DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH: **PETER JOHNSON (PJ)**

INTERVIEWER: **CARL COLBY (CC)**

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PJ: I think Junior [John D. Rockefeller, Jr.] had liked to intervene in the lives of his family, in both kind of a beneficent and a maleficent way. Sometimes he's very good [INAUDIBLE: 0:00:17] but a huge pain in the neck. But she [Mary Todhunter Clark] was done with school, and they [Nelson Rockefeller and Mary Clark] were going on this big trip down the Nile, and I think they went to Luxor and Memphis and saw everything they could see. It always reminded me of the Agatha Christie [novel], *Death on the Nile*.

CC: Yes, they were with an Egyptologist, and they said he was reading hieroglyphics in the middle of the night. [Laughing]

PJ: So she probably, for that reason—being away for a long time in close quarters with future in-laws—was able to develop probably a much closer relationship with Abby [Aldrich Rockefeller]. You can just imagine.

CC: How was it that she knew [the Rockefellers]? Because of Maine? Because of Seal Harbor? Or—?

PJ: Her family spent time up in Seal Harbor, and that's where they [Mary and Nelson] got to know each other.

CC: Was that an impetuous marriage for her, or—?

PJ: No, I guess it's assumed that it was somewhat impetuous for Nelson, but he also was constrained by his father. I think Nelson might have married her his last year of Dartmouth. And Junior said, no way. So in that sense, he wanted to do something immediately; his father said no, you can't do it immediately, but Nelson stuck to his guns and eventually married her anyway.

CC: What Mary "Tod" was able to give us—she wouldn't let us tape her but she would let us take notes and now, and then she, she was being lewd [INAUDIBLE: 0:01:56]. But she said a couple of interesting things. She said that given the life that Abby had to lead, that it was strict, in that sense, [and] that there wasn't really much she could do that was too outrageous or different or whatever.

PJ: Yes.

CC: So when she found the Museum—art, though it might be avant-garde, it's still cultural and intellectual. So then she just went full steam into that, and that gave her that release or that outlet that she needed in terms of energy and all that.

PJ: That sounds pretty close to it. I'm sure there are always very personal reasons why people do these kinds of things, rather than great historical forces in operation. People get bored and want to do something different, and that is probably as good an explanation as any. The other one is of course that she did have that knowledge of art and the French art scene and the origins of modern art, and I think that's probably [INAUDIBLE: 0:02:55].

CC: Why was she her father's hostess, in a sense? What happened to her mother?

PJ: Her mother was ill for a long time, and I think died at a fairly young age, so Abby was the—if she wasn't the oldest daughter, she was the oldest unmarried daughter, so consequently.

CC: Lucy was younger?

PJ: Lucy is younger, in fact, Lucy was substantially younger. She must have been 10 or 15 years younger. Lucy was quite a character. She traveled a great deal and was—

CC: She was in that Chinese bandit incident.

PJ: Which is just—I read the article, and it's one of the funniest things. In the middle of the night, she's in her nightgown with slippers on, and the Chinese bandits come in and they take her off; and she's being dragged around the countryside in her slippers. [Laughing] So she was quite lively. And I think her liveliness was almost an Aldrich liveliness. I think they were all like that. They kind of liked funny situations and different kinds of things. They weren't afraid of those things.

It's almost the exact opposite of the image you get of Nelson [Wilmarth] Aldrich calculating the sad and figuring out how to keep the populace and labor union activists under control. He was a very, very bright man, and knew how to operate.

CC: A very intuitive sort though, wasn't he?

PJ: Yes.

CC: He didn't read a lot.

PJ: No, he had been a successful businessman, but he came from the same circumstances that many of the big businessmen of that time came from. He wasn't abjectly poor, but he certainly wasn't very well off. He was a farm boy in Rhode Island and he went up to Providence and got involved in—

CC: He created his own—

PJ: Yes. Now, it was very modest, in comparison, but he was a great success by just about any standards.

