television. What has happened to that I don't know; it should be extremely valuable. It was probably tossed out of some closet. The person who knows most about the council in its very formative years is Mrs. E. Powis Jones, Anne Jones, who is more than alive and kicking, and who was a close friend of mine. She was a new sort of American for Alfred. Alfred respected her.

SZ: What does that mean?

WL: Alfred needed you to give concentrated attention to him; Anne didn't. Anne was a marvelous volunteer working, really, as a pro, but from the Junior Council. She helped me with the Max Ernst show, certainly helped with the auction, the Louise Smith thing she did.

SZ: Yes, I want to know about that.

WL: It was really Anne Jones who did all the dirty work. Anne became disenchanted with the Museum when René d'Harnoncourt was responsible for a show of American sculpture at the Rodin museum. René could be even more desultory than myself or Alfred, and Anne just gave up on that. She's a very good person. Through the council came, eventually, several trustees -- foolishly, they never made one of Anne -- but that's how Celeste Bartos came in. She just wandered in the Junior Council offices. No one had known her before. That's how Beth Straus came in. Even Gertrud [Mellon] was a member of the council. Of course, some of these people got long in the tooth and didn't like being called "junior" anymore.

SZ: Wasn't the initial idea of the Junior Council to cultivate [trustees]?

WL: Frankly, it was a training ground to try to find trustees, but under, I guess, the advice of someone at the Rockefeller office, and I'm sorry, I simply don't remember who it is, it was sufficiently broad. I think the Junior Council brought great things to the Museum at a time, and then stopped. They also commissioned prints, including, believe it or not, one by Dubuffet.

SZ: When they would do something like commission prints, was there curatorial input in that?

WL: Well, you see, I was curator of prints. I tried to encourage them with anything I could control, just so they didn't go to the irritation....

SZ: I'm asking that for a reason, because later on, and it was well after you were no longer really involved with them, there were instances where the Junior Council and its actions were in some way an irritant.

WL: It was. In the new building -- remember, I was violently against the present building; I believed that the old building should have been leveled, that the garden be transferred to 53rd Street and that the opening be on the 54th Street side, instead of this -- in the original plans, the Art Lending Service was having space on the first floor, and this was long after I had been [involved], and as I said, the idea was out of date, no longer needed. That was a bone of contention. I think the first paid person working for the Art Lending Service was Ruth Cook, who at that time was married to Alistair Cook. He, of course, met a wealthy American and divorced Ruth. I'm sorry to ramble on so.

SZ: It's been said to me by a few of the women who came into the Museum through the Junior Council that it was also a wonderful experience, there were so many exciting programs....

WL: My ten happiest years. I was contemporary of the people or slightly younger; we grew up together, and it was wonderful. Alfred hated my association with the Junior Council.

SZ: Because?

WL: I did a show at the guest house, selections from the collection. There's a small checklist; I wrote an introduction. It was quite successful, and it was at the time the fire occurred. But that was at the guest house, and it was really quite a fascinating show. It showed them as collectors, not only in painting and sculpture, but in prints, even illustrated books. They also did one of the first guides to modern art in Europe -- there must be a copy of it someplace -- was a good, if early, listing of what to see in Europe that was relevant to modern art. That was published in book form. Again, I

think I did an introduction to it.

SZ: Later on, of course, they undertook the calendar.

WL: No, the calendar was before all this. The calendar began almost in the beginning, but they did do other projects.

SZ: They would sponsor performances? Were you still [affiliated]? I think you must have been.

WL: The first performance thing was done by that man who was associated with the public library, a friend of David and Peggy's [Rockefeller], lived in the adjacent house in the '60s.... I forget the performing arts things they did. It was in the auditorium. I seem to remember André Emmerich and pre-Columbian music.

SZ: I think there was Indian [music], Ali Akbar Khan.

WL: Yes. The woman who did it was not actually a council member. What is her name? I'll think of her name. Carleton Sprague Smith's wife, Elizabeth. She irritated people, but she did a good job. And then, of course, out of the Junior Council grew the idea -- again, I think, a Rockefeller office idea -- of the International Council.

SZ: In terms of the Junior Council, two things: the open shows. Philosophically, how did that fit in with what was going on at the Museum, or wasn't? Why did you feel that was important to do at that time?

WL: They wanted to be concerned with what was going on. That was one problem, always, with the council. They were always, say, more contemporary-minded than

the Museum itself, even though they didn't know very much about it. It isn't like these days when you have baby couples collecting the most outrageous things of the avant-garde. The time was really quite different then. I remember when The Museum of Modern Art got Jackson's first painting. It was not shown in the galleries proper, it was shown in the penthouse. Walter Bareiss came in through the Junior Council. If you can show me a list, there are several people who became really vital. The architect who was married to the woman who wore red shoes is called Ed Barnes. Mary at that time was not married to him. She's the person with the Bloomsbury-Wyndham Lewis connection. She is considerably older than Ed, I think. They're a marvelous couple. Philip, of course, was violently against his being a trustee: he was another successful architect. If he had been an unsuccessful architect, okey-dokey.

SZ: The guest house, Mrs. Rockefeller's guest house. What kind of part did that play?

WL: In the very beginning, the house was finished, and Blanchette had a few family and friends -- Blanchette and John, actually; John, of course, hated the idea -- I'll never forget, there were a few family and a few friends, and I was caught in the pool, those pavements, making chit chat to Mr. John, which is always extremely difficult, I mean just going on and on, and I said, "Mr. John, has anyone fallen in the water yet?" And he went [nodded his head], and I said, "Who?" and he pointed to himself. So I just fled. No Rockefeller ever slept in the guest house. I think the first foreign person who did was Chisaburoh Yamada, Japanese, who was quite important to Blanchette and certainly important to me, in my involvement with things Japanese. He had studied in Germany before the war, had married a Dutch woman, who stayed with him, and he became a courier during the war. They have two sons, both of whom were in America. He was a brilliant director of the Museum of Western Art and fully sympathetic to modern art, to twentieth-century art. Chisaburoh, I think, was the first

person who ever stayed there. It was rather awkward. The stairwell was extremely abrupt, and I had to put treads on it because people really would fall down. It's architecture has been changed, has been redone now, with the help of Philip's office, by an English friend of mine, Anthony d'Offay, who owns the house. When I did the show of the Junior Council Collection, as I said, it was shown at the guest house. There's one trouble. Philip is good at ideas but not carry-through. He had stripped the interior to the retaining walls. That was just ducky and very effective, but if you hung a canvas on these walls, the air . . . and so for fillers I used bread, fresh bread that had dried, and did that on several occasions there. I remember Anthony d'Offay was alarmed when I happened to remember one area that I just plucked out [LAUGHTER]. The guest house was invaluable for entertainment, not so much entertainment on a grand scale, although certainly there was nothing in New York like that at the time, but it was different, it was the Museum's but it wasn't the Museum's. Then Bill Burden, who is extremely conscious of things social, although he himself was sort of a bull in a china shop, gave an amount of money which matched any staff entertainment. For instance, he made it possible that I could give a lunch at the guest house, which I normally couldn't afford, because the small fund he had paid for half of it. One used that to very great -- at least I did -- to very great advantage. Gertrud Mellon was in charge of housekeeping for the Museum and sort of the guest house. For several years there was a terrible butler there -- Scandinavian, I think -- called Charles, who was really a tyrant, but we finally got along. The master bedroom on the first floor I don't think was ever used. People used to give house tours -- they still do -- and the master bedroom was gotten up with these hairbrushes, Blanchette's actually, silver, on the dressing table, and the first time it was open for a house tour, all that was flinched. I've always wondered about the cellar of the guest house, where, for some reason, I never was. I know that sounds ridiculous, but I worry about strange things, though. The lighting was a problem. Philip used those lamps around the floor that shine up, and if you smoked,

it just became a...and, of course, the [Jacques] Lipchitz that's now at Lincoln Center was commissioned as an overmantel, overmantels being a Rockefeller tradition. Nelson had commissioned Matisse to do an overmantel. Even [Gaston] Lachaise did an overmantel project for Nelson, and the Lachaise drawing for that is now at the Modern, strangely enough, if I remember correctly, a gift of Blanchette. So that idea, perhaps, was Nelson's. That was the only commissioned work of art in the guest house, and a very bad Lipchitz it is. What else about the guest house?

SZ: That's fine. So all in all, you felt that the Art Lending Service became outdated.

WL: As an idea.

SZ: Because there were so many galleries and people were....

WL: People on Saturdays and then on weekdays went around. It's like Larry Aldrich in the beginning. I brought him to the Museum. He wouldn't buy anything unless it was at auction, and that was because he felt there was another sucker willing to pay. I said, "Larry, that's crazy." He once cheated terribly with the Art Lending Service, incidentally. He bought quite a lot, and since the checks are made out to the Art Lending [Service] of The Museum of Modern Art, he claimed a sizable tax deduction for works of art that he had bought. That was his problem with the Treasury Department.

SZ: But as a group, the Junior Council, which now has another name, as a function within the whole institution, that you felt was a profitable one, an important one.

WL: In the first dozen years, yes. Remember, the . . . had tended to grow older. This did bring the younger crowd around.

SZ: Maybe I should just stay now in the 1950s, since I think that's what we're really talking about, and I guess I've gotten hints of it, but tell me a little bit about how you took the print collection and really started to fill it out and make it grow, and what kinds of things you needed to do and what kinds of skills you needed to do that.

WL: As I said to you in the beginning, this was a time before definitive catalogues, things like that. For instance, for the [Paul] Klee collection, Curt Valentin had published a book called *The Prints of Paul Klee* [Soby, James Thrall. *The Prints of Paul Klee*. New York: Curt Valentin, 1945] or something like that. In schlepping around Europe, I realized that there were very many that weren't in the book, so I began collecting them. Then, when I discovered the so-called Vollard Suite -- I mean, no one had heard of it then -- the first publication of that was only a part of it, in a pamphlet I did as a membership publication called *Picasso: The Sculptor's Studio.* Before that, any part of the Vollard Suite was unknown. Then, as I told you, I once was abroad for a protracted time because I was ill, but I had found in England a marvelous revival called lithography, and Alfred -- I didn't do it, but with the stuff I got for the Museum, Alfred did a show called *Current English Printmaking* [Note: *English Color Lithographs*, Circulating Exhibitions, 1941-1942], something like that. One was bold. I actually studied with [Stanley William] Hayter, because too many print curators, they may know all about how different impressions look and things like that, but they don't know actually how to make a print. What I did was terrible, but I did learn how to etch, how to handle a burin, and I still advise people going into the field to do that, in fact, I think it's essential. I was with [Georges] Braque -- I forget the street his house was on -- we were talking about Cubism and Cubist prints, and he said, "There are other plates," and I said, "I certainly have never seen one." He let me rummage around and I found about four or six, which then were printed, but really Cubist prints. I had the same thing when I did the Pollock show at the Museum

[*Jackson Pollock*, MoMA Exh. #824, April 5-June 4, 1967]. Lee Krasner let me go through every scrap, and I found all those Pollock prints, only one of which had been known, and editions were pulled of that. I think the first important print show I did was *Recent Woodcuts USA* [*Recent American Woodcuts and Prints by Marin, Hopper and Weber*, MoMA Exh. #519, September 9-November 16, 1952]. I'm sorry, that's so long ago I don't know whether it was a Junior Council show or not....

SZ: I can probably tell you right now, if you want to know.

WL: No, I don't, really. That may have been the Junior Council's first print show, even. No, it wasn't, because the Junior Council's first print show had lithographs.

SZ: You said it was *Young American Printmakers.*

WL: Yes, that's right. There was one artist, June Wayne, who later sucked money by the millions out of the Ford Foundation for lithography. I used to call her the Queen of Lithoania. Anyway, she was considerably over the age of thirty-five but entered the show. Of course, I didn't know; it never occurred to me in those years that people would be false about their ages. And then someone she knew called Richard Florsheim, Chicago Florsheim shoes, himself an artist, a bad artist, but wealthy, took great glee in telling me June Wayne's exact age.

SZ: She had Tamarind.

WL: Yes. This was before Tamarind. Imagine being before Tamarind [LAUGHING]. And then, of course, I helped Tanya Grossman, although I don't think it's really mentioned in the book about Universal Art Editions, and brought to her the financial support of the Bartoses.

SZ: You brought her that support.

WL: Yes. And made sure The Museum of Modern Art got the first of everything. I also brought a few council people out to West Islip, for instance, Augie Heckscher's wife, Clothilde, and she pulled a lithograph there, and Larry Rivers was nice enough to be there once.

SZ: What made her so good? I remember reading that piece in *The New Yorker,* and I wondered, and something that you just said, you have the eye and the connoisseurship and you've tried to do it, you're not good at it but at least you understand the process, in that piece it seemed to me that in some way she was kind of facilitating the process but didn't...I don't know exactly what it was, but I came away from that feeling that I didn't really understand what it was about her that made her product so wonderful.

WL: Her personality and her insistence upon perfection, which she learned. She began, actually, with some Jewish artists, someone like Max Weber or something -- all of this was never written up, I'm sure -- and that just didn't go over. Then somehow she met Mary Callery, my friend, also Alfred's friend, and did something with Mary Callery. All this she later denied, but Mary Callery was a real entre into the New York art world. She met Jasper and Larry, collaborations between poets, which didn't work out so well, and then my friend Alexander Liberman -- I'd done his photography show at the Modern [*The Artist in His Studio - Photographs by Alexander Liberman,* MoMA Exh. #653, October 29, 1959-January 13, 1960] -- wanted to be associated with her, but he wasn't quite a high-enough type artist for her. But, of course, when some Russian author asked that he illustrate something, that was fine. She branched out. She would mother the artists as they worked. They would often stay

with her in the neighborhood; she would feed them. Countless proofs were tossed away: that explains the eccentric numbering of the editions that say [edition of] nineteen or twenty-three -- usually it's twenty or a hundred. She really mothered the artist. She began very modestly. Her husband, Maurice, was, unfortunately, an artist, and a very bad one. I did defend his work, which I couldn't stand, but, frankly, just because of her. She would insist on physically bringing me the first thing printed, always elaborately wrapped, often at awkward times, without an appointment, and as one got busier and busier, I couldn't cope with coddling her, so I tried to then have Riva [Castleman] take it over, and for years she wouldn't do it with Riva at all, but that finally got all better, and now, I suppose, it will be Riva who was her great defender, but it didn't happen that way. She really learned about quality, though.

SZ: She *learned* about quality.

WL: Yes. That's what I meant when I began.

SZ: So she was a perfectionist and she was an able technician.

WL: She wasn't. She couldn't print herself. Absolutely not, absolutely not. People have visions and they'll tell you they saw her...no. Jasper did a print, I think, called *Accident,* and what was that all about? It was about an actual accident: the stone cracked. But it was pulled that way, and that's why the print is called *Accident.* If one could only write the truth [LAUGHING]. She would never call me Bill.

SZ: Mr. Lieberman?

WL: And, of course, so few people called me Mr. Lieberman, I'd turn around to see where Mr. Lieberman was. June Wayne hated her, but, luckily, they hadn't...you see, June

Wayne had all that support, millions of dollars from the Ford Foundation, and if you do the cumulative thing of Tamarind, which is thousands and thousands of images, in quality Tanya practically never did a bad print.

SZ: Because of her perfectionism.

WL: Yes.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 3

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 3

WL: She had trouble with one artist, Helen Frankenthaler.

SZ: That was personal trouble, you mean?

WL: She kept a lot of trial proofs, and Helen claimed them. I'm thinking of a lawsuit. I stayed out of it.

SZ: So ultimately, if you look at the renaissance of printmaking in this country, you'd really say that it was Tanya Grossman who fostered it.

WL: No, I'd say it was me, actually. I know that sounds immodest. In lithography, yes.

SZ: My use of technical terms is not so....

WL: It was Hayter in intaglio -- that's etching and engraving; it was the American woodcut show that the Modern did, in woodcut and linoleum -- and I claim credit for that.

Actually, Una Johnson had done, a few years before, a recent American woodcut show at the Brooklyn Museum, which, quite frankly, gave me the idea of the one I did at the Modern on a much larger scale. That was...I thought of it because I saw what Una had done, and then, in lithography, it is certainly Tanya Grossman, and to a larger but lesser extent, June Wayne. The tradition of June Wayne and Tanya combined is being led today by a printed called Ken Tyler, who was, of course, the best collaborator June Wayne ever had. That's where he began.

SZ: That's right, he began there and then he left, and then he came east.

WL: Yes. What? [LAUGHING]

SZ: I'm thinking about how to move into it, how to phrase it. I wanted to ask you about the [Lester] Avnet collection and how that was acquired, but that was one of several major acquisitions along the way.

WL: The first that way was the Victor Riesenfeld collection. I'd been abroad and gotten a lot of prints. Alfred advanced me the money, but told me I had to raise the money for it. A close friend of my parents was Newman Levy. You're too young, but he was a lawyer, but also a rather amusing poet. He did *Opera Guyde.* Have you ever seen that? It's sort of limericks: "Cigarette and cigar men were smitten with Carmen, from near and from far, men were caught with her smile." Anyway, through Newman Levy's wife, Eva, who's since remarried, I discussed the problem, and she suggested Riesenfeld, whom I went to, whom I'd never met before, and God, I was young. And he said no. I gave him my night line at the Museum -- in those days, one had night lines -- and to my astonishment, he phoned and said yes. At the same time, the same trip abroad, I'd gotten Matisse to give us *Jazz,* so we did a double show called *Two Gifts* [*Print Gift of Victor S. Riesenfeld & Matisse: Jazz: Gift of the*

Artist, MoMA Exh. #387, October 1-October 31, 1948]; it was all the stuff I'd gotten that Riesenfeld paid for, and then the thing from Matisse.

SZ: What had you done to change his mind?

WL: I think I must have been so young and so faltering -- the money was really his wife's, which I didn't know at the time -- that they really took an interested pity on me. He later became fairly important in the fundraising drives at the Museum. I was away when he died, but I believe Alfred spoke at his funeral, a service which for some reason I think was at Hunter College -- I may be wrong, because I was away -- instead of the auditorium at the Museum. But I continued getting gifts. Curt Valentin in his will left me a choice, I think, of five drawings and twenty-five prints, things like that. Then I met Lester Avnet and formed a collection for him, with the understanding that it would come to the Museum. I'd seen Alfred screwed enough, buying for people, like Mrs. [Aline M.] Liebman or for the resource when stuff didn't come to the Museum.

SZ: There was a part to that sentence that didn't appear. You had seen it so that....

WL: Alfred would help people to acquire things with the understanding that they would come to the Museum...and then they wouldn't.

SZ: What did that make you do differently? I thought that was implicit in what you were saying.

WL: One had gotten him to put it in his will. Here at the Met, I insist on something in writing, which people don't like, but I saw Alfred get burnt so often. That, of course, was honored in his will, which was a mess, a real mess. His wife, his widow, who's

now quite ill, with no interest in all this at all, and three children who were really about to be paupers and that whole situation. The gift to the Modern was saved by a lawyer called Lillian Poses, who was faced with this will written by some horrible other lawyer. Anyway, she rescued the Avnet estate, the Avnet family and the gift to the Modern. Avent also gave things like the Marisol, the big statue of Lyndon Johnson, to the Modern [*LBJ*,1967] . He at one time bought the real Monsu [spelling unconfirmed] doors at the Vatican. When I say the "real Monsu doors at the Vatican," they were the first ones, but like the Matisse *Dance,* they didn't fit when they were delivered. Those did not go to the Modern. I helped Lillian Poses, this lawyer, sell them to a man called [Nobutaka] Shikanai in Japan, who was the Hakone Open-Air Museum. He died. It's strange. Both Lester Avnet and Victor Riesenfeld had Christian mothers, and I've often wondered if the mix-up in my own racial and religious background...I've just wondered about that, I certainly wouldn't push it. It is a funny coincidence, though.

SZ: What was it about these two collections?

WL: I formed them.

SZ: As you formed them, you were doing that with the Modern in mind?

WL: Yes.

SZ: With the Avnet, yes, but the other?

WL: Riesenfeld? Yes. As I say, Alfred advanced me the money but told me I had to raise it. I don't think it was a vast sum. I think the Riesenfeld thing came to $1,200. It ought to be in the records someplace. Larry Aldrich I shamed into giving to the

Museum, because he had benefited so much from my advice, and, eventually, he did. Also, I got Larry to give a fund for artists not represented in the collection. That's how the first Stella was bought, if you check.

SZ: And getting *Jazz* from Matisse?

WL: Mom was one of the pretty loved artists, so it was a fairly good entre. Actually, she helped Alfred with the question in the Matisse book. She may be there under the name Slattery in the credits, I don't know; you can check. I went there with Douglas Cooper, who at the time had dedicated his Penguin book on Paul Klee to me. There are a lot of other print collections or drawing collections that one brought in. I forget what they were; I'd really have to go back. In the very, very beginning, until she died, Miss Abby would give money. All you had to do was ask her. There was a friend of my parents, Jean Boucher, he was a rather distinguished art dealer in Paris, who was a friend of someone called Catsby Jones in Virginia, and immediately after the war, Jean bought for Catsby Jones Picasso's *Bouffant,* those animal etchings, which no one had ever seen. Before she delivered it in Virginia to Catsby Jones, I showed it to Alfred, and we got a copy, or rather, I got a copy, and Miss Abby paid for that. Those were shown at the Museum in conjunction with a gift she gave of things she had collected of [Henri de] Toulouse-Lautrec posters. Try to get the press release for that show. Alfred wrote the press release, and there's some gorgeous prose in there. I think he describes the Picasso etching of a wolf. Someone should go back to some of those press releases, because some very good writing by Alfred is in them.

SZ: There was a press person at that time, right?

WL: There was Sarah Newmeyer, who terrified everyone, then she did herself in. Then there was someone else. Then, after my long stay abroad, they had hired Elizabeth

Bolt, and Elizabeth and I became very good friends and formed a pact, actually, that if we heard one or the other was getting the shove, we'd tell the other immediately.... [LAUGHTER] It brought us close.

SZ: Were you always wondering whether you were secure or not?

WL: No.

SZ: And I'm using "you" in the large sense.

WL: Me, personally, no. Other people were, though. As I said to you, as far as I know, Sweeney was the only person who ever had a contract. I may be wrong with that; I don't think I am.

SZ: But my impression largely is that once René took over, those kinds of machinations subsided to some degree, at least for a period of time, at least until the '60s. But that may not be correct.

WL: Alfred really began crumbling about the time of my Miró show, which is the time that Arthur Drexler led what Alfred always referred to as the Young Turks.

SZ: Yes, I was going to ask you what you knew about that, so, since you've brought it up....

WL: Alfred changed. One remained fantastically loyal to him, but increasingly, things went wrong. For instance, the great Picasso portrait of Oud which was offered to the Museum for acquisition, something the Museum should have gotten, Alfred was just too tired. Alfred's real comeback is, I think, in the annual report for ['43-'44] or ['44-

'45], for the staff listing, and there at the top of the first column, on the left, it's "Alfred H. Barr, director of research," then there's my name, then there is, alphabetically, the curatorial departments. I think Sweeney was still there. Dorothy was listed, not with Alfred, but with Sweeney. It's either '43-'44 or '44-'45. Take a peek. You must ask me questions, because I can rattle on.

SZ: Okay.... The end of the '50s. There was the fire, and then the decision was made to take on a large capital campaign.

WL: The fire was terrible. There was the show at the guest house. I was beginning doing the Miró exhibition. From the guest house I had gone to Pierre Matisse, my dear friend, and Pierre said he had heard about the fire. I thought it was the guest house. I went back, and of course it wasn't the guest house, it was the Museum. I entered the Museum through the Whitney, that back entrance, and Alfred and I began carrying out pictures. Remember, almost all of Seurat was there, to say nothing of Juan Gris. We literally schlepped pictures with strength we really didn't have. How the big *Grande Jatte* was manipulated out of the Modern into the lobby of the Whitney.... I know we did it; I just don't see how we did it. I passed out from smoke and was revived by milk being . . . which apparently is the way you revive people from smoke [inhalation]. I didn't wash it off. Dried milk can stink. I remember the first thing I saw was Nelson in a fireman's helmet, which was just so ludicrous that me, always laughing at the wrong time, I broke out laughing, and Nel apparently had been around, heard about it and arrived with his fire cap. The fire deeply distressed Alfred. As I told you, he accused René of committing murder, which deeply distressed René. René insisted that all lenders to the Seurat exhibition be notified immediately that everything was okay, but immediately, and that was done. The only lender -- of course, everybody said, "Oh my God" -- who was difficult was [Alfred] Lehman, and that wasn't because of Lehman, it was because of his curator, a man

called Szabo, who tried to cause trouble -- George Szabo, I guess he's called. Alfred always kept on his desk a catalogue. I forget what it was. It was a fairly thin catalogue, almost square in format, and the cover of the catalogue was a sort of geometric design, two verticals, one white and one sort of a beige color, and the reason he kept it there, there had been something over it, and after the fire, when this was removed, the soot was on the catalogue, just to show what had happened. The [Claude] Monet, as you know, was not destroyed by fire, it was destroyed by the fire department. I remember the Museum had just been inspected by the fire department a few days before all this, and they didn't know where the water outlets were, and they just hacked that into pieces. Seriously affected by fire were several things. Larry's *George Washington Crossing the Delaware,* the [Umberto] Boccioni, which was very successfully restored -- I mean, too successfully -- and the [Candido] Portinari, I think, just burnt. There was damage -- I think I'm correct -- Pavel Tchelitchew's *Hide and Seek,* but again, that was repaired. Those were the only big damages that I remember. It was a dramatic time for Dorothy. Her big American show was abroad, and she, naturally, wanted to come back, and Alfred should have let her come back. He instructed her firmly not to, why, I don't know. As I said to you, Dorothy was so devoted to Alfred, and he could be terribly cruel to her at times. Maybe that was a replacement for sex, I don't know, but I saw it happen more than once. A difficult time for me, with the Seurat show. I helped René with the Seurat show, and it was just at a time that my mother had died. That's extraneous. Alfred resented me working with René on the Seurat show.... As I said to you, Alfred really never realized that René was his best friend. I have a feeling Marga knew that, but....

SZ: Certainly after the fire the trustees decided to undertake the capital campaign and to start a new building.

WL: After the fire the trustees met in the boardroom of the Whitney Museum. Remember, the Modern had given to the Whitney -- *given* to the Whitney -- that property, which was foolish. Then the rebuilding began. It was quite funny. Old man [Alexander M.] Bing, who owned the Dorset, was a friend of mine, actually gave the Modern a few very good things. He wandered over to the Modern from the Hotel Dorset and I had him meet René d'Harnoncourt, who liked lunching in the bar at the Dorset, and he had his eggs Benedict, as usual, on a very hot plate. Then, when old man Bing made the offer, I remember distinctly René saying, "We're not in the real estate business," and how differently things turned out. Bing died and his wife went to Los Angeles and there's a big Anna Bing complex at the Los Angeles County Museum [of Art]. Curiously enough, Bing's son, who inherited the interest in the Dorset, sued the Modern about the expansion, not, unfortunately, as owner of the Dorset or whatever he was, but as a public citizen -- I don't know the terminology. It's because of old man Bing that I became interested in Jacques Villon, actually.

SZ: You had met him...?

WL: I don't know how I met old man Bing. Maybe it was through his [Odilon] Redon drawings. I don't know what happened to them. He lent them on one occasion to a show the Modern did of French drawings that went to Europe [*French Drawings from American Collections: Clouet to Matisse*, ICE, 1958-1959]. He gave to the Modern, I believe, the [Raymond] Duchamp-Villon head of *Baudelaire*. Anyway, I began collecting Jacques Villon prints, and the Modern does have the best collection of those. Villon lived across the courtyard from [Frantisek] Kupka, and then Alfred gets involved with Kupka. This is all so long ago. What were we talking about?

SZ: We were leading up to the 1960s....

WL: As I said, the trustees met in the boardroom of the Whitney. I was not at that meeting. I must have been in the room beforehand, to set up something; I can think of no other reason why I would be in that room. It's very spooky. When the Museum closed, people would stand across the street and look at the building, I mean, not just isolated [people]. The Museum had meant so much to those people, they came back just to look. Of course, Nelson never gets the credit for giving all that library property to the city [the property on which the Donnell Library now stands]. The original plan for Rockefeller Center -- you know where the Prometheus is?

SZ: It was supposed to come all the way through.

WL: Yes, and then "21" wouldn't sell. I think I told you why they wouldn't sell, didn't I?

SZ: No, you did not tell me why they wouldn't sell.

WL: There are bodies in cement -- you never believe me -- from the speakeasy days, and I don't think they can ever sell that. It would be like the Negro burial ground. The Kriendlers were offered so, so much. Curiously enough, the current owner of "21" is a trustee of the Modern [Marshall S. Cogan].

SZ: So back to that trustee meeting.

WL: And that's where the rebuilding, everything.... And the insurance money -- Alfred was able to get even greater Monets. Remember, Walter Chrysler was the first person, really, to get a Monet Water Lily, and Alfred saw it. Walter -- hard man, silly queen that he was -- is really responsible for the Monet revival. Again, no one ever points this out. Alfred earlier had gotten a Monet, a much earlier one from the Jaffeys -- she's now Mrs. Melville Hall -- and that was shown in a new acquisitions show. At the

time, one critic, maybe someone like Clem [Clement Greenberg], said, "You know, what's the Modern doing collecting Monet?" That, of course, was not a late Monet; it was an earlier one. The dealer for that was Katia Granoff, and I got another Water Lilies for Louise Smith, which she since has given here. Walter Bareiss gave perhaps the latest of the Monets to the Modern, an intense, small painting, all in brown. Walter was extremely generous to the collection, of course. I mean, I remember vividly when Monet was old hat. I think that Monet one was the only one they've retained from my installation, isn't it? Yes. Alfred, of course, was the best installer ever, and he believed, as I do, that an installation can tell you as much as a wall label. He believed that very much.

SZ: That's basically been the principle.

WL: I follow his precept.

SZ: At the Modern, that's pretty much stayed, do you think?

WL: I think so. I'm ashamed to say, I haven't been through the galleries in about a year. I understand they've changed considerably.

SZ: They're changing again. But I think you've said that before, that's been your installation philosophy.

WL: Yes, and mixing up the Europeans and the Americans whenever possible. The one thing that I did was to combine [Giorgio] de Chirico and [Henri] Rousseau, which I think they're still doing.

SZ: Maybe this is a good place to end. That philosophy seems to me to be, if you will,

more a populist one; then an elitist one would be the flip side. If you come in with a brain and eyes and something inside you, you can....

WL: Alfred never could understand how people could only be interested in American art. He could understand that people could be interested only in European art. You use the word "populist." When Miss Abby's folklore collection was in the custody of the Modern, remember, Alfred's installation of the collection always began with the folk art, then the self-taught painters, the [John] Kane, then your Cézannes. It's the American folk art that came first in Alfred's installations. You can check that from installation photographs. Even after the fire, when they no longer had it, because that went to Williamsburg, but the installation of the collections began with the Kane. Ask me more.

SZ: I'm going to stop for today. Thank you.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 3

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**WILLIAMS S. LIEBERMAN (WL)**
INTERVIEWER:	**SHARON ZANE (SZ)**
LOCATION:	**NEW YORK, NEW YORK**
DATE:	**MAY 19, 1993**

BEGIN TAPE #4, SIDE #1

SZ: I have sort of a plan for today. We ended last time, you were relating to me the circumstances of several of the large acquisitions that you in some way played a part in, but we didn't talk at all about the [Gertrude] Stein collection, and I thought maybe you could tell me that story, since you were intimately involved with it.