CC: Yes, Majority Leader of the Senate is pretty essential even in those days.

PJ: And he really is more or less the author of the Federal Reserve system. There was something called the Aldrich Plan, which was not accepted as it was written, but it was modified.

CC: Was Nelson Aldrich in close contact with Junior or with Senior [John Davidson Rockefeller, Sr.] in any way?

PJ: It doesn't seem to be, though, I think, almost inevitably, you have to guess that there were some connections. Though, as we mentioned the other day, Senior's connections were more with European bankers like the Warburgs. Because Standard Oil at that time was primarily an export operation. They sold kerosene in the United States and some lubricating oils, but the great markets were overseas. So, in fact, the oil companies and Standard Oil in particular were one of the few foreign exchange earners in the United States during that period, because we were importing a substantial amount of our manufactured goods from the Germans and the English.

CC: Huh, that's nothing new.

PJ: [Laughing] Yes. And the English in particular had a substantial stake in American industry, owned a substantial portion of it, and J. P. Morgan was literally their agent in the United States. So, I don't think there were connections, though Junior went to Brown, and that's where he met Abby is up there.

CC: And that still had a religious affiliation, didn't it? And it was small?

PJ: It was a small Baptist school.

CC: And that was important for—

PJ: Yes but it's also, they didn't—when they were considering where to send Junior to school, they didn't want to send him to just some small parochial institution where they read the Bible; they wanted him to kind of get out in the world. And three of his friends from prep school were going to Brown, and he went up there because of that. And from all sources, it would seem he had a wonderful college life. He was very popular. People liked him, he liked them. He learned how to tolerate other kinds of behavior. He didn't drink, but he learned that he couldn't really impose that view on everybody else, because if they were going to drink, they were going to drink. And all he did was look like a jerk by [INAUDIBLE: 0:07:25] and scampering and that kind of thing.

CC: Because when you look at the photographs of him, I'm a little startled sometimes, especially to see the whole family. I always thought that he would be tall and thin and gaunt, but he wasn't. He was relatively short and stocky.

PJ: Yes; but five foot six, much different physiognomy than his father. Senior was actually quite a tall man.

CC: And very thin.

PJ: And kind of an ascetic and he was—I remember reading some of Max Weber's works, especially *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and he's got a whole section in there where he talks about the prototypical capitalist. It sounds like he spent some time at least looking at John D. Rockefeller. The accountant mentality and that sort of thing, a counting-house mentality. But at the same time

it would seem that Senior was also quite a humorous man, enjoyed having a good time. He just had very strong principles and values that he didn't violate.

CC: I think what was interesting was when you were describing the typical—around the corner the Vanderbilts were having parties, and they would be having—would they have had, what? Reverends, social scientists? What kind of people would have been there?

PJ: They'd have university presidents spend a great deal of time sitting around the Rockefeller drawing room trying to get a little closer to him. They also had—and Junior talks about this in letters and reminiscences—they had prayer meetings and different kinds of church socials where they would sing hymns and read the Bible, and have somebody get up and talk about being saved, that kind of thing. Or their responsibilities. They would also have—Senior, at a time when American philanthropy had not yet really started to try to solve the problems of domestic society: housing and transportation and inequities of different sorts; he gave substantial amounts of money every year to various missionary groups. So there were an awful lot of missionaries who would come back, and many of these were very famous missionaries. There's still a church [Judson Memorial Church] on Washington Square, and I can't think of the name, but it's right within the NYU complex; it's a very famous Baptist missionary to China. And China, they just loved to think about China; how we're going to save China, make it more Christian, and, you know, save the world. So lots and lots of the missionaries would come back and report to him. Junior.

CC: This is Junior's dinner table.

PJ: This is Junior's dinner table and Senior's. And Junior, in particular, he tried to do something different when it came to missions. He sponsored an incredible review of missions which is called "Rethinking Missions" which said, what we're doing over there is, we're proselytizing too much, and we're not really trying to get at the problems that people face. And it was a very abrupt shift in thinking; it brought about a very big change in the operations of the Rockefeller Foundation.

CC: So in a way, he was a very pragmatic philanthropist.

PJ: Yes.

CC: He wanted to see that his money was really going to do something, rather than just throw it at the wind and [INAUDIBLE: 0:11:00] reason. That's the opposite of Dutch.

PJ: Exactly. He was not giving the money for feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, guilt, blood money, or anything like that. He was giving his money to change things, and he wanted to be sure that they were going to change. He wanted to be very sure that these programs and ideas that came to him had some possibility of success.

CC: That great quote that Junior makes when—I think it was in a letter to Abby, he said that he felt that modern art—he saw it too much as too indicative of self-expression rather than it had a greater good. In other words, that if [Henri] Matisse is making a picture, he's not making it for the ages or, well, we have talked about it, but it wasn't just his own—

PJ: The community is not involved.

CC: Yes, it's not the community, it's not spiritual, necessarily. It could even be simply sensual, and it's only expressive of one person's point of view, rather than it be of great spiritual worth.

PJ: Like Michelangelo or [Leonardo] DaVinci. It's not community art, you know, in a funny kind of way. It's obviously being done to be sold, but sometimes, I think, with modern art, you wonder if the artist really cares about that. This is his way of expressing himself, and his need to communicate his ideas in a simple way, at least, is much less important with the great artists of the past. And really, even with many of the Impressionists, you get their idea, but with modern abstract art, it's very, very difficult to understand.

CC: So Junior might have seen a little bit into the picture, the pretty pictures, the Impressionists and that sort of thing, but when it came to—

PJ: The people who are really starting to get—

CC: —a [Pablo] Picasso with six heads and that sort of—noses out of joint...

PJ: Yes; no, that to him would have been totally inexplicable.

CC: Because it wasn't beauty or good or truthful in any large sense.

PJ: No, it was a mish-mash of things. I think there's one exception to that, and this is the famous—

CC: I wonder whether they debated it, too?

PJ: I think they probably did. I think—they talked to each other constantly.

CC: They would talk to each other.

PJ: Oh yes. They wouldn't just go, oh, I don't like that and I'm not going to talk to you for two weeks. They would discuss these matters among themselves.

CC: Abby and Junior would probably talk it out.

PJ: Yes. And they'd probably reach a point where Junior would say, you're never going to convince me, but I'm not going to prevent you from doing that if that's what you like to do. And you can have a floor in the house to put the stuff in, and you can get involved in The Museum of Modern Art.

CC: I think he probably enjoyed that she had a business and was opinionated, and it's almost sad, in a way, because I saw that Mary "Tod" Rockefeller also seemed to have that healthy skepticism about things. She would quiz me and then she'd let go a little bit, and it seemed to be, she had that—she had that back and forth that you want. Some relationships don't have that, but she, Abby, I guess, or the two of them probably did talk these things out a lot.

PJ: And I think that that might not have been quite as apparent to their children as really it was. Because one of the things that they would talk about was how they were going to raise their children, and the roles that each of them would play. So in other words, if Junior said, 'Look, you're going to go to Dartmouth; you're going to go to Princeton; there's not being any arguments about this;' Abby would not say, 'Oh John, let's think about this,' and maybe go back at it a different way. So they were a partnership who cooperated and understood what each one's role was, and didn't intrude on that. And I think that they enabled each other to have privacy, which is a very important thing. And I think that was Junior—after you left the other day, I was thinking about the fact that the circumstances and the chronology of when the Museum was founded and when it was discovered that Abby did have some problems with health. I think that the two are probably

connected. This might have been Junior's way too of encouraging her to relax and get involved in something else. I don't know, but...