WL: The whole Stein thing was recorded by the girl that was Bates Lowry's assistant. She's an art historian. I know her well and love her, and I plumb forget her name [Irene Gordon]. She documented the whole thing, and that must exist someplace, either with her or within the files. My family knew Stein and [Alice B.] Toklas -- this has nothing to do with the acquisition of the collection. I myself, for some reason, have absolutely no recollection of Stein herself. I'm fairly good at things like that. I plumb don't, I really don't. Toklas I remember vividly, and indeed, Alfred and I once visited her together and I bought her -- this was really immediately after the war -- *langues-de-chat*. They're sort of tongues of marzipan dipped in chocolate. There used to be a chocolate place on Fifth Avenue near the Museum, rather expensive, and they got up small amounts of chocolate in very attractive boxes. Toklas had a sweet tooth. She remarked, I remember vividly, that they tasted of camphor, which rather unnerved me. Alfred was ill at ease. He and Stein really seemed not to hit it off. Miss Stein had left her portrait by Pablo [Picasso] specifically to the Metropolitan Museum, and Alfred wrangled -- indeed, with the Met's approval, because they were almost embarrassed by the acquisition -- to get that on long-term loan at the Modern, along with at least two or three other things, one of which was my old torso of *Chained in Action,* which, without the head and arms, is, indeed, completely a twentieth-century piece. Stein herself made the painting return here [to the Metropolitan]. Alfred had requested the painting for his big Picasso show in, I guess,

'39, and indeed, I think it's a full-page reproduction in the catalogue for the show. What people don't realize is, that painting was not in the show. That sometimes happens with a catalogue.

SZ: Was it intended to be and then it just didn't come?

WL: She refused to lend. For some reason, I think probably because of Alfred's brilliance, they didn't shine together. All that long ago. During Bates Lowry's time, the Stein collection was bought. It had never been shown as a collection or documented completely; one knew certain things were in the collection, other things were not. I had a tendency to work Saturdays and Sundays, as certain people knew, including Bates Lowry. For some reason, I was in Bates Lowry's office -- I think it was a Saturday, not a Sunday -- there was something he wanted me to wait for, and the call came in from the trustee Gifford Phillips that the "Gertrude Stein collection was available." One got to work. One established that what was available was really the heart of what was good in the collection; it didn't include any crap. For instance, no [Pavel] Tchelitchew, no Berat [spelling unconfirmed]. There was that English dilettante painter -- I'll think of his name later -- and no [Francis] Picabia. What the collection did consist of were the Picassos and the paintings by Juan Gris. I forget, Sharon, how many there are. It's all in whatever this girl did. The Juan Grises had remained in Paris, conveniently in a vault at Chase Manhattan Bank -- of course, Rockefeller territory. The Picassos had been gotten out of the country -- by that time, I guess it was legal to do that -- and were in a vault in a bank in the city in London. With haste I collected as much information as I could about the Picassos and the Grises. This was difficult, because, as I say, the collection had never been documented as a collection, and one knew that several important things she had sold during her lifetime; those were also documented. Walter Bareiss, who was then very important at the Museum -- indeed, people forget that for a while, he was acting

temporary director, and actually kept that joint together; I don't think he's ever been properly thanked for that -- Bates suggested that Walter come up from Munich and join me in London, and he was amazed, as I was, by her Picasso holdings. The Gertrude Stein inheritors were controlled, really, by their mother -- again, I know her well and plumb forget her name -- and a lawyer called Dumas.

SZ: Roland Dumas?

WL: Yes, who was the person who wrote me about *Guernica*. That's apart from this, though. Walter and I then went to Paris to look at the Grises. I was staying at my usual hotel, the Pont Royal -- no, the St. Regis. Walter was staying at his usual hotel, the Pont Royal, giggling at the time that he had never paid a bill at the Pont Royal, because he had always paid by his American Express card and for some reason he had never been billed; this apparently happened on several trips. We went to Balthus's favorite restaurant on the Place de l'Odeon, called Mediteranée, for dinner. The owner was a friend of mine. To my astonishment, there was a telephone call for me while we were having the meal, and the telephone was rather awkwardly placed in the Pont Royal; you had to go behind the bar and up half a flight of stairs. I thought, My God, what's happened?, and it was Bates Lowry phoning to see what was happening. I came back -- Walter, of course, stayed in Europe -- came back, gone to see Miss Stein to say good-bye, and I think I had been told to just play it as cool as possible. While I was in...no. Yes, came back, discussed the thing with Bates -- all this was really top secret, because if it suddenly got around that the collection actually was being sold -- and Bates must have spoken with someone, I don't know whom (I say this in retrospect), but anyway, what emerged was the idea of a cartel. I think there were six people involved, each with a share. Among those people were David Rockefeller, with two shares, although at the time the other members didn't know he was going to have two shares; Nelson; Jock

[Whitney]; because of David, André Meyer.... Let's see. That's David, with two; Jock, one; Nel, one; Meyer, one. That makes one, two, three, four, five. And [William S.] Paley. Either I'm wrong, or there were only six.

SZ: I think that's it. I know it ended up being five, because one of them....

WL: There were five. David had two.

SZ: But whose share did he take?

WL: No one's. I, with my very, very good eyes, Walter with his very, very good eyes, realized the importance of the collection. As I said, much of it was undocumented. I had to do a sales pitch, Bates accompanying me, to Jock, to Nelson, to Paley and to David. I did not make a pitch with André Meyer; David took care of that. Of those people, the person who responded most quickly with interest was David. The person who responded most knowledgeably, because I really had worked with him before, was Nelson. What other people were approached? Bill Burden, who said, somewhat to my astonishment, that he didn't have that much money and that he had never borrowed a penny in his life. That last information I thought rather superfluous. We also approached Mike Cowles, who said he simply didn't have the dough. It was decided to limit it to trustees, André Meyer being considered a patron of the collection or something and therefore a trustee. It was difficult to make the pitch, Sharon, because, as I said, most of the stuff had been undocumented and what those people were buying was just me rambling on. But I must have been fairly persuasive, because I really couldn't say this is what it looks like, that's what it looks like. Negotiations began. The lawyer came over, Dick Koch -- this happened in Dick Koch's office. I get very nervous in negotiations, and I'm very stupid financially, and it just lingered on. Dumas was very, very clever. There was a meeting after lunch; they

had been meeting all morning, and he simply didn't turn up after lunch, and they all panicked. One has a tiny bit of knowledge of the way the French work, and I said, "I'm sure," and indeed, the next morning, an apology, and it was ironed up. These grown-up men sat around, unable [to reach an agreement], and finally, whatever the figure was, I said, "You're talking that way, you're talking that way" -- I tried to put myself as the intermediary, which I didn't want to do. That was the figure accepted by both sides; let's say it was $3.5 million, I forget exactly what it was. There was, though, I remember distinctly, they had reached a point where neither side would budge, and it was just me, open-eyed, being naive, that.... The stuff then came. This was all being kept terribly secret. There was no problem getting the Picassos, because they were already out of France, and, as I said, in a vault in London. One anticipated possibly some difficulty with the Juan Grises. I went back -- I lost a lot of money in this, incidentally, with hotel bills -- to get the stuff out of the thing at Chase.

SZ: Were you not there on business?

WL: Yes, but the Museum, you know, you had to have receipts for how much you paid the toilet attendant, and I'm very, very funny, Sharon, I refuse in a restaurant to ask for a receipt if I'm entertaining someone for dinner. For some reason it just seems terribly tacky to me. Luckily, as I said, the stuff was at rue [inaudible], and arranged for the shipment. This was me. Walter wasn't in Paris; there was no reason for him to be. I had lunch that day with Heinz Berggruen, picking him up at his gallery at the l'Université. As usual, I arrived on time. There was a British dealer with Hans, having an appointment, and Hans introduced me to the dealer as the person who had acquired -- the dealer -- the Gertrude Stein estate. Of course, I was slightly astonished, knowing that the Picassos were already in New York and the Grises were about to be, but I was delighted to meet him, etcetera, etcetera, and yes, of course, we'd be interested in things from the collection. With the shares, remember,

the people didn't know, really, what was there. My chief interest, of course, was the Museum's collection, and the various people had to agree that they would give to the Museum something of their choice. They all agreed to that. Alfred, not well at all, got wind of this -- there was absolutely no reason that he shouldn't have gotten wind of it -- but whether it was the old hang-up he had with Stein or whatever, I don't know, but he minimized the importance of the pictures to a few people, and I really don't know why he did that. It was at a time, though, that he had refused to consider for acquisition Picasso's great portrait of Oud, the Cubist portrait, which was soon after acquired by Joe Pulitzer. As I think I said to you before, there seems to have been a moment when he was just physically tired and didn't want to cope. Not even hugging him would have worked.

SZ: But also, I think with what he suffered from, doesn't one often go through a personality change as well?

WL: He did, completely.

SZ: So it could be that he was already....

WL: Anyway, the stuff came, and they met in the storeroom, which I think at that time was in the old Whitney. I may be wrong. No, they met in the new storeroom.... Irene Gordon...was there, chronicling the whole caboodle. She had worked with Bates before he came to the Museum, and when he came, she was sort of his girl Friday. Bill Paley wasn't able to attend the auction, or the meeting, whatever you want to call it. Babe [Paley] was. She was fairly...she looked fairly tall, and with the excitement and everything, I remember this elegant woman who kept her legs swinging under a chair, as if she was riding a motorcycle or walking a tread. They did lots, David, of course, getting two lots. They would go around and choose one and go around and

choose one. None of them chose any of the Juan Grises, which disappointed me. The most important of the Juan Grises was a collage with roses, and I think was the inspiration for Miss Stein's little poem "A rose is a rose is a rose." It was in lousy condition. I had it put in A-1 condition. What they didn't choose was sold. Word got around that some of the stuff was being sold, and a relative of Bill Paley's, that young boy who committed suicide, Jeff Byers, began heckling me about the unsold stuff. I didn't want to be a tradesman or anything like that. But, as I say, none of them, unfortunately, got any of the Grises. Everyone honored what they had promised to give, eventually. I believe people have committed themselves, you treat them gently. Bill Rubin, who had been ill during all this time with whatever happened to him and the lightbulb, later, I'm told, expressed great fury that he was not involved. Well, the thing is, how could he be involved in the hospital?

SZ: This was 1968, as I remember.

WL: I forget the date.

SZ: So you already had the title, curator of painting and sculpture?

WL: I was director of painting and sculpture. No, I was curator.

SZ: Then in '69 you were director, but that's all he was, too, at that time?

WL: No, he came in under another title.

SZ: So he wasn't even a curator of painting and sculpture.

WL: No, he may have been. He came in as something in charge of research, and that is

documented in the issue of *Vogue* which has an article on him. I forget the exact title. It's in that *Vogue* article. Anyway, it worked out wonderfully well. It's perhaps the most exciting acquisition I ever made. There was a lot of cloak and dagger.

SZ: You mean in keeping it secret, or also in the choices?

WL: Dealing with Dumas.

SZ: In terms of the way the works were distributed, because there was a procedure it was all friendly?

WL: By lot. It was.

SZ: It went fine?

WL: Yes, and they didn't know what I had chosen for the Museum, which meant that if they got a...no, they could get it and give it to the Museum, as each one of them did -- not immediately, but subsequently. I forget why Bill [Paley] wasn't there. Jock brought with him as adviser, why, I've never understood, a John Rewald, because at that time, when I say I don't understand why, at that time Jock had discovered that John Rewald had not only been kept on retainer by him, but was accepting a kickback from the people that Jock bought from, which isn't so hot. So the non-trustee people who were at the auction were me, Irene Gordon, Bates and John Rewald. Ralph Colin was then a trustee, and he asked me whether he could see the pictures, and I said of course and I showed them to him; he had nothing to do with it, though. A missing picture turned up later, a picture that Sabrina Stein had. It's the famous not-famous picture of a door by Matisse, and I didn't find that till the actual exhibition itself, *Four Americans in Paris: The Collection of Gertrude Stein and Her*

Family [MoMA Exh. #950, December 19, 1970-March 1, 1971]. I chose that corny title deliberately, so people would confuse it with the [George] Gershwin song, and suggested that the catalogue for the exhibition look like that phonograph album. The catalogue was done hastily. We had photographs of all the stuff that I had acquired. Photographs of all the stuff that was in the exhibition are not reproduced, unfortunately; we simply did not have the materials. It was a great show. Douglas Cooper insists that one Picasso drawing was a fake; I forget which one. It couldn't be important, because I've forgotten it. Wilder Green designed the galleries for the exhibition, and I installed it. Margaret Potter, who had been brought to the Museum by Bates Lowry -- at that time a fine person and quite stable; later in life, she wasn't -- did the dirty work, the loans, everything. In reconstructing the collection, no one has ever pointed out or had not pointed out then, that the famous portrait by Pablo of Gertrude was actually conceived as a vis-a-vis, or a pendant, the portrait she owned by Cézanne of his wife. During the beginning of the war, she and Alice had gone to the French-Swiss border with this rapacious collector, Jewish, handed it across the border and got the money; he wouldn't lend to the exhibition. He was a sort of banquier type, and I made a boo-boo: it never occurred to me to enlist David Rockefeller, and I'm sure if we had had David request the loan, we would have gotten it. That's just hindsight. It was an immensely popular show. One is always worried about money, and I suggested that the people who had bought the pictures maintain their own insurance. I mean, when it comes to what I'm working for, I can be horrible, and they all graciously agreed to do that. The Museum made a tiny bit of extra dough of the people who make Levi's, Haas. Mrs. [Elise S.] Haas fashioned herself sort of in the Gertrude Stein circle, which she absolutely never was, absolutely never. But she had a few things from Michael Stein, and she particularly wanted the show to go to San Francisco, which was impossible. I mean, you can't take loans from all over the world and have them go to San Francisco. What we did do is take the stuff that had been acquired by the cartel and that was a separate

show, and so the Museum made a tiny bit of money. I think there was a separate catalogue, I don't remember. They got a billion dollars worth of pictures for nothing. I must say, though, those people were quite wonderful, buying, to a great extent, blind.

SZ: So they heard what you had to say about them.

WL: Yes, but if someone came to me that way, I know I wouldn't [LAUGHING].

SZ: So it was an arrangement that really suited everybody.

WL: Yes. Jacques Gelman, a friend of mine, a Mexican collector and owner of Cantinflas, I showed the pictures to him, too, as I had to Ralph Colin, because they were, well, they're still very close friends of mine; [he] was upset that he had not been asked to be a part of the cartel. Well, none of these people knew him. Let's see, yes, none of these people knew him, or Natasha, and I explained that it was only a trustee thing. They later did manage to get one of the pictures that, I believe, André Meyer got, an early Picasso, 1906, a small painting, a self-portrait. Jacques had already owned a Matisse from the Stein collection, which had been previously acquired -- why do I remember all this crap? -- by Helena Rubinstein. You're quite right, they were all quite satisfied. David, particularly, wanted that girl with a basket that's a tiny bit too long and has feet that look like chicken's feet and the girl herself doesn't look quite white, but he wanted that [*Landscape (La Rue des Bois)*].

SZ: I've heard it and seen it written, that Bill Paley, he had, I don't know if it was the first lot or not, but that he got the absolute prize of the collection.

WL: You mean *The Architect's Table?* Well, it depends what you call "absolute prize."

One painting that no one took was a wonderful thing...no, I guess it's too personal in relation to Stein. Certainly, it's the best Cubist picture she had. David's picture, *Landscape (La Rue des Bois),* which he gave to the Museum on the occasion of that *Modern Masters* [*Modern Masters: Manet to Matisse* ICE-F-163-74 and MoMA Exh. #1105, August 5-September 28, 1975] show that I did for Australia, is perhaps the most important of the proto-Cubist pictures. The great landscapes, of course, had already been sold during Stein's lifetime, very early, to [Sergei I.] Shchukin in Russia. For your information, you know the Matisse, the girl on a high stool that was given to the Museum by Florene Schoenborn, then Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Marx [*Woman on a High Stool (Germaine Raynal)*, 1914]. It's interesting, Sharon. That would have been Shchukin's last Matisse purchase, and war came, and the picture was never delivered. It's just curious. There are so many footnotes to everything.

SZ: How did you feel about this feeble attempt to reclaim some of those works?

WL: That, actually, if the people had looked back, happened more than twenty-five years ago when the Picassos from Russia were lent to Paris. I happened to be in Paris at the time, and Alfred asked me to get photographs of them, which I did, I guess simply because one knows one's way around. When the lawsuit was brought -- and there was no mention of it just recently -- the pictures were whisked off the walls and sent back to Russia. I don't think they had a leg to stand on. They certainly are confiscated pictures, though. I've had the Stein portrait x-rayed here, and it does show changes in the head; but if you compare it with the Cézanne that I mentioned, you'll see exactly what I mean, even the arms, [inaudible], everything.