CC: Mary "Tod" said that, in a sense. She said that as she really was ill and she was supposed to relax, and this would be something that pleased her, and it certainly wasn't something that was hyper active.

PJ: Right.

CC: It's not sporting; it's looking at pictures and admiring things and—

PJ: Yes, but also being a little bit busy in something. I don't know if her involvement at the Museum ever became very overwhelming in an administrative sense, where she had to worry about the future, and that sort of thing.

CC: They kept her close in terms of policy and all. They would write her elaborate letters; Stephen Clark and [A. Conger] Goodyear and [Alfred] Barr would write her often letters about, this is what we plan to do; what do you think about this; what do you think about that. But she kept them a little on edge, too. She never said, don't worry about the next 10 years, I'll take care of everything.

PJ: Well, see, that's an old Rockefeller principle which has become part of, I think, general American philanthropy. The Rockefellers never—never say never, but rarely would back one thing totally by themselves, because it could just swallow up impressive amounts of money. They learned that lesson with the University of Chicago. Because when William Rainey Harper got out there, he was a very creative man and he said, 'I'm going to create a great university in three years.' And this was—when you look at the gifts that the Rockefellers made to the University of Chicago, this guy was totally out of control out there. And he would just call them up and say, 'I need another $500,000. It's as simple as that. You want me to do this, don't you?' So they learned a lesson there, and they finally were able to move William Rainey Harper aside; they were talking about the need to consolidate, and that kind of thing.

CC: About what year was this?

PJ: This was early 1900s. They had started it in the early 1890s.

CC: So everybody knew in New York then, in the early thirties, particularly by then, that you couldn't push them too far.

PJ: You could interest them in things, and they would go into something in conjunction with other people, but you could not depend upon them for everything, because first of all, they felt if something was a good idea, then you could get other people to do it.

CC: Right.

PJ: And that they had a responsibility across the board to many things, and they couldn't just put all of their philanthropic investments into one thing, because it would prevent them from doing others.

CC: What about the potential profit motive in terms of the collections? Do you think—? And that was very early on, so I can't really—I wouldn't want to pin it on them, and this is something I'm sure, cynics would say now, oh well, they just protected their collection and they knew modern art would be valuable. And it became incredibly valuable. And the later letters in the thirties and the forties, too, as I had spoken to you before—Barr would write a letter saying, 'As those two [Giorgio] de Chiricos are now going to be double in value by next year,' and then he even wrote one letter at one time where he said one piece of art had gone up 2,000 percent in value. And of course—

PJ: That'd turn me into an art collector.

CC: Now of course, that letter wasn't directed to Junior, it was directed to Abby and really to Clark, Goodyear, and to Mrs. Rockefeller just as a general statement to say: Listen; our things are increasing in value. But do you think that was a cushion, or do you think that the amounts were too small to concern themselves with that? I would really say no at the beginning.

PJ: I'd say no at the beginning, but I think that it inevitably played a part later on in their thinking, that this was something that could at least serve as a sort of forward endowment for the Museum, where they could provide themselves with some money in the future by selling off a piece that had become very, very valuable if they had other representatives of that particular artist, and therefore, protect themselves. But as far as personal—I just don't see that, though it

becomes complicated by, as we were talking about the other day, tax law. Because these kinds of things—when you give a piece of art that you purchased at $200, let's say, and then it goes up in value to $100,000 you're giving that gift at $100,000 and taking a tax deduction based on that. In the thirties, that simply was not a question.

CC: Well, they weren't buying pictures at that value, either.

PJ: No.

CC: I think very early on, it couldn't have been, even in the least bit of interest, because her pictures were a few 100, 25, 500, a thousand [dollars]. Where it begins to make a difference, I think, is with Nelson and certainly David [Rockefeller]. I think by that time we're talking about major—

PJ: Yes, it's become big business, really.

CC: The paintings were already $50,000, $20,000, $100,000. He bought *The Dream*, for instance, that [Henri] Rousseau where the person is lying down and the lion is walking by.