SZ: Next thing I thought we'd do, last time we sort of talked a bit about prints, and we really have not talked much about drawings. I know Sam Hunter said something about it, it really took a long time for the Museum to curatorially take it seriously, that

it grew.

WL: Prints.... Remember, I was the founding director of the two most recent departments at the Museum, prints and then, most recently, drawings. I think I explained to you before about the delays, particularly in the print department. Then drawings were put under me. Drawings and prints are both on paper usually. They share the same problems of housing. Prints are matted to uniform sizes as much as possible and stored that way. Drawings...I prefer to store them framed, framing each drawing individually. In other words, although I tried, and I do it here to, to make the frames for drawings as uniform as possible, to help storage, there are many, many exceptions. When I voluntarily resigned as director of painting and sculpture, what was I to do? At that time, the Museum thought that obviously the idea of me not being there was insupportable. Walter Bareiss, again, always being called on for emergencies, because Hightower was really incompetent and Walter I know quite well, and I said really what I'd like to do most is set up a separate department of drawings. That's really how it happened, I guess. Being director of prints and director of painting and sculpture and director of drawings never really confused me, nor did it other people. They certainly had to hire a lot of people to replace me [LAUGHING]. I was very glad to hear they were going back to the title of curator, without avail. Under both Bates and Hightower I tried, I think as I told you, to have this business of everyone being a director stopped. I told you about the stationery.

SZ: I don't think you did.

WL: At that time, there was departmental stationery, for instance, for...the department of architecture and design; then Arthur Drexler would write his letters and under that it would say simply "director." But it would be the [same title for the director of the] department of photography, whoever was in charge. So it seemed to the world at

large that what you and I would call the curator of photography was director of the Museum. People never look at the same print, and it was becoming terribly confusing. I tried to have that done under Bates and under Hightower, but that didn't work. That's why I say I'm glad they seem to be doing it now. Did they announce a new paid president at the June meeting?

SZ: I don't know, but I haven't talked to anybody since then, so I don't know. I think I would have heard. They've selected somebody, I assume.

WL: I heard they have, but there's always so much rumor in the act.

SZ: That issue of title...the term curator and the term director don't sound the same.

WL: They aren't. There's nothing wrong with being a curator or a chief curator, but for a museum there should be simply one director. I can't tell you the confusion. Half the world thought that, say, Bill Rubin was director of the Museum. That director confusion, I think, really began with Monroe Wheeler. I could try to think it out. Obviously, René d'Harnoncourt, as director of the Museum, would have supported the word "directorship" in Alfred Barr's title. I doubt whether he would have with everyone else.

SZ: In any event, until the department of drawings became a separate department, you were the curator of prints *and* drawings.

WL: No, first I was curator of prints, then I was curator of drawings and prints.

SZ: That was in 1960.

WL: Yes. Then, when the departments split, it was called prints and illustrated books. I was very, very upset. I had nominated Riva Castleman to direct that, and they were just terribly dilatory. Months and months went by, and finally, I had to make a fuss, saying, "You can't continue to play with people's lives" -- which the Museum certainly has done.

SZ: Can you tell me anything about the Katherine Dreier bequest?

WL: Marcel Duchamp was sort of in charge of the Katherine Dreier bequest. I had sort of met her, and she terrified me, and indeed, for the very first catalogue of her collection I wrote one or two entries. I think they misspelled my name as author.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 4

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 4

SZ: They misspelled your name as author?

WL: I think they did. Anyway, she croaked, and there was stuff, apparently, and I don't know exactly what I'm talking about, that was not exactly incorporated or spelled out in this Societé Anonyme bequest -- the collection. Dreier was always agitated by Alfred. She felt that he had stolen the name Museum of Modern Art from her, and it's so obvious to call something Museum of Modern Art. She was a ridiculous spinster. Like many American women -- I say American women, because they were legion -- she was attracted to Marcel Duchamp. Most of them he had an affair with; he did *not* with Miss Dreier. One American woman he had the longest affair with was a girl from Chicago, Mary Reynolds, who was a bookbinder in Paris, did exquisite bindings. And then, of course, he married Mrs. Pierre Matisse. Anyway, Marcel was in charge of

the distribution of what was not Societé Anonyme, and Alfred and I went, I guess it must have been to the house, and chose what was wanted for the Modern. At that time, I was particularly interested in Jacques Villon, and there were several early Villons, watercolors. For some reason, the [Duchamp] *Large Glass* was not in the Societé Anonyme incorporation, or whatever it was, and that went to Philadelphia. Alfred, of course, would have wanted that very much for the Modern. Anyway, the Guggenheim got something, too, and maybe another institution. I was particularly upset, though, and this was absolutely minor, as I said, I was interested in Jacques Villon, and one of the Jacques Villon watercolors I set aside simply vanished, was not there when the stuff was picked up. I don't remember the image; I think it was a watercolor of a standing woman. Anyway, Marcel was indispensable in channeling that to the Modern. The Guggenheim got much less, but I seem to remember what they got was significant; it may include a Brancusi sculpture, I'm not sure. That can all be checked. Rona [Roob] should have that in her files. When we went up to the house, if I remember correctly, it was fair weather, so that would be the spring or the fall of whatever year it was. I don't remember how we went up. We must have gone up by train, but I don't remember that at all. I'm usually good at things like that. We didn't go up by car; I never was in a car that Alfred drove.

SZ: You never were, you just said.

WL: No.

SZ: But he did drive.

WL: I think so. He must have. I can't drive. In retrospect, Sharon, why he took me and not Dorothy Miller -- I mentioned this to you before -- in retrospect, why he did that, I don't know, and I think it must have caused some hurt to Dorothy, which I certainly

never intended.

SZ: Did you think about it at the time?

WL: No, I say in retrospect.

SZ: And in retrospect you don't understand it.

WL: No, just the way, as I said, he would take me to trustees' meetings. I mean, Dorothy and I were never close friends, but we did work closely together and did collaborate on several extraordinary things.

SZ: I know the answer to this question, but do you have similar eyes?

WL: Alfred sort of channeled Dorothy to things American and me to things European, although he flatly denied this.

SZ: Do you think his doing that was based on something real, from your point of view?

WL: I don't know. Have you seen the Dorothy Miller-Holger Cahill show, at Equitable downtown?

SZ: That's right. No, and I should see it. That's where the AAA [Archives of American Art] is also, right?

WL: Yes. It's funny, the Studio Museum in Harlem, which I am interested in, had a show there of the best works from their collection -- no checklist. I wrote two letters. I mean, sheer incompetence on their part. You asked me about Alfred and Dorothy

and Abstract Expressionism. If you have time, go to Hirschl & Adler uptown. There are two interesting, small retrospectives, upstairs, one of Stanley William Hayter -- remember, several of the Abstract Expressionists studied printmaking with him -- and the downstairs show of Charles Howard. Charles Howard was featured in one of Dorothy's early American shows. They are abstract, but the contours are very carefully defined and they're very finely painted, and at that time, that is, perhaps, the kind of abstraction that Alfred and Dorothy were anticipating in American painting. It did not go that way. But if you've time, Sharon, do peek at the show. It's rather fascinating. I put a Charles Howard on view here -- we have, perhaps, his best painting -- about ten years ago, and the Hirschl & Adler catalogue they say that is what caused their interest in his work. But also, it would be that sort of abstraction at The Museum of Modern Art that Pollock saw, that Rothko saw. Did you see the show of Abstract Expressionist drawings downstairs? Remember the primordial ones? You see, that derives from the Howards you're going to see. I mean, people never write it straight. What else?

SZ: I was just going to ask you of an assessment of the Dreier bequest to the collection.

WL: What was gotten was not overly significant, but certainly necessary to the collection. I mean, a more than welcome gift. Alfred had gotten pissed off at Miss Dreier at one point. They used to do summer shows, summer loan shows, on the theory that the wealthy were away from the metropolitan scene from May through September. Of course, people were terribly flattered and pretended they were away. But the summer shows were good and there would be a room for each collector, and Alfred, trying to get in there with Miss Dreier, asked and she consented, but she included a work by herself, which was later acquired by the Museum. Alfred didn't like that.

SZ: I thought maybe the last thing today, we talked about the Junior Council, but we did

not talk very much about, although we touched on it a couple of times, the International Program and how it impacted what you did, how you participated, and I know that sort of the great culmination would be the Australian show.

WL: Yes, maybe.

SZ: I want you to tell me all [about that], because I know that was a huge hit, because you were there from the beginning, when it was instituted and how it grew and how you participated in it.

WL: The first sort of social gathering of the International Council was in the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Colin, who were fairly recent trustees of the Museum -- as I say, this is about forty, forty-one years ago -- and several of the founding members of the International Council were there. Mrs. [Lydia Winston] Malbin, the Futurist collector, I can think of, and quite a few others.

SZ: Were you there?

WL: I was there. I was always wherever something was, for some reason, I don't know. I must say, they treat me the same way here. I find myself at unlikely events. That was a luncheon, and out of that grew the International Council. As I said to you about the Junior Council, there must have been discussions with the Rockefeller office, and Blanchette must have been, again, instructed or given guidelines for the International Council. As I think I said to you, I have no idea who that was in the Rockefeller office. The Rockefeller office, remember, for years there was a direct [line], and I would get the Rockefeller office on my phone. People forget that. When I did the text on Nelson's collection, for some reason, it wasn't denied me, but for some reason I didn't have access to the papers that are kept in room, what is it,

30,000?

SZ: Fifty-six hundred?

WL: Yes. And I'm sure someone bright should go over that. Alfred always resented someone called Arthur B. Davies, who really, although he died, certainly influenced Miss Bliss and also Miss Abby. I think Miss Abby took Nel as a young boy to meet Arthur B. Davies.

SZ: Alfred resented him because...?

WL: I don't know why. Remember, Arthur B. Davies, for a large extent, was responsible for the Armory Show.

SZ: He was an artist, also.

WL: Yes, although his work certainly shows nothing of the avant-garde. He was particularly attracted to Redon, and Redon, don't forget, was represented by more works in the Armory Show than any other artist. Again, people don't look. If you look at the catalogue, he was the honorary chairman -- Redon -- of the New York Armory Show, and that fact, I think, doesn't even appear in books on the Armory Show, although it's clearly printed in the catalogue.

SZ: Anyway, you were at the Colins's....

WL: And then it evolved from that. Bill Paley jumped aboard, giving a grant of I forget how much, for a period of three years, for exhibitions to be prepared by an International Program, at that time being headed by Porter McCray, who had

returned to the Museum. I did several of those first shows, one of them, I think I told you, was done in duplicate because it was a print show, and prints being multiples, you could do it that way. The meetings have improved, the business meetings of the International Council. There used to be a the same meeting two meetings, and you would vote for the end of the first session and then the second session would being immediately afterward. Why all this? Anyway, that's been straightened out, it doesn't happen anymore. In the beginning, it was a very good group, very weighted toward the States, but always wanting to be international. They try to keep a quota for people from New York; they weren't too successful. The Tremaines were quite active, and they're always cockteasers with their collection, so much so that they did themselves in and their foundation was dissolved by the Treasury Department. But they flirted with the Modern, first with Alfred, then with me; with the National Gallery -- everything. Emily was sort of pissed off that she or Burt had never been named trustees of the Modern, but they definitely wanted to be, very much, on this International Council. If you look back, it was called The International Council *at* The Museum of Modern Art instead of *of,* and I remember some prolonged discussion at a meeting that took place at Philip's Glass House. When the meeting of the International Council executive committee would go inside with a trustees meeting, a meeting of the trustees of the Modern, which would be in the board room of the Modern, Emily Tremaine, who was on the executive committee, was always very careful to leave immediately after the International Council did and not stay, as did a few others. What else about the council?

SZ: I was actually asking more about the program, how much that...did you ever put together shows specifically for traveling?

WL: Oh, sure, but not the way it is now. Credited to the International Council now, simply because they can use their money, are a lot of shows that are not generated by the

International Program. Also, several of their shows weren't specifically modern art. The great drawings show [*French Drawings from American Collections: Clouet to Matisse,* ICE, 1958-1959], I was on the committee for that, with Agnes Mongan. That was never going to be shown in America, it was being shown just in France and in Holland, and the Met very nicely made itself host for the exhibition here, also the show of, I believe, nineteenth-century French paintings [*De David À Toulouse-Lautrec*, ICE, 1955]. In time, the range of the International Council's major exhibition was much more than the, in time, span of The Museum of Modern Art's program, and Porter administrated that very, very well. He hampered, in the beginning, as I told you, because he was never made a member of the Museum's executive council, I mean, this all comes this way.

SZ: For you, how do you feel about the mission that it certainly stated it was....

WL: I think the Junior Council was marvelous, when it was active, and then it became dated. The idea of the Art Lending Service, I mean, completely outmoded. It's turned into, as far as I can make out, a sort of social thing. As I told you, they did the only three or four open shows the Museum ever did. They were actively involved in, say, Christmas cards and the calendar. They published prints, etcetera, etcetera. The International Council, I think it was most effective when it was a smaller group. I mean, this time, in Paris, one had to schlep around with 107 people. It's difficult even with my pull to find someone in Paris who can entertain 107 people in their home. I think what the council does today is effective in supporting the Museum's program. It doesn't really have a separate program the way it did when Porter ran it. Porter had someone for, say, architecture and design, Ada Louise Huxtable. Frank O'Hara was initially a curator. He had sold tickets at the front desk, but he was sort of a curator of painting and sculpture. Even the [Helen] Frankenthaler [1969] show that the International Council organized, the Museum refused to show that and it was shown

at the Whitney. Things got sort of icky. They did a Leonard Baskin show [1961]. The Museum itself did not. I did that show with Peter Selz. One of the funniest things that ever happened, Lenny's -- I sort of discovered Leonard Baskin and got Grace Borgenicht to take him on in the beginning, and that did very well and now he's done much better -- but the show organized by the International Program, it had had a successful foreign tour and it was scheduled to go to Israel. Lenny's father, who was a rabbi or whatever is next to a rabbi, was quite pleased, and then because some of the Jewish elders, and this was long ago, saw this Baskin sculpture and they decided they were graven images, and I had to be the person to tell Lenny's father, an old man, sitting in one of those Knoll chairs, that the show was cancelled in Israel. The only booking we could get for the show in this interim period was, believe it or not, in Berlin [LAUGHING].

SZ: There's a certain irony in that.

WL: And in the window of the exhibition hall I hung that huge woodcut of Hamon [LAUGHTER]. No one got the point. Membership in the council has become sort of social, I think, but to its members it is very important, not only the American members, but the foreign members. The best contribution I made to that was, I think, bringing Franzie [Duke Franz von Bayern] into the orbit. Again, the credit for that really should go to Walter Bareiss, who introduced me to Franz.

SZ: The mission of the program, the whole International Program, to take contemporary American art and....

WL: It wasn't just that. There was the big master drawings show, French drawings; it was nineteenth-century French [*French Drawings from American Collections: Clouet to Matisse,* SP-ICE-21-58, 1958-1959]. Dorothy Miller's show was pivotal [*The New*

American Painting, ICE-F-36-57, 1958-1959, MoMA Exh. #645, May 28-September 8, 1959]-- this is the time of the fire. But that sort of crusading bit has kind of stopped, just the way the Museum itself is really not crusading. By and large, what they're doing is playing it safe, and Alfred believed in making mistakes, not only in exhibitions, but in acquisitions, and it's very wise that he did. I am still very upset that they've given up the program of domestic circulating exhibitions, which they did extremely well. There are now several organizations doing an approximate job, but nothing of the consistent quality of choice and presentation, and I must have done, I don't know, about a hundred such shows. I'm trying to think who is alive of the original members of the International Council. There's Louise Smith...I'll have to look at a listing. I think there are pretty few. And me.

SZ: And the show that you did for Australia that was such a big success? I heard it was really fun to take it and it was fun to be there.

WL: I love Australia. I fell in love with it when I first went there. That show was done, it was as much love of Australia as it was for...it was never intended to be at The Museum of Modern Art. As I think I told you, the Australians continued their indemnity for the showing in New York, which was incredibly generous. The lines outside that show were just.... On the other hand, and this is still doing it Porter's way, there was someone curatorially there at all times. While I was in Australia, I inspected the show every day, every day. And then there was Monawee Richards and John Stringer, just the way at the French drawings show in Paris and in Holland, I believe Agnes Mongan inspected it daily in Paris, or someone else did, and there was someone inspecting it in [Holland]. There wasn't one damage even to a frame in *Modern Masters.* If you look at the catalogue, the choice, although interesting, is not particularly original. If you compare it to Alfred's choice of European paintings for *Art in Our Time* in '39, you'll see how greatly I am in his debt, even to the juxtaposition of

the [Chaim] Soutine of Chartres [*Chartres Cathedral*] with the [Maurice] Utrillo [*The Church at Blévy*].

SZ: Have you had enough for today?

WL: Almost. One more.

SZ: One more what?

WL: Whatever you want [LAUGHING].

SZ: Maybe I'll ask it here, because I know it fits in in a lot of different ways, but it's logical. What happened to Porter? You had mentioned how the program and the council, that there started to be friction.

WL: The Museum itself sort of resented what had become, essentially, a separate empire, which, I must say, functioned very, very well. When the CBS grant went out -- I think it was renewed, actually, but then went out -- it seemed to some people in the Museum itself that the International Program was almost in rivalry with the Museum's own program. It really wasn't. I'm saying the way it was taken. And Porter was always treated as an outsider. Then he went to the Rockefeller thing [the John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund], and behaved brilliantly then. Porter was always excessive about money, which he did not have, and then, when he retired from that and the pension plan with the JDR3 fund collapsed, his pension did, too. This is confidential. Several of us chipped in, and I was really quite angry that the Rockefeller office would treat anyone that cavalierly. And then, of course, there was the business of the amputation.

SZ: But I didn't mean that. I meant, there was a lot of fuss over...there was that whole meeting up in Maine and whatever, that there was a mood that really pushed him out, so I just wanted your version of that, what you know about it.

WL: That meeting in Maine was very strange.

SZ: Were you there?

WL: Oh, yes, and I was at the Bates meeting in Appalachia or wherever it was.... The few staff members...Elizabeth Shaw was there -- Elizabeth Bolt -- and what did one tip the servants? To me, that wasn't really a hot issue. At that time, Alfred needed a new bookcase and had needed one for several, several months or years, and I couldn't get the money to get it built. Small things fester often in my mind, and I blurted this out in Maine [LAUGHING], and I think I was told it was irrelevant, but getting a bookcase for my boss seemed pretty important at the time.

SZ: But the purpose of that weekend or whatever it was, was there a clear agenda, did you feel, when you went up there?

WL: No, I don't. I think it was probably Mr. David's [David Rockefeller] idea, but I'm not sure. And it's strange, Sharon, I don't remember it being focused about the ouster of Porter, I really don't.

SZ: That's the impression I got, certainly, from, again, the Russell Lynes's book.

WL: You *can't* go by that. As I told you, Ralph Colin wanted me to sue.

SZ: But I think he did say that it was really a move on Arthur Drexler's part to....

WL: Arthur Drexler always wanted to be director of the Museum. At this point, he made no attempt to implement. He did later, though. He even had a summit meeting at some fancy private dining room in New York, that place where the waiter comes in and says, "I am John. I am your bruh-bruh-bruh for the evening."

SZ: Let me ask it this way: once Porter was gone, were the problems, as they were supposedly perceived, about the program, did those abate? Did its method of operating change?

WL: The curatorial staff of Porter's department was stripped. There was some firing, and part of it [the staff] was incorporated into the Museum. I took under me Elaine Johnson. Frank O'Hara was incorporated. I get the two strippings confused, the one after Maine and the one after Bates's meeting. The two meetings, certainly, differed in glamour, but the two meetings were essentially the same: they were gripe meetings.

SZ: So in the stripping....

WL: The director of the film library -- I forget his name, a tall, sort of amiable drunk -- knew he was on the way out.

SZ: [Dick] Abbott.

WL: No, this is after. I forget his name. I can remember it, though. Oh, Arthur Knight's name was Arthur Rosenheimer when he was at the Museum. Also, it [the meeting at William A.M. Burden's house in Maine] introduced Dick Koch to the Museum before he actually appeared on its premises. It was the first time I had met Dick Koch,

certainly the first time Liz Bolt did, certainly the first time Arthur Drexler met him. Dick Koch is another person whose life was bruised badly by the Modern. I mean, that record is bad. Okey-doke.

SZ: Thank you.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 4

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **WILLIAMS S. LIEBERMAN (WL)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

DATE: **JUNE 9, 1993**

BEGIN TAPE 5, SIDE 1

SZ: I have a plan for today. There are a couple of things I wanted to pick up on from last time, things that we maybe touched on. One thing I was thinking about...the agreement between the Met and the Modern, which originally included the Whitney,

too....

WL: That's right.

SZ: Is there anything else that you can tell me about that, certainly from the Modern's point of view at that time?

WL: There were one or two strange things. There was a Matisse, a nice little still life that had belonged to Leonide Massine, whom I knew, that was switched over to the Met and then was brought back. I never understood why. There may have been one other thing, Sharon; I forget. By and large, the Met got rather spectacular works -- *The Woman in White,* by Picasso, certainly one of his most famous images. The trouble with that, in reproduction it looks like a classic painting, perhaps a bit dull. It's on view here. If you look at it closely, Sharon, you'll see that the handling of paint is really virtuosic and parts of the figure are actually covered in sort of a white wash, and especially in the lower right, he took brown paint and very, very, very freely applied it over. In other words, the way it's painted is much more adventurous than it looks. The other important Picasso -- and this is really what pissed, I think, Stephen Clark, who, I think, gave the painting -- is *La Coiffure,* which was probably finished in the fall of 1906, when Pablo came back from Gosol. He'd certainly begun it before he went to Gosol. The painting is unfinished; it leads directly to the Stein portrait and also continues a theme that goes through Pablo's early work, particularly the Blue and the Rose periods. It's a thing that for some reason no one's ever investigated, and that's the theme of sight and blindness. If you look at a lot of the Blue period paintings, even the Rose period, there's something wrong with the eyes. There are, of course, the blind man's meals, things like that, but even *The Frugal Repast,* and why people.... [INTERRUPTION] That was just my interest in *La Coiffure*. With it was a Rouault portrait of a painter called Henri La Basque, a minor painter who was

a friend of Matisse's, strangely enough. By coincidence, the Met has through the de Groot bequest, Matisse's portrait of his daughter; it's the painting known as Nono [*Nono Lebasque* (1908)]. Let's see what else came here. A small Rouault landscape with figures. Then, disturbingly, some of the best Seurat drawings that had been in the collection of Miss Bliss, I forget how much money the Modern got -- that should be in the records and Rona should be able to tell you. Sharon, it's so long ago, I think there were one or two other things. I simply forget.

SZ: Two things about that: were you a part of the decisions on what would go in the exchange?

WL: Me, myself and I.

SZ: So that was Alfred?

WL: That was Alfred. I frankly don't know whether he consulted with anyone. It was at a time that things were really getting tense with not only Mr. Clark but with Mr. [Adolf] Lewisohn as well. You've read the Simon girl's book, haven't you, portrait of her father?

SZ: Yes. I guess what I want to know is, from your perspective then and then now, what you felt about the concept behind this arrangement, which really spoke to, I guess, one of the original ideas of what The Museum of Modern Art should be.

WL: The things that Alfred disposed of could be considered classic, even if some of them, such as the Rouault *La Basque* [portrait], weren't first-rate. They did, perhaps, aesthetically look back instead of pointing forward. The Matisse still life from Leonide certainly did look forward, and I would assume that, after reflection, Alfred took it

back. Apparently here they sat on their fannies and took anything that Alfred [sent]. That I don't know, because I don't have access to the records here. If you're curious, I can try to find out.

SZ: It's just interesting.

WL: They won't let me copy anything, but they will let me look. Of the Met and the Modern's relationships, you saw the ecstatic thing about the acquisition of the [inaudible] that goes so marvelously in the Annenberg collection, blah, blah, blah. Alfred Barr recommended to this museum, the Metropolitan, the acquisition of two pictures. One was the [James] Ensor *Temptation of St. Anthony* [*Tribulations of Saint Anthony* (1887)], which certainly is a nineteenth-century picture, and the other was, quite simply, van Gogh's *Starry Night* (1889). That was much too adventurous, both, but Kimmelman's story could have been so amusing....

SZ: If he had known that [LAUGHING].

WL: All he had to do was look. I'm sure it's recorded someplace. There is in Alfred's writing someplace, and I forget where -- maybe Rona can help you; it was not in an obvious place; it was something like a paragraph in *Art News* -- where he says he thinks of the Modern as a try-out place specifically for things to come to the Met. That in theory was the original concept, but the particular quotation I'm thinking of comes really a bit later, in the mid '30s. Although this museum has an extraordinary collection of American twentieth-century painting, and, indeed, in the beginning of the century and through the first two or three decades, bought current work, I mean work within a year in which it was done. It's almost as if in 1939, when The Museum of Modern Art opened [the new building], they just gave up here. But the records of acquisitions during the first three decades of this century are really quite

extraordinary.

SZ: I'm just trying to remember, also, was Taylor the director then, in 1939?

WL: Sometime I should chart exactly who was curatorially responsible. Of relations to the Metropolitan Museum, the very first thing I wrote under Alfred, I think -- now this sounds very strange -- was for the Metropolitan Museum's bulletin, and that was for their first big tapestry show, long, long ago, and it's in the *Bulletin* here. This must be in the late '40s, and they wanted a supplement to the historical tapestry thing, and I wrote about twentieth-century tapestries. That was all done through Alfred. It's rather funny if you think that I've ended up in the place that first published me [LAUGHING]. Really odd.

SZ: There are so many ironies. Clark, especially, fell out because of the interest in Abstract Expressionism, Alfred's interest. Let me say the Modern's interest in that.

WL: Stephen Clark could be very mean. He recognized that Alfred was really the beacon of light that illuminated the art of our century, but he still resented that fact. I think the same thing was true of Mr. Lewisohn, whom I saw less in action. Of course, Alfred drove Conger Goodyear just batty. People come around, though. Conger gave that Matisse in Alfred's honor -- that's after they had had their contretemps. Relations with Conger were slightly complicated because Conger was having an affair with Eliza Bliss Parkinson's mother, who ended up with an extraordinary Miró pastel.

SZ: What about the loss of the Clark and the Lewisohn collections to the Modern?

WL: To the Met, you mean.

SZ: They came to the Met, but what do you think that has meant, ultimately, to the Modern's collection? [TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION] I was just asking you for your assessment of how important that loss was to the Modern.

WL: I think irrevocable. It also changed the course, because Alfred saw the European collection...let me go back to 1929. The first show, the first loan exhibition, the four Post-Impressionists [*Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat and van Gogh,* MoMA Exh. #1, November 7-December 7, 1929], and, as I told you, I think, before, Alfred's catalogue for that, written in haste and under duress, when he always wrote best, was classic textbook, I mean, it was used at Fogg when I was there. If one goes back, Alfred was planning to have that first loan exhibition, he was planning it to include five artists; the fifth was Renoir. And again, Alfred must have sat down and with the clarity of his vision, Renoir belonged to Impressionism and, therefore, out. So the Modern's collection would begin with the four Post-Impressionists. Strangely enough, most of them croaked before the Impressionists themselves did, but people don't point that out. Renoir came back into the picture when Paul Rosenberg gave a reclining nude, which I think has since been disposed of, in fact I know it has been. But so much for the Europeans. Alfred saw the American part of the collection beginning, really, with Homer and with Ryder and with Eakins. Homer and Eakins were really quite neatly covered by what Clark had, so no acquisitions were particularly made that way. Clark also owned that extraordinary portrait of Robert Lewis Stevenson, I think it was, or someone, that Alfred liked very much. But anyway, because of not getting the Clark pictures, which he had counted on, I think that's the reason why the Modern's collection begins now with the Europeans and doesn't have the Americans in it. Alfred fully recognized, say, the important correspondence of [Maurice] Prendergast to the Post-Impressionists, in fact very much so. Remember, the very first show that Alfred had proposed was that it would

review the art of the '20s, and the trustees absolutely nixed that. The *Nineteen Living Americans* show was a hoot. Actually, I think five or six of the paintings that were in that show are now in the collection of the Met. Alfred and a couple of learned trustees, including Frank Crowninshield, who certainly knew nothing, got together and made lists, and the mish-mosh that resulted was because there was no single eye. It's much better, say, that in a jury or something like that or an installation, to have one person -- at least the mistakes are consistent. But if you have get in a compromise situation, you're really screwed up. I'm rambling and not answering the question you asked.

SZ: You basically answered. I asked you how important were the losses of these two collections to the Modern, and you've certainly answered it in terms of Clark. You haven't really spoken to Lewisohn's defection.

WL: We lost the study for the great Seurat, which Lewisohn, of course, refused to ever call a study. He got hysterical about that. We lost the Lewisohn Gauguin. Cézanne. What else did we lose? There were other things, but it's those three paintings that I particularly remember. But to get back to Stephen Clark's things, if you look through the early loan exhibitions, you see how very, very heavily Alfred counted upon Clark's things. I think as I told you, one of the first people in the joint after the fire was Stephen Clark, and I remember him walking down the staircase and out of the building. I think that really did it. Also for Lewisohn and Clark, they were of the time when the historically proven valuable paintings of the Modern were going to come to the Modern, and they very possibly said.... The first -- I think I'm right -- the first indication that Alfred got that things weren't so hunky-dunky with Clark did not involve the Metropolitan. Alfred had been responsible for Stephen getting a major Picasso; it's called *The First Steps,* of the mother and child.

SZ: That little....

WL: It's not so little.

SZ: I'm thinking of the child in the painting.

WL: Indeed, a painting at the Museum, a still life with a rooster, I think, a vertical painting, was somehow deacquisitioned, and Clark gave that to Yale. I mean, it all sort of meshed together. And Clark in a way was very much like Chester Dale, cock-teasing with their pictures; they really got their kicks that way. Unfortunately, in our century there are collectors, certainly curators and critics, who believe they're more important than what they have. Where would Adolf Lewisohn have been without his pictures. Where would Chester Dale have been without the pictures his wife bought?

SZ: That pretty much answers it, although there is an irony in all of this, as you sit downstairs with that wonderful Abstract Expressionist show, which is used the most as the reason why Stephen Clark defected from the Modern, but you've given me some other possible explanations.

WL: Conger was funny. He hated Abstract Expressionism, but just flipped over the first sort of hovering Rothkos, I think possibly to prove to his fellow trustees he was really with it. Despite his personal life, he was rather a prude. I remember the Brancusi *Kiss* being presented as a possible acquisition, and it's what? A couple embracing; they're not doing anything, they're just embracing. But for some reason, Conger....

SZ: That brings me, actually, to another question I had. When the acquisitions committee at the Modern split, so that each department had its own, did it really change the nature of what was acquired? I don't know if it's possible to even answer

that question.

WL: When they became these separate citadels, they all have committees. Remember, they aren't just acquisitions committees. Their purpose was to discuss program, publications, which was very often forgotten. We must remember the bank of people available to serve on these committees is rather limited, so you naturally begin having duplication. I think Louise Smith was at one time on four. There was no real communication between the various committees. I myself was the closest link simply because I wore so many hats at the same time. Ideally, and I did propose this once, that there be, say, a necessary visitor at the committees, say, a member of another committee, something like that. You might be trying to get a gift from a dealer -- this happened with a self-taught painter; she had a Polish name -- and someone was angling for a painting, having no idea that someone was also angling for a gift of a drawing. Here the system is little better, I think. There is a single committee, and, frankly, I've found it invaluable. One is curious, and I've learnt so much. I think the separate committees led to the divisionism, which is very bad at the Modern, and, as I said to you before, they still lack a curatorial top banana. They have the person who should have the job right there: [John] Elderfield. It got rather cumbersome, because Alfred...this is when everything was together and they used to meet in the storeroom on the second floor, off the stairwell in the old Museum, and painting and sculpture, and I often helped the workmen, actually, schlep in the paintings. That might be all right for paintings, a bit more difficult for sculpture, okay for prints, for drawings, okay for photography. But then, Richard Griffith -- not Richard Griffith; I forget his name -- who was then in charge of the film library, and you can't present a film at a meeting like this, but, nevertheless, they were. There is a documentation of one of those meetings, probably in the archives of Time-Life. Dorothy Siberling was allowed to attend one acquisitions meeting. I'm sorry, I forget when that was. If you interview Liz Shaw, she might remember. The committees also know what purchase

funds are available. They're shown that at the beginning of the meeting -- or were; I don't know if they still are. The only thing that's bad when people begin thinking of dollars and cents rather than works of art, it's much better to decide yes or no and then figure out how to get it.