PJ: That's my favorite picture.

CC: Nelson bought that for $750,000. That was a hell of a lot of money.

PJ: It is. Well, Nelson also bought the very famous Picasso, Three Mademoiselles.

CC: *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*?[1]

PJ: I'm sure that that was a fairly—when he bought it, it was probably not, relatively speaking—

CC: No, it was a paint picture I guess worth about a hundred dollars that would be valuable. Now it's the last word.

PJ: It's valued at five and a half million dollars. And that was four years ago.

[1] In November 1937 the Jacques Seligman & Co. art gallery in New York City held an exhibition titled *20 Years in the Evolution of Picasso, 1903–1923* that included *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. The Museum of Modern Art acquired the painting for $24,000, and the work officially entered the collection in 1939. The Museum raised $18,000 toward the purchase price by selling an equestrian Degas painting from the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest and the rest came from donations from the co-owners of the gallery, Germain Seligman and Cesar de Hauke.

CC: Well, now they say it's priceless. It'd be like the *Mona Lisa* of modern art, so you can't say what it would be worth.

PJ: I think you're right. I think as time went on, as you got to the fifties, and the art boom started, then you started to think about these things. Sherman Lee from the Cleveland Museum told me in reference to JDR III, that he became very, very concerned at the escalation in price. And he was very active in the art market in the fifties and early sixties, but when it all of a sudden started to become what he considered outrageous, he withdrew, and he would only buy really spectacular pieces that were a once in a lifetime situation. And I'm not sure if Nelson might not have done the same kind of thing.

CC: Yes, Nelson bailed out after a while. I think he was tired of the wheeling and dealing and the trading. He just got tired of the whole thing, and then he went to only see—he used pictures for relaxation, it was almost like a balm; a wave that would wash over him to relax him after a tough day.

PJ: Yes, I think that's very true, and I obviously—

CC: Mary "Tod" said that he'd come home, and he'd be totally exhausted and he'd look at pictures and catalogues. She also said—she was good about the mother—because when you read of course, the Mary Ellen Chase book [*Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*], and she said that book is just a postcard; it's nothing; no bite. And she said, the woman had bite, and she would scare them sometimes. She would dress them down and no namby-pamby about her, [and] that she didn't hesitate about herself. She really had a lot of bite. And I think that fills it out, and I think that's what was nice about her, because she made her seem more alive than just the great noblesse oblige grand dame.

PJ: Yes. That confirms just about everything I have ever seen or heard about Abby, that she was not a pushover. She knew what she stood for, and was very concerned that her children had values, principles, backbone, worked hard, but also that they understood that she loved them very much. So she was capable of approaching them in very honest and caring ways. And she understood what each of them were like, and could react to them differently, not as just kind of this bunch of children.

CC: The family. It wasn't so formal as that.

PJ: And I think what she did is, she ended up—it's said that Nelson was her favorite. I'm not so sure that's true. I think that she liked the ones that appeared to be a little shyer and afraid of the world. I've been told by a few people that Winthrop [Rockefeller] was actually her favorite because Winthrop had more problems than everybody else, and I think a mother would tend to maybe—should I go down and give him a big hug, everything would be alright. [Laughing]

CC: Also, I guess, in those days, the idea of the museum and those things, that was not a chic or fashionable thing to be doing really. It wasn't conventional, but in the beginning years anyway, it wasn't that avant-garde-ist. They weren't having all sorts of people over every night for dinner; it wasn't a salon or anything.

PJ: No, no.

CC: She wasn't having those literary obsessions, and poets weren't dropping by and that sort of thing.

PJ: Though Diego Rivera came to dinner, and that must have been wild. I wish I could have been there. There are some dinner parties in history that I would have liked to have been at, and the one with Diego Rivera and Junior is one of them. [Laughter]

CC: He must have tolerated a lot.