SZ: Was that a Museum-wide policy, or did that just develop on the committee you were on?

WL: No, it was on all the committees that I ever served on.

SZ: Even when the acquisitions committee was one single committee?

WL: Yes.

SZ: I see. So it wasn't looking at something and then figure out how we're going to get, it was more we have this much....

WL: Well, no, that entered into it. And then a lot of, say, trustees, never.... What did rankle, Alfred was the advisory committee, and I think he managed to get rid of almost everything they brought to the collection, if you check. That doesn't diminish Alfred at all. You see, George L.K. Morris was on that; that's how Monroe came into the Museum. Agnes Rindge was on it. I think Dorothy Schaeffer was on it.

SZ: After the fire in 1958, I think the Museum undertook this big fundraising campaign. They were getting ready for the expansion. I just remember you tossed up a couple of sessions ago Louise Smith's auction, but that was actually important in the Museum's [history].

WL: Yes. That was really run, as I told you, by Anne Jones.

SZ: But it was really a public, I hate to use the word, deaccessioning.

WL: No, things were given purposely to be sold.

SZ: So they were not [from the] collection.

WL: Look at the auction catalogue. There may have been one or two things from the collection, but the *Grand Jazz Band* of Dubuffet was given to be auctioned. I remember Alfred wanted me to approach Pablo to give something, and I refused.

SZ: Because?

WL: Alfred and I, weren't we doing the sixtieth- or the seventy-fifth-anniversary Picasso exhibition?

SZ: So you felt it wasn't appropriate?

WL: It wasn't the right moment. Heinz Berggruen gave three Matisse paper cut-outs. Look at the auction catalogue. You'll see immediately what I mean. This was different from the auction a decade before, which was primarily works of art from the collection.

SZ: Maybe that's what it is. It's gotten confused in my mind.

WL: The head of *Madame Cézanne* [1885-87] that Louis Stern got, that's from the earlier auction. That auction catalogue has a yellow cover, I think.

SZ: You have some memory.

WL: The auction you're talking about, I think it was sort of a bluish cover. Remember, that was the first time that anything was televised.

SZ: Was that exciting?

WL: Yes, the auction went very well. They had an auction much later of the prints that I had gotten for the International Program. That's much later. And the things I'd gotten for ten, fifteen or a hundred dollars. Boy, did they make a mint.

SZ: How did that 1964 expansion change things at the Museum? Did it change the feeling of what the institution was at all?

WL: I forget. It is sort of when the family atmosphere at the Museum cracked up. Oh, you asked me about the International Program, and you kept saying it was the thing in Maine. I remember that it was the thing that Bates Lowry did in upstate New York.

SZ: I think those are different things.... The meeting in Maine, my memory of this was that in late 1959, and it in some way involved Liz Shaw and....

WL: Liz Shaw, curatorial department heads, and it was Richard Koch's introduction to the Museum. We all met Richard Koch for the first time there.

SZ: But the Bates Lowry thing is a later thing.

WL: Much later.

SZ: He was at the Museum from '68 to '69, for about eighteen months, and I thought we'd get into all that. But I wanted to know a little bit more about the expansion, because it changed the size, it changed the amount of staff that was required, it changed the operating bottom line. It changed the way the garden looked.

WL: I remember one time it was hoped that the garden would extend to Fifth Avenue, and Philip Goodwin, I think, quite anonymously gave money for the completion of the garden. Philip, of course, was there on press day with a broom, brushing away leaves. I think he did get photographed, which was probably his main purpose in being there.

SZ: Which Philip?

WL: [LAUGHING] Phipper [Philip Johnson].

SZ: Was the choice of Philip as architect in that expansion, was that a fait accompli?

WL: Yes. And Philip, as I told you, violently opposed architects being named to the board. He thought of the Modern as his turf, and as I said to you, from my point of view he's never acknowledged his very great debt to Alfred.

SZ: Anything else? I think that in that expansion you had new gallery space, the Sachs gallery?

WL: That's probably really shrunk in this most recent expansion. It was the Paul J. Sachs Galleries for Prints and Drawing, and now it's a what? Lauder, Tanya Grossman. I did considerable fundraising, not only for the Museum, but certainly for the Sachs

complex. I found that those galleries worked very well, and I kept the view of the garden. There must be photographs someplace; it was a nice place. As usual, in my installations I made sure there was seating. Curators so often forget people get tired. Before that, I had had only one wall on the second floor, one very flat wall, as you left the painting galleries, to hang prints.... Are you seeing Anne [Jones]?

SZ: Yes. She's on the list.

WL: Good. What else can I fill in, if anything? Tell me, Sharon.

SZ: I'm just trying to think of other parts of the...expansion, the opening day -- remember that, in '64, in the evening?

WL: It was disastrous. There were many friends of the Museum, and there had been a dinner, and very well-intended people had to wait on this line that extended all the way to Fifth Avenue. It was just very badly handled. There was dancing where the raised garden is now. What did we open with? I'll have to look that up. I simply forget.

SZ: I think it was that...best of every department [*Art in a Changing World: 1888-1964*, Exhs.732-744, 1964-1965].... René died in 1968, but I think in the last few years it was clear he was going to retire. What started to happen was, it was nearing Monroe's retirement, Alfred was retiring and René was going to retire, so you really had a power vacuum.

WL: Yes. René was going to stay for a year as advisor to Bates, and monies were raised for three chairs -- one in Alfred's name, one is René's name and I think one in Monroe's. Whatever happened to those monies, I don't know; I suspect they

vanished. Alfred, of course, was already on the decline, which became evident, at least to those close to him, about the time of my Miró show, whenever that was.

SZ: ...Your big Miró show was 1959, so already...?

WL: Yes.

SZ: I guess what I'm asking you is, it was one generation of Museum people leaving, and there was another generation of people who had been there a very long time, such as yourself and Arthur Drexler....

WL: Alfred was always wary of Arthur Drexler. Arthur Drexler was certainly brilliant. You must remember, he desperately wanted to become director of the Museum?

SZ: Around this time, right?

WL: It certainly was lurking in his head.

SZ: Did he have the administrative talents for that?

WL: I don't know. One recognized his brilliance. I suppose he was the most brilliant of the younger people, but to me, Sharon, he was always that sort of person who, if you cut off his arm at the elbow, there wouldn't be any blood. I think emotionally he was -- Liz can probably tell you more -- screwed up, but there was real brilliance there, brilliance, really, in interpretation. Like many architects, though, too often physical architecture would dominate. For instance, the first show that John Szarkowski did -- I think it was *American Landscape Photography* [Note: *The Photographer and the American Landscape*]-- Szarkowski panicked about installing it and Arthur Drexler

was called in. He made such an architectural discipline to the installation that when you left the show, all you remembered were these massive, compartmentalized walls. Remember, Alfred's installations were always innovative. Alfred never hung pictures symmetrically. Remember, that's the way it was supposed to be done. Alfred occasionally skied things. All the tricks I use today so well, I learned from Alfred Barr. Frankly, if I'm really screwed up and look at six things, can't do it, then say, Well, what would Alfred have done? Since space was always a problem, Alfred had to hang pictures much more close to each other than he really wanted, and at times -- I think I've said this to you before -- was more and more suspicious of horizontal paintings, simply because they took up more room [LAUGHING]. I know that sounds frivolous, but I assure you, it's true. Of this museum, what our great Peter Blume...that's because Alfred was on the jury, and got the prize, the painting itself in Scranton.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 5

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 5

SZ: So at the time, once he knew René was going to retire, it's my understanding and I think you're saying that Arthur was hoping that he would become director. I would assume that you had some feeling about it for yourself.

WL: No, absolutely not. Never. What a thankless job. No, Arthur actually...one of the things in Rockefeller Center, one of the new buildings had opened up with some super dining club. It's the one where the waiter came and said, "Tootsie, I'm called Push-Push and I am your servant for the evening," that sort of thing. Terribly embarrassing. Arthur arranged and paid for himself a dinner there for the curatorial department heads -- it probably included Liz -- and I believe actually had a pamphlet

published. I'm almost sure I'm right. A rare item; I don't have a copy.

SZ: Sort of a campaign brochure?

WL: Yes. There was one terrible moment. This must have been after I resigned as director of painting and sculpture. The architecture and design galleries were off the second floor of the collection, and Bill Rubin suddenly built a wall, and that had to be taken down. It must have been after I resigned, because I never would have done that.

SZ: We'll get the dates, and then I'll go back. In '67, which is before René retired, you were appointed curator of painting and sculpture, and in 1969, director. I assume that was during Bates's tenure or right after he was fired, because he was fired, I believe, in.... [TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION] So in '67 curator, '69 director and '71 you resigned. That was in the middle of all this upheaval, which I like to start to get into.

WL: Hightower...it was very, very sad. The trustees were all sent stuff he had written, and if one of them had sat down and read it, they wouldn't have made that mistake. It was perfectly clear the way he thought, the populist thinking, and it was unfair to him to have hired him. That's what I meant when I said the Museum has destroyed the lives of many people.

SZ: Let me just establish this, too, in case you can't remember. Bates Lowry began in the beginning of 1968 and he left sometime in the middle of 1969; he served about a year and a half. Then for about a year there was the threesome of Bareiss and Koch and Wilder Green.

WL: It was really Bareiss.

SZ: We'll talk about that. Then you had about a year of John Hightower, and Dick Oldenburg became acting director in January of '72 and became director in June of '72. That was a very difficult time for the Museum, and I mean in the middle of all of this there were global problems with staff and unions and everything. But first, go back and tell me how it came....

WL: Arthur Drexler activated the staff association. He was terrible to one of his handlers, and the handler, a very intelligent young man -- I forget his name -- really triggered the staff association. I believed in the staff association and was at all its first meetings. Arthur Drexler, though, and Emily Woodruff -- Emily Stone -- found it all beneath them. Also at that time, [Thomas] Hoving delegated Ted Rousseau to try to get me to come here, and I flatly refused, because the Museum was very rocky.

SZ: Let me just stay with the whole staff thing for a minute. You're someone who began working at the Museum as a young person and grew up there as a staff person, taking on more and more responsibility. How did you feel about the idea of a union for professional staff?

WL: I supported it completely, absolutely completely. You can get money. Those kids weren't getting the salaries. A few people like . . . Kynaston [McShine] thought he could come in and collect his mail at the end of the day after being on strike. That was ludicrous. I made sure all the phones were manned, all that. There is a great difference, of course, being in a managerial thing and being sympathetic to a staff organization. I was management, but I was completely sympathetic. What destroyed the staff thing at the Museum was its incorporation of noncuratorial people. That just eviscerated the whole thing.

SZ: Are you saying it was sometimes difficult for you, being management?

WL: I've just been elected vice president of the staff organization here -- yesterday. Apparently, it was unanimous [LAUGHING].

SZ: Congratulations [LAUGHING].

WL: To get back to Arthur, he would always find extremely bright people to work for him and then he'd just pull the carpet out from under them. All of them survived. [INTERRUPTION]

SZ: I guess that was speaking to what I was asking about how in those last few years of René's directorship, what did you expect was going to happen when he retired? Did you or anyone else have thoughts about who would be an appropriate successor to him?

WL: It's very funny, everyone always thought about Alfred's retirement. People, knowing René was going to retire, really didn't think about his retirement. As I said to you once, there were so many people at the Modern who thought of René as their closest friend, I think it was really inconceivable for many, many people to think of the Museum without him. For a long time, Alfred's successor was obvious -- me -- and then all that changed when he had the troubles. People really did not think of a successor for René.

SZ: But, with Alfred's retirement you were really...Alfred retired in '67, but, as you pointed out, Alfred was really sick for ten years before, would you say?

WL: It began.

SZ: So I'm just trying to get a sense of how it all played out. You became curator of painting and sculpture in '67. What were the circumstances under which that happened?

WL: I was simultaneously director of drawings and prints, simultaneously a curator in painting and sculpture, with Dorothy Miller. Then I became director of painting and sculpture, succeeding Bates Lowry, who, as director, assumed directorship of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, although, when he was hired, or before he was hired, that had never occurred to the trustees.

SZ: But that was a condition that he placed on....

WL: No, no. It just happened. He told me that he was assuming directorship of painting and sculpture at lunch at the Dorset it the first room of the bar grill, in the corner...[INTERRUPTION]. We were at the corner table in the first room, the one by the bar, and he actually used the word "troika," and it was him having it [the directorship] and Dorothy and me. Then he began working there.

SZ: Where was Bill Rubin at that time?

WL: Bill Rubin was -- it's documented someplace -- adviser to the student center.

SZ: But he didn't figure, at that point, in what was happening in the department. He came in and did the Matta show, right? [*Matta*, MoMA Exh. #620, September 11-October 20, 1957]

WL: That was long, long before. It had nothing to do with his subsequent association, the Matta show irritating violently one of Matta's foremost supporters, Emily Genauer.

SZ: I just saw her.

WL: Then he had really no relationship to the Museum. I got him to give a drawing by [Theodore J.] Roszak, and then he was interested in the Théâtre d'Louvre, a sort of shadow theater in Paris, and in the print collection I had collected quite a few of the original lithographs relating to it. He and Dorothy didn't hit it off, but, more importantly, Bates and Dorothy didn't hit it off -- really didn't. I'm trained as a servant, and Bates was director of the Museum, and I certainly did everything I could to support him.

SZ: Did you hit it off with him, though?

WL: As I said to you before, Dorothy Miller and I were never close friends. Together, we did...to me, that's part of the job. Yes, we [Bates and I] did hit it off together, and with Isabelle [Lowry]. But my friend Larry Aldrich, whom I'd gotten to give so much money to the Museum, wanted to turn over to the Museum his property and small museum in Litchfield. Captain Steichen was still alive, had the adjacent property, and we drove up -- I knew the property, Bates didn't -- and during that drive up I knew that there was something wrong, the way you can just sense it. There was this luncheon with Captain Steichen there, then we drove back, and for some reason it was even more depressing. They dropped Bates and Isabelle at that Park Avenue apartment, and then I guess I walked home. But, as we got out of the car, Isabelle was crying, and that was the first indication that I knew that Bates was about to be fired. On a trustee level, I think he and Philip [Johnson] clashed. Remember, as I told you before, that summer I'd arranged with Peggy Guggenheim that she turn over her

collection and everything to the Modern, etcetera, and I don't think it was ever presented to the full board; I think it was presented to the executive committee and, to my horror, was declined. If you interview Bates, I'm sure he will remember that vividly.

SZ: What about his selection?

WL: It all was because of Save Venice. No one had heard of Bates before that. I first heard about him at an opening at the Morgan Library. Helen Franc was rushing around saying that she thought she knew who the new director of the Museum was.

SZ: Because she was involved with that also.

WL: With what?

SZ: With Save Venice. CRIA [Committee for the Rescue of Italian Art].

WL: Helen Franc, another bride of MoMA. I met her through the *Magazine of Art* when I did their film reviews, I mean of art films. Alfred admired her tremendously. He made dead sure she never worked for him. I remember he once said to me that she did the work of, let's say, ten people, and I said to him, "But Alfred, what about the ten people she puts out of commission?"

SZ: But Bates, you didn't know him before, but what kind of a director was he and what kind of a director of painting and sculpture was he, and how was his eye?

WL: He was a man of vision. I don't think his eye was so hot. He was particularly partial to sculpture and insisted on -- remember the old little indoor sculpture court on the

third floor? -- he insisted on doing an installation there. The floor was carpeted -- you shouldn't carpet floors with sculpture; it makes it difficult to move things around . . .

SZ: Because there were people who didn't...why, Bill? What did they find in Bates Lowry that they didn't...?

WL: The place really became a nest of hostilities, and I guess you're right, it really dates to the expansion. I'd never sat down and thought about it that way.

SZ: Doesn't that also speak, to some degree, to his administrative style or lack thereof?

WL: I don't think he was supported administratively by the trustees. I remember Philip submitted some sort of plan for another sort of tower, and Bates resented -- I don't remember exactly what I'm talking about -- Bates resented it being submitted as a fait accompli and must have said something at some trustees' meeting. Then there is a woman who made mosaics, J. B. Neumann's wife [Elsa Schmid], and the Modern owns a portrait of Father Darcy by her. She's an awfully nice woman, but the portrait of Father Darcy, the Catholic theologian, is pretty ghastly, though, and Dorothy hung it -- she was in charge of hanging the collection floors then -- and Bates made her take it down. Unfortunately, I don't think Bates trusted anyone but me. He knew I always worked weekends and for some reason, doing something for him, I happened to be working on a Saturday when Gifford Phillips phoned, giving us the information that the Stein collection would be available. He did do something strange. Remember, I was on the fourth floor. He had a direct line put into my telephone where he could get me directly. Quite frankly, I think he used it four or five times, but it was there. It just seemed odd. He did rely heavily on Irene Gordon, if you interview her. That's the girl, remember I told you, who took notes on the Gertrude Stein transactions. Bates did find himself so overwhelmed with people

really anxious to assassinate him, such as Betsy Jones, that he brought in, suddenly, Meg Potter, Carolyn Lanchner and one other person, and they all came in, I think, at associate curator level. You might want to check that. In other words, this was a sort of cushion [against] the old guard that was antagonistic to him, he tried to put pillows around himself. Betsy Jones would literally do everything, anything possible to make him do a boo-boo.

SZ: Was that a personality thing or a power thing?

WL: Alfred ended up being absolutely terrified by Betsy Jones. I could tell on the phone when she was in his office when we were speaking. I don't know why. Absolutely terrified. Bates did drink a bit, not to excess. Alfred, who wasn't always focusing, he did see Bates in a corridor in a hallway on the fifth floor with a glass in his hand, which obviously shocked Alfred. I wasn't there, but he...it was Bates, actually, that told me Alfred had seen him. I think supported by staff and, certainly, trustees, Bates could have worked out. I gather this Museum went to him in Washington, and, of course, after he left the Museum, he had the heart attack and then Isabelle phoned me and I had to make sure he was still covered by health insurance -- the sort of thing one hates getting involved in.

SZ: One thing that has been mentioned to me, one of the issues with him was the study center, I guess with its establishment, and he was very focused on that, to the exclusion of other Museum pursuits. Does that sound right to you?

WL: No. He was very much interested in the study center; indeed, the technical operatings of it were handled for a long time, or for several months, by Carolyn Lanchner. The trouble was, what is in storage at the Modern, I mean, there may be a few capital things, but what's in storage is really crap. Now, how did that come

about? Alfred really believed in acquiring things as they were being done, and as Alfred himself said, I forget, one out of ten of them survives, nevertheless, one is left with the other nine, and there is not so much to study with that. Eliza was enchanted that it was being called the Lillie P. Bliss [International Study Center]. I was in Bates's office when he was being attacked by some black organization, and this woman went to the window that was in the study center, she looked and saw the lettering and said, "The Lillie P. *White* Study Center." I don't know why, but it struck me as hilariously funny, and, as usual when I'm nervous, I broke out laughing, and it wasn't so hot. He certainly got on with the workmen very much. His coming to the Museum was all done, really, through René. René had promised him lodging. Remember, Bates gave up tenure, free lodging and free tuition for the children. René had promised him lodging. Tragically, René never told this to the trustees. I had forgotten all this. What a boo-boo. He told them *after* it was all done. I have heard Bates criticized for the fact he didn't entertain. I don't think that's true. I mean, he and Isabelle were what, just moving in. He handled trustees' meetings well. It must have been terrible for him, though. Betsy Jones was used to being Alfred's, she thought, his right arm or whatever you want, and she really was almost plotting agin him. She was the most avid people of the strike, was on the picket line. Both Marga Barr and Dorothy Miller insisted -- this later, after the fact -- that she was never on the picket line. This is relatively unimportant, but to me what was so disturbing, why did they do that? Alfred, of course, did attend the trustees' meetings, which may have intimidated Bates. And, of course, as I've told you, since the Museum provided no secretarial help for Alfred at all, it was me and Monawee Richards, it meant him coming down, really, or just be on the fourth floor, which he wasn't so familiar with and, as I think I've told you, he'd get lost occasionally and I'd put him on the right road.

SZ: You mentioned last time a meeting in Appalachia? Remember, we were mixing up

those meetings? What did that have to do with [Bates]?

WL: There was someone in charge of publications who had been at the Met and came to the Modern -- I forget his name; Craig something-or-other.

SZ: Gray Williams?

WL: Yes. That meeting really did him in. One was woken at night the second night by the sounds of his retching in the john. Waldo [Rasmussen] in his loftiness, was unable to attend the meetings and sent as his delegate someone who used to be a docent at the Modern. I forget her name. She and Ruth Olsen years ago did the *Gabo-Pevsner* show [MoMA Exh. #369, February 10-April 25, 1948].... The girl whose name I forget was Walter's delegate, and of course she was absolutely unable to defend....

SZ: What was the purpose of this meeting?

WL: Just to try to get everyone together.

SZ: This was in the middle of all this upheaval?

WL: Just before.

SZ: So Bates was there.

WL: Yes, this was near his home. Dumb me, I caught poison ivy.

SZ: It really was way out in....

WL: It's in that poor part of New York State, and Bates has or had a house.

SZ: You said it was Appalachia! [LAUGHING] I thought you were serious.

WL: Bill Rubin was there, Arthur Drexler, Emily Stone, I guess Liz [Shaw], maybe the new man in the film library, I'm not sure. I think Bates was trying to hammer out some sort of policy, intellectual policy, or to find what was the consensus of opinion about what the direction of The Museum of Modern Art should be. The only concrete thing, apart from the destruction of the circulating program, was that it was absolutely necessary that The Museum of Modern Art do a scholarly bulletin, which, of course, never happened. I insisted that Bates be invited to the opening of the Gertrude Stein show. I'm goopy that way. You just can't erase history. I know he appreciated that. I think he thought that Gifford Phillips was going to be more of a support, but Gifford Phillips is rather an odd fish. By coincidence, Eliza gave three cocktail parties for various people to meet Bates Lowry. Just by coincidence, I was unable to go to any of them. We all joked about that.

SZ: So it sounds, from what you're saying, is that there was real effort to integrate him, and it didn't....

WL: He didn't have the support of the trustees and, certainly, the staff, with whom he worked most closely. I remember at that time I was much more involved with Japan than I am now. I was supposed to go to Japan as a guest of the government, it was all arranged, and at Bates's request I called it off.

SZ: He wanted you to...?

WL: To stay.

SZ: Because?

WL: No. All this I realize in retrospect.

SZ: So how did you see his firing?

WL: Usually I have my, not my ear to the ground, usually my instincts are pretty accurate, but, as I say, it wasn't until coming back from Litchfield that I really had any inkling, and then it just poured. Bates asked me to resign with him, and the Museum was just too important to me; I wouldn't dream of it. Supposedly, they find a paid president this month.

SZ: You mean they have their paid president and they're going to announce it?

WL: I don't think they have it. It's funny, Sharon, you can't stop but worry about the place.

SZ: Let's just do one more thing. Are you okay for another?

WL: Sure.

SZ: Let's go on to then he did leave. You got the big troika of Green and Bareiss and Koch.

WL: I guess, really, Wilder was really functioning a director of exhibitions. Dick was in the midst of a divorce, and then married the girl from the film library. Walter, of course, at that time based mostly in Munich but communicating and doing a superb job, for

which I don't think he was ever properly thanked. Then I was moved into Bates's former office as director of painting and sculpture, which Bates had had rather elaborately over-decorated. And Nelson produced Hightower.

SZ: So the three of them running the Museum doesn't bring much to mind for you?

WL: Walter Bareiss is a businessperson. The budget had to be trimmed. It was his decision, I think, that, let's say, thirteen percent of every budget [had to be trimmed]. I know nothing about finance, am very stupid that way; however, I guess that was one way of doing it. There was tremendous resentment about that. Walter, although intellectually he's brilliant, isn't used to cloudiness, and I think that irritated him. He had some sort of tiff with Bill Rubin, and Bill Rubin submitted his resignation, which Walter immediately accepted, but *immediately* accepted, and then, of course, it never happened. Then, of course, there was either the Rothko show or the de Kooning show. Tom Hess had wanted me to install the de Kooning show, simply because, let's face it, I'm the best installer. Rubin, though, was terribly miffed that he wasn't doing the de Kooning show. I remember he stalked out of a meeting, as Walter said, like a crab.

SZ: But at that time you didn't have an equal relationship, if you think of titles, did you? At that time you were director of the department and he was a curator.

WL: Yes. Brilliant person, terribly difficult to work with. Incidentally, any friction was never on my part. People have us being enemies. I think you know me well enough by now...and he is by nature litigious, going back to the Matta show, I forget whom he threatened to sue. At another time he threatened to sue the Saidenburgs. Also, since my office was suddenly his, I'll never forget there was some marvelous Cubist picture, an oval picture, and for some reason it was being hidden in his office. I

mean, all sorts of strange things like that. Then Ernst Beyeler, my friend, introduced Bill to Picasso, and he went down with Walter Bareiss and Bill took with him a Cézanne landscape, which he wanted to exchange....

END SIDE 2, TAPE 5

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 6

WL: ...[but Rubin] neglected to check if Pablo already had a similar landscape, but then Pablo gave the famous *Guitar*, which was really, I think, Pablo's way of making a tribute to Alfred Barr. In fact, I always considered it that way. Jacqueline photographed Bill Rubin and Walter Bareiss with Pablo. Bill Rubin's address she had at the Museum, but she didn't have Bareiss's address. Walter and I were close friends and his mail was always delivered to me, and I said, "Save the envelope" -- this was to Betsy Jones -- "because it has decorations by Picasso," and, of course, that bitch threw it away [LAUGHING]. Bill developed a relationship with Jacqueline, which led to other things, I'm not sure quite what. My great friend, of course, had been Françoise Gilot. [TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION] What else do you want to be talking about?

SZ: What I wanted to know is, you were director of painting and sculpture, and I assume that was something you liked and wanted to do?

WL: Oh, yes. I loved installing, as did Alfred. I think Alfred was happiest installing pictures.

SZ: As you said, a lot has been made of the clash between the two of you [Lieberman and Rubin]. Did you feel that you were both jockeying for that?

WL: No. Bill Rubin can't work for anyone. Dick Oldenburg is still scared shitless of Bill Rubin, really frightened of Bill. Also, Bill takes so much credit for work that other people have really done, like Judith DeMeo, who's rather a pill -- Judith Cousins. I mean, you take that Picasso book. It's her chronology. I mean, everything thinks of it as Bill's book. He was quite opposed to Alfred's last book he issued, that sort of fat one [Barr Jr., Alfred H. *Painting and Sculpture in The Museum of Modern Art, 1929-1977*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977].

SZ: That might be something we could save for next time, too, because I did want to ask you, from your perspective, about the direction Bill Rubin took the Museum in once he became director of painting and sculpture and the artists he felt were important and how the collection....

WL: The whole file on Bill Rubin was in Bates's office, and there were many controversial things in it. I'm very funny, I'm incapable of reading another person's mail. Helen Franc was marvelous at that, incidentally. I would have a letter here, and somehow she would get [in position] and somehow be able to read it. Then I took, really, my first vacation from the Museum. When I came back, that file had completely disappeared. I mean, I don't know who took it, but, obviously, someone did. It went into...let's turn this off. [TAPE INTERRUPTION] Carolyn Lanchner has been an invaluable person in that department. Have you gotten to know her at all?

SZ: Yes, I do know her. I'm very fond of her.

WL: She's a really wonderful person and I don't believe has gotten sufficient credit. Her Rousseau show [*Henri Rousseau*, MoMA Exh. #1389, February 21-June 4, 1985] was downstairs in the basement, but she sure made that space look well. I guess

that's all for now.

SZ: Okay. Thank you.

END TAPE 6, SIDE 1

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **WILLIAMS S. LIEBERMAN (WL)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

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BEGIN TAPE #7, SIDE #1

SZ: We left off last time, we talked about Bates Lowry's brief tenure at the Museum, but we never got to John Hightower. We also talked about what is commonly known as the troika, which ran the Museum for the year between Lowry and Hightower. I guess now I'd like to get your thoughts and memories of the Hightower year and a half, I guess, a little bit less than that, because it was also a very difficult time at the Museum. There were staff union problems, and....

WL: Hightower was Nelson's bright-eyed suggestion, and, of course, Nelson enjoyed quite a clout at that time, much as his brother David does today. All the trustees were sent previous writings by Hightower; I think I've told you this. I don't think one of them read them. Had they read them, they would have gotten what he was thinking, his ideas, everything, all spelled out. Anyway, he was hired. I think John Canaday was alive then, at *The New York Times,* and when Hightower made some sort of speech to the staff, it was upstairs, on the sixth floor, he happened to mention Canaday in some negative context, which he didn't mean at all. Anyway, that got back to Canaday; he was annoyed. I was impressed by Hightower in the beginning because sometimes he was at work, at least in the first few weeks he was there, he

was at work earlier than I was in the morning, which is always a good sign. He was a man of good faith. He was happily married; one didn't see too much of his wife around, certainly not as much as one had seen Isabelle Lowry. He got hipped on a book that came out just at that time called *The Greening of America,* and I don't know how many copies of that we sent around. I never read the book. It soon became apparent that the whole thing was way above his head, which is unfair to him. To repeat, if they had done their homework, he wouldn't have been hired.... He believed in spreading it around and certainly no touch for elitism, man of the people. Somehow he just lacked the style or the remnants of the style that had been The Museum of Modern Art.

SZ: Isn't that a curious choice, then, for Nelson to have made?

WL: Hightower was extremely personable, came on very nice, although relatively short in stature, had touch of charisma, none of the innate arrogance that Bates seemed to have, which wasn't really arrogance; with Bates, it's more shyness. The Museum had just issued a book by Helen Franc called *An Invitation to See*. It's really a rather good book. Its genesis was incorrect, in my opinion. It was based on what we happened to have plates for, to make postcards. To me, you don't do a book about the collection that way. At the same time, Elaine Johnson, I think, had done a book on modern prints. One realized at a meeting about the publishing program that Hightower thought both of these were the equivalent of definitive catalogues, which they weren't. Everyone remained terribly polite at the meeting, but it was apparent that he didn't have the experience or the framework. Unlike Bates, he was terrified by Bill Rubin. During his tenure, through me, the Museum was offered the complete Jackson Pollock archive, by my friend Lee Krasner. It actually had arrived at the Museum. I was forced to write a letter refusing the gift. That was because of Bill Rubin getting hysterical because it hadn't come in through him.

SZ: He opposed it on what basis?

WL: Frankly, it was me. As I said, our difficulties were never generated by me. If you go back, unfortunately, time and time, for instance, his big Cézanne show [*Cézanne: The Late Work*, MoMA Exh. #1188, October 7, 1977-January 2, 1978], he simply forgets completely that I was the one who defended it to Bill Burden when it was first being thought of as a watercolor show. That, perhaps, is irrelevant.

SZ: What I mean is, he would say that it wasn't in the purview of the Museum to accept a gift like that?

WL: He convinced Hightower; I don't know. I was away in Switzerland, I forget on what business, and learned to my horror that I had been assigned to do a show of a friend of mine, a black artist, a sculptor, Richard Hunt. My horror was not really that I had been assigned to do the show, because I respect his work very much; my horror was not that I had not been consulted in any previous conversation; my horror was that they were making it a double-header with another black artist, Romare Bearden, which to me intellectually defeated the very reason that they wanted to do the show. I think you understand immediately what I mean. Nevertheless, both shows happened, and they opened simultaneously. It was apparent that Hightower and Walter disagreed, or, rather, came to disagree. I was with the Schoenborns -- that's Mrs. Samuel Marx -- and my office phoned me that Bill Rubin was campaigning violently to get me out of the Museum. The reason they knew that is, when he gets excited, he just screams. There also was a crisis about Waldo Rasmussen and a Latin American show -- long in planning, this show was -- and I wrote a long memo from Mexico about it. I found out from someone who had been working for me, Judith DeMeo [Judith Cousins], who's very, very bright, actually quite disliked me,

who was perhaps trying to do a Betsy Jones with me -- this made me quite uncomfortable. Even with the plea that I come back from New York, I did stay the full time, I guess about three or four days longer than I was supposed to with the Schoenborns. Remember, I had outlined their -- her -- considerable gift to the Museum. I came back, and, indeed, things were in a turmoil. Hightower asked me to lunch at that noisy restaurant in the basement of the CBS building -- I think it's no longer in existence -- and the tables are very, very close together. Naturally, he being the director and things, I introduced him to whomever, and he really didn't know anyone. It was quite crowded, and he said...actually, he said what Oldenburg said to me much later, that he couldn't stand Bill Rubin screaming at him, and would I resign as director of painting and sculpture. The Museum was really in a mess at this time. Stupidly not thinking of myself but only of the Museum, and that's just the nutty way I am, I didn't make a fight or anything and did indeed resign to become director of the Department of Drawings. I don't really remember much about Hightower's tenure. It really was not memorable. There wasn't the attempt on the part of trustees, for instance, Eliza, to give an event in her home so people could meet him, as there had been for Bates. His reception at the Museum was quite different.