PJ: You've seen pictures of Diego, I mean, he's a huge, fat Mexican, smoking cigars in a Panama hat. [Laughter]

CC: Marxist. [Laughter]

PJ: Well, [Leon] Trotsky lived with him for a while in Mexico City, and of course that's later in the thirties, but Rivera was very naïve and unsophisticated when they came to many of these things. Junior however did like the Mexican painters. He liked—

CC: Mural; is this the great exception you were talking about?

PJ: Yes. Because he could understand that. The one of the *Zapatistas* by—I don't think that's by Rivera. It's by the—I forget who.[2]

CC: In other words, the realism ones.

PJ: Yes. He could understand that.

CC: The ones [of] people building a bridge or whatever. Rockefeller Center has all that.

PJ: That's modern art, in a funny kind of—it's contemporary art; it was contemporary for that period of time, and he could understand those kinds of things.

CC: Was he involved in the design and all of Rockefeller Center?

PJ: Of the Center? Very much so. He was consulted. He had great interest in those kinds of things, just as he did at Colonial Williamsburg. He wanted to see how this was done, why it was being done, the motivations of the architects, and so on.

CC: So he worked with Wallace Harrison and—?

PJ: Yes, and the whole bunch. You know, there's a—down on the promenade level, downstairs, they've got an exhibit about the development of Rockefeller Center. You might just want to go down there and take a look.

CC: Yes. Well it was funny; we were walking out the other day from the archive, and we started looking at all of the murals, and really, it's quite substantial, when you look at them.

PJ: Yes, it's very interesting. And the various bits of art over the doorways and so on are very interesting. I'm not sure if you could say that this, Rockefeller Center, bore Junior's imprint or anything like that, because he obviously had some very, very good architects, but if he didn't like something, then it didn't get in. That one plan had a very strange opera building when the opera was still involved, in the middle of it, and it looked like some kind of a gasoline can, and it was really panned by the critics when they announced this thing. And he didn't like it anyway, so he did have an influence in the design of the—

[2] José Clemente Orozco.

CC: They did put the skating rink in though, right?

PJ: Yes, but that was not there initially, so this was—they all of a sudden realized, we've got this dead space here.

CC: What do we do?

PJ: It was just supposed to be an entryway into the building more than anything, so this happened subsequently.

CC: Well, they had a skating rink next to their old house, didn't they?

PJ: Yes, supposedly Senior would go out there and ice skate in the morning before he went downtown to 26 Broadway. I don't know if that's true.

CC: That's a great idea, though.

PJ: But he was that kind of a guy. And he wore—the business attire in those days was the top hat and tails. And supposedly, people said they would walk by and he'd be out there in top hat and tails skating in the morning before he went off to work. [Laughter]

CC: You can see on the side of the—in the photographs, the sides are just as you would if you were to go out for skating because it dips to the side.

PJ: Well, he loved to exercise. Senior was a great exerciser; horseback riding and the whole bit. So he was a fascinating man, but he never let anybody really glimpse what he was thinking about or what he was doing. He's still a great enigma, historically.

CC: The Senior.

PJ: Yes. Junior was much more straightforward, and: Here, this is what I believe and what I stand for. Senior was quiet. He'd sit at a meeting and listen to everybody else, and maybe not even say anything, and then go back and make a decision. So he just operated in a totally different way, total self-assurance and self-confidence and an idea of what he wanted to do.

CC: What was fun too, is to see how—I'm sure Abby influenced other people, her friends and contemporaries, about what they thought of things. Mary "Tod" said that one time she was looking at a Matisse picture of a nude, and all of her

friends said, 'God, look at that nude! It's horrible. It's so sensual, and it doesn't have any value. Look at it; it's awful.' And then she said, 'Well, this belongs to Abby Rockefeller. She gave it to me as a gift.' And they go, 'Are you kidding? Her? Well, I knew she was,' whatever, and then of course, you could see the whole value structure starting to shift gradually,

PJ: Yes, gradually to... [laughing]

CC: Maybe 'the picture's okay,' and 'I knew *she* was alright.' And I think a lot of people probably were that way, the second team anyway, the B team, after coming in and looking at what was there.