SZ: There was, actually, a strike during his tenure.

WL: There was, yes. I, of course, stayed, I mean, I was there. I got rather pissed off with people like . . . Kynaston -- who thought they could waltz in after they had been on strike to collect their mail and telephone calls. That didn't seem to me quite kosher. I was worried about the kids who weren't getting money. There must be some way of checking: I actually gave money to be used to those who were really in economic need.

SZ: Somewhere I read that, also, he was very open to the antiwar protests of the time and that one of the things that really did him in with the trustees was that he closed the Museum, he did something without consulting [them].

WL: The Martin Luther King day? That was a mess.

SZ: Do you remember that?

WL: Not really. I mean, one did help him give it a certain touch of style. I don't remember much else. There was an episode, some artist showing at the Peridot Gallery, something like that, did something to the American flag, I think he desecrated it, and Hightower did force the acquisition of a preliminary drawing for it. I mean, to me it was no hot issue; it might of been, had it been a decent work of art.

SZ: It brings up a very interesting question, because you described him as a man of the people, and I've certainly gotten the impression from what I've read that he kind of took a stand at that time, in terms of what he believed was right, and it makes one wonder what the place of an institution like the Modern, is there a place for that kind of political activism, if you will?

WL: I think there could be, certainly not the way he mishandled it, though. The trustees of the Modern, or at least at that time or during my many years, were not used to a director talking or, say, dictating to them at all. Luckily, I was removed from the fifth floor, because the drawing collection was on the fourth floor, so I missed a lot of that. Then, of course, his wife left him and God knows; I think he had a mini-breakdown. That's what I meant when I say the Museum has wrecked the lives of many people. He was a good man, but, I repeat, the trustees hadn't done their initial homework, and, boy, I hope they do this time.

SZ: You mean with the selection of the paid president?

WL: The whole idea of the paid president is absolutely ludicrous. It's not analogous to the Metropolitan Museum. We have Bill Lewis in charge of administration and fundraising, and we have Philippe [de Montebello] in charge of curatorial affairs. All right, the Modern has Dick Oldenburg in charge of administration and fundraising, but they call him director; in other words, that's what we call a paid president. But David is hipped on this idea and David's going bye-bye, and I guess he wants this to be his last thing.

SZ: So at the Modern, who is the equivalent of Philippe in fact?

WL: There isn't.

SZ: It comes from each department.

WL: I know. That's what I meant when I said to you "all these separate kingdoms," with a separate acquisitions committee, with no one from one department being on another department's committee. See, it's different here: there's one acquisitions committee. For instance, the curator of photography might be courting Mrs. Zilch. The curator of painting and sculpture might be courting *Mr.* Zilch. Neither curator would know what the other curator was doing and might very well break up the Zilch marriage. So it's not thought through. To Hightower I did suggest, as I had to Bates, that the title "director" be dropped from the title of the department heads. I still believe very strongly that there should be only one director at the Museum. There's nothing wrong, as I said to you, being a chief curator or senior curator.

SZ: So would it be safe to assume that you were not surprised when Hightower made his exit?

WL: I think to anyone knowledgeable on the staff that it was apparent -- not immediately apparent, but certainly after a very short time.

SZ: So by the time he was in fact let go, it was not a surprise to anyone. What about the choice of Dick to succeed him?

WL: I think it was fine. It was sort of unexpected. It seemed fine, and I think Dick did a good job. I think that this paid president thing must unnerve him. He and I haven't talked about it at all. And it must make Aggie Gund think, "Well, why am I an *unpaid* president?" I mean, all these sort of obvious things, Sharon. The attitude of the curators toward Hightower was with him never "Let me share something with you," it was much more "Let me explain," and that must have been very frustrating for him. I haven't thought about that before, though. You must remember, during a long hunk of his tenure I took my first and only sabbatical, vacation.

SZ: Was this before you resigned from painting and sculpture or after?

WL: Immediately after.

SZ: So you really took a vacation.

WL: Yes. Well, no. I did the show in Australia [LAUGHTER].

SZ: To prove your point, your previous point.

WL: Ask me more.

SZ: Now I want to know a little bit about what it was like....

WL: It's really because I was away during much of that period that I don't remember more.

SZ: But once you got back and once you were director of the Department of Drawings, how was that for you? Dick was director; I assume that some of the messiness with then Bill being director of painting and sculpture, he had his area and you were there, you did....

WL: ...some big painting shows [LAUGHING]. They had to get it done.

SZ: Tell me about that.

WL: Well, the *Modern Masters* was done for Australia, for the International Program, and it was a wild success in Australia, that's two showings and I forget how many zillions of copies of the catalogue they sold. Certainly, if I had one percent of each copy, I'd be well-off. It was such a success and the Museum's domestic program seemed so bleak, it was decided to see whether that show couldn't be shown here in New York. Luckily, people in Australia liked me -- I was able to get to lenders, certainly -- but the people in Australia extended their indemnity of the insurance for the showing here, which was really an incredible gift. Mind you, Sharon, that meant paying no insurance. If you look at the catalogue of that show.... Yes?

SZ: It makes me think of a lot of things, but let me continue this way first. I guess just around that time, also, or a little bit afterwards, serious talk began about another

expansion.

WL: Yes. It had under Bates, and a plan was presented to Bates without any previous discussion with Bates. That did begin trouble. Bates was the director of the Museum; Bates also knows a tremendous amount about architecture, and he was presented, almost, with a fait accompli.

SZ: By whom? Who presented it to him?

WL: I don't know. I would say the executive committee. Certainly, the presentation was engineered by Phipper -- by Philip Johnson. That particular plan fell through, and the new plan didn't work. As I told you, the suggestion Arthur Drexler and I had was never entertained, which upset me.

SZ: Which was?

WL: Instead of just adding to the rabbit warren, why not do the ideal thing: switch the garden side to 53rd Street, build your ideal building, with its entrance on 54th. Mind you, all the area under all of this, the garden, had never been developed or anything. Also, one suggested a parking lot underneath.

SZ: As a revenue...?

WL: Yes, and also to relieve the congestion on 53rd. Today you go down 53rd Street, it's a horror; you go down 54th Street, it's something else. I still think it would have been a good idea. I don't think: I *know* it would have been.

SZ: So in some sense you were for an expansion at that time.

WL: Yes. I still believe very firmly what Alfred believed, that *a* museum of modern art one should be able to visit and see in one visit. It became apparent that the Museum no longer considered itself something evolving but was turning its collection into an historic collection, which Alfred never intended.

SZ: Is this a direction that Bill is largely responsible for?

WL: I think Bill was largely responsible for [it]; however, Bates did argue that the Modern's collection should begin with Manet, and the Manet in question had just been acquired by David Rockefeller and now belongs to this museum [the Metropolitan]. If only one could write the history accurately [LAUGHING].

SZ: Well, one could.... [LAUGHING]

WL: The new expansion [in 1984], I don't think, solved problems. The galleries, the ceilings are much too low. Modern pictures, contemporary works, are larger. There is no way of denying that. I've tried to accommodate that in the architecture here on the second floor, and, I think, quite successfully, but there's no attempt [at the Modern] at giving pictures more space, and I think there's nothing more intimidating than seeing groups of large pictures shoved against each other in small, boxlike rooms. I think the only thing was kept of my installations was the [Monet] *Waterlilies,* which still looks pretty well.

SZ: I guess what I want to ask you is how you feel about the direction that Bill took the Museum in those, what, just about twenty years that he really had influence there.

WL: I think his involvement with contemporary art has been vastly overstated; certainly

the results were simply historic shows. Of the idea of having to have a curator, so to speak, for the avant garde -- remember, you're dealing with about a hundred years -- is crazy. I must say, none of those curators for the avant garde have lasted very long. I guess this new man, [Robert] Storr, has lasted longer than any other.

SZ: The press has also said that he placed undue emphasis on certain artists.

WL: Yes, Frank Stella.

SZ: You think that's a valid criticism?

WL: And I think he was actively involved in the Frank Stella markup. In fact, his accountant was paid with Frank Stellas, a fact that I did not like learning. I mean, his wild change to the primitive arts culminated in the dispersal of his own collection to get a collection of primitive art. To me, all that's very shaky. As I said, when I returned from my sabbatical, I think I told you, the file on Bill Rubin no longer existed. Don't get me wrong. Bill is brilliant, really brilliant; he also is extremely destructive. And unlike so many of the people in the field, he actually does look at pictures. He evolved; he learned how to install, not perfectly, but certainly better than he did in the beginning. He loved lecturing the staff on modern art. And Hightower was weak enough to let Bill really have the outside world think that he, Bill Rubin, was director of the Museum.

SZ: That was Hightower, but what about when Dick came in?

WL: I don't think Bill changed much. There was one moment when everyone heard screaming in the corridors, Bill yelling that he would not report to anyone who had been trained by Bill Lieberman. I think this was when it was announced that Riva

Castleman would be whatever [Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs]. What's that?

SZ: I was looking at the lists of exhibitions in the '70s, drawings.

WL: Let me look, I'm just curious. The business of the one-man shows from the Museum collection, I started that with Dubuffet [*Jean Dubuffet at the Museum of Modern Art*, MoMA Exh. #868, October 2-October 27, 1968]. He kept saying that he started it with something else. Then the *Art of the Twenties,* it had been decided to be the anniversary-year show; then he tried to push, I guess it was the Picasso show [*Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective*, MoMA Exh. #1290, May 16-September 30, 1980] or the primitive show [*"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art:Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern,* MoMA Exh. #1382, September 19, 1984 January 15, 1985]....

SZ: It was Picasso, because that came in '80.

WL: ...as the fiftieth-anniversary show. I mean, irritating to me, confusing to others. As I told you, he once built a wall in front of Arthur Drexler's galleries, which he at his own expense had to tear down. There's just too many shows [looking at exhibitions list, laughing].

SZ: What was your impulse when the Met approached you, and how did that happen?

WL: As I said, the Met had approached me earlier and Ted Rousseau was here, and Hoving, and I said no. The Met had helped considerably with the *Modern Masters* show, if you check the catalogue. That show was very, very successful. I had always been friendly with the Met. Ted Rousseau was a close friend. I adored his mistress, Mme [inaudible]. Philippe asked me to lunch, to speak about a new...person here to head twentieth-century [art]. We spoke with several people, and I had one concrete

suggestion, which was Jim Demetrion, whom at that time Philippe did not know. Jim had not gone to the Hirshhorn, I believe, then. Anyway, it was a fairly long lunch, and then quite suddenly, at the end of the lunch, and I don't know whether Philippe had thought about this beforehand or during lunch, he said, "What about you?," which, frankly, what does the word nonplussed mean? I'm fairly level, but that really surprised me. We finished lunch and I said I'd be back to him, and it seemed to me inconceivable, much as I was dissatisfied with the direction that the Museum had taken, that I would leave. I did think about it. I spoke about it with my lawyer, Lillian Poses. I said to her jokingly, "Do you think it would be better than having a menopause," and she said to me, looking me straight in the eye, "Tootsie, you already had yours" [LAUGHTER]. I was terribly disturbed at the thought of leaving the Modern. Actually, I'm in fairly good health, luckily, always, I did throw up. I guess that shows how emotionally or physically.... Then, after that, I sat down and I said, "My God, who the hell are you that you think you can keep The Museum of Modern Art level, no matter how anonymously you work," etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, the constant irritations, the deliberate misunderstandings and the false misleadings. So I phoned Philippe back -- didn't see him -- and I said, "Philippe, you know I'm committed to doing The Museum of Modern Art's fiftieth-anniversary show, and it's a commitment I made and their fiftieth anniversary is terribly important, and it's important to me. It's actually *the* show that Alfred Barr wanted The Museum of Modern Art to open with in 1929." Philippe was pretty marvelous about that. He said, "Bill, I'll wait." It was a fairly well-kept secret. It wasn't really until the time the *Art of the Twenties* show was being installed that word got around. Hilariously, the opening night, it was very carefully arranged I not be at the dinner party at the Museum, that I be at the dinner party at the Four Seasons with the International Council. I mean, who's kidding who? [LAUGHING] The first person I told was Dick Oldenburg. It came to him as a surprise. He said, "I can't visualize the Museum without you." I said, "My mind's made up." And then, of course, I immediately told Lily Auchincloss. Lily's

closest friend is Joanne Stern, so I told Joanne Stern, because I knew, although I'd spoken to Lily in confidence, she.... Joanne Stern was then seeing Dick Oldenburg, and Dick Oldenburg was about to tell her that I was leaving. Joanne -- and this must have pissed off Dick; I don't blame him -- said, "I already knew." Eliza was extremely upset. Bates had planned to celebrate my fortieth or thirtieth, whatever it was, year at the Modern, and when he approached me, I pointed out that I had already been there longer [LAUGHTER], so it was pointless. I didn't want any sort of farewell party at the Museum. I have a habit of getting on very well with minor people, but to me people keep the Museum going. Like the matters, like the framers, like the guards, the people who actually hang the pictures, and that meant a lot to me in leaving. Eliza asked whether she could have a few friends, and I'd do anything to Eliza, so I said of course. It was a nice party. I think Dick said something publicly, I certainly didn't, at that party, what was he going to do, he'd lost the only person who got on with people, something like that.

SZ: It's turned out to be a loss for them.

WL: It has been. I'm still the best person they could have at the Met, which they don't realize. One can't help but worry, Sharon.

SZ: But it was the right thing for you to do at that time.

WL: Oh, sure. Quite frankly, they [the Museum] offered me a paid trusteeship. In other words, they were willing to pay me for doing nothing, just so I wouldn't come here. I don't know how many of the trustees know I was offered that, but I certainly was. That rather unnerved me, I mean morally -- not rather unnerved me, it unnerved me very much -- and then that was suddenly switched, that I would be an honorary trustee, which means simply window dressing and nothing more, and there was

anything that drove a nail harder into a decision, it was that offer. I'd completely forgotten that until now.

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WL: The thing I missed most is not training people the way I did at the Modern -- I mean, the thing I miss most here.

SZ: Why is that, the set-up is different?

WL: It's sort of different and there isn't room. I think Dick, fond of him as I am, has gotten slightly paranoid about the Met. Not because of me at the Met, at least I think not because of me at the Met, but just the idea of the Met, which is so silly.

SZ: You've gotten a number of very wonderful gifts.

WL: I have, but I've never touched anything that I knew had been committed to the Modern. That was *the* first thing that I told Philippe after I told him about my commitment. I said I will never bring to the museum anything that I know is promised on paper or orally to me or to Alfred, and that I've been *very* strict about. I think it really is quite wonderful of Philippe. He didn't really know what he was getting. Also, strangely enough, things are much less departmentalized here than they are at the Modern, and, as I told you, communication is so infinitely better.

SZ: One would think that you must get a certain satisfaction in being able to deal with one more than one medium, that it's all seen as a piece....

WL: With me, it's an incredible need to. You have Bernice Rose reaching out to call a

dripping on a rock a drawing. The reports I hear about the new guy in photography are very good, Peter [Galassi].

SZ: So when you say you worry....

WL: It's my life. It certainly is my heart, although I learn I've been here twelve years, which rather unnerved me.

SZ: Thank you, Bill. I think maybe that's it for now.

WL: Sure.

END TAPE 7, SIDE 2

END INTERVIEW