PJ: Yes, I think those are the kinds of things that do happen.

CC: Because when you describe the makeup of New York society, and the fact that they certainly weren't ostracized and they were part of it. They weren't running around naked, but they were part of the art and cultured group, and certainly the religion played a big part of it in those days. That if she said something was interesting, then other people would jump to see if it's interesting.

PJ: Yes. That's what he got. That's what leadership in society often does, it legitimizes something that might have taken a much longer time to be legitimizing.

CC: I looked over what you said, and I was telling somebody the other day, and I said, well, if you have that much money you have immediate entry into society. But that's not necessarily true, because in a way, it's almost as if, maybe it's difficult to say—but it was a bit easier then than now? I don't know how to say that. I mean, now it seems very stratified, and I'm sure it was then, too, but nowadays there's ethnic problem—I guess they had the same ethnic background that everyone else did. So, I think it's hard to say whether it was easier.

PJ: It's a question of also whether you wanted to enter society. And the view that the Rockefellers had was that society was a fairly superficial thing, "society" in quotes, that didn't really accomplish very much.

CC: The chit chats or the lecture series.

PJ: Well, not that so much as the—

CC: And the parties.

PJ: Yes. I think Gore Vidal's *1876* really captures New York society at that period of time, where it was these huge gustatory bouts, with people eating huge amounts of food, and really not accomplishing very much. So the Rockefellers were not interested in that. They were workers, first of all, worked hard, and went to church. So having huge parties and consuming half of the oyster product of Long Island in one night was not what they were going to do.

CC: And they didn't have a big North Shore house where there were big fun and games and tennis and all that. They lived a very urban life.

PJ: They lived a very urban life. It wasn't until the early 1890s that they were able to get anything out of town or even be interested in it, because he was much more interested in having something close to work and close to his church, because these were the minimum.

CC: And no ballroom or anything either.

PJ: No ballroom. I don't think so.

CC: It must have made a big difference.

PJ: It was only four stories, and they had to have room to sleep in and to eat and stuff like that.

CC: And Junior's too [INAUDIBLE: 0:32:39], no ballroom or nothing?

PJ: I don't think so. You know there might have been a ballroom in number 10; number four, I don't think.

CC: But not like the Dodges.

PJ: No.

CC: Nothing like that.

PJ: Which was designed to have the ballroom.

CC: So they did not design their house for massive parties?

PJ: No.

CC: For small gatherings, but not—

PJ: Yes. In fact, they bought number four from the second wife of Collis P. Huntington, one of the financiers of the Union Pacific Railroad, and literally just moved in it and didn't change anything. Now of course, this area of New York in the 1880s was suburban rather than urban.

CC: It's interesting to think; business really was downtown.

PJ: Croton Aqueduct was right where the New York Public Library is, and north of 42nd Street you kind of tended to almost get out into the country. So it was much different. It was an area that changed dramatically.

CC: This is the 1890s?

PJ: This is the 1880s and into the 1890s, but then very rapidly everything urbanized. There were shanty towns up around Central Park. In fact, there were people living in Central Park, even in those days.

CC: Did they have a great security then, do you think? Guards and things?

PJ: No. Nothing like that. It wasn't until after the turn of the century; it was really not until about 1910 that you begin to have a problem with class warfare and that sort of thing. And it was one of the reasons why Senior started to spend less time in New York, that, plus the fact that he had become older, and was really not in business anymore.

CC: Someone like Abby was, though, very politically conservative, wasn't she? Economic, she was very much a Republican, a staunch—

PJ: She was an Aldrich Republican. And if you're an Aldrich Republican, what you are is conservative economically and socially, though probably a much greater awareness of the necessity for state intervention than most people give them credit for, because the Federal Reserve system is, if nothing else, federal intervention in the economy. And he saw the need for those sorts of things.

CC: And the Rockefellers, how different were they from, let's say, Junior? Or was she maybe more politically active than he was?

PJ: She was certainly more politically aware.

CC: Savvy.

PJ: Yes. There had been great accusations about the Rockefellers buying politicians, and so on, which had the tendency—I don't know if any of those are true, because the files tend to be very silent on those questions, but, they simply don't exist. It was a hell of a lot cheaper to get elected to the Senate or the House in those days than it's become now. [Laughter] I think Abby was simply more aware of what was happening politically, more practical and pragmatic. Junior was very much an idealist. He believed very much in a society that was cooperative and that would work together. So he sponsored many good government operations where the attempt was to get citizens involved in the management of their own affairs, and that kind of thing, overcoming politics. You have to remember that New York was always, really from about the 1850s on, if not earlier—there's a constant process of machine rule; throw the machine out, then you'd have two or three years of good government, and then the machine would work its way back in. This was a constant process. Junior was very much involved in that kind of thing. He gave lots of money to the Citizen's Union in New York, to the fusion party candidates where you'd come up with some wonderful man who wanted to be mayor, and everybody would rally to his side, and he'd be elected, and nothing would happen, because that's not how government works. You almost needed corruption. [Laughing]

CC: Especially in those days.

PJ: Yes. But he, for instance, was a great supporter of [Fiorello] LaGuardia, and LaGuardia was one of these fusion party candidates, in the same sense that Tom Dewey was. There was another fellow.

CC: I guess LaGuardia would have been quite close to that. Would LaGuardia have known Junior and Abby?

PJ: David Rockefeller worked for LaGuardia briefly, six months as a personal secretary. It was some kind of an internship program that he was involved with. But there are pictures of LaGuardia and Junior. He was mayor of New York during a portion of the time that Rockefeller Center was being built. And Junior admired him. He was a maverick politician. He was an Italian Republican.

CC: So they had great plans for their children, too, then; right? And they thought in big terms, but they didn't want them to dominate, perhaps, but they wanted them to certainly serve a major role.

PJ: They had—my old boss, JDR III, used to say that there is a responsibility and an obligation to serve. And he was using that in almost a Madisonian or a Jeffersonian way: that we're American citizens. Our distinction from the rest of the world is that we govern ourselves, and you give up part of your life to serve your community. It was that kind of an ethic that they had.

CC: So they weren't just raised to give away money intelligently.

PJ: No.

CC: They were also raised to serve, and so when Nelson went into politics, and David went into the bank—

PJ: That is certainly a part of the story. I think what happens is that that ethic is eroded over the years as other things change. And in order to become governor of New York, you're just not a nice guy. You have to be tough, too. And consequently, Nelson became a politician. I think his older brother John never understood politics and what it really took to get elected, or what the hurly-burly of elected politics were all about. But he tried to contribute in other ways, through service, which is the way Junior tried to contribute.

CC: So John III really was the heir to Junior.

PJ: Very much so. I think so.

CC: It sounds that way. Asia Society to everything else.

PJ: This constant exhortation to people to serve and do good and so on and so forth. Though Junior, I think, would have been, in fact was—the story is that when Nelson got elected Governor of New York, he just danced a jig. He was ecstatic that this had happened.

CC: Did they speak a number of languages, for instance? Did someone like Abby or Junior speak French or Italian?

PJ: Junior took French, but I don't think he was particularly fluent in it. He had studied French in college, and also in preparatory school, so I think he probably could get by.

CC: Abby? Did she speak [French]? She was over there.

PJ: Yes, I think she spoke French to a certain degree. They certainly didn't have the—

CC: Facility.

PJ: Yes, and they simply weren't operating in the language all the time. But if—now Nelson was pretty good in Spanish. I think he was almost fluent in Spanish. And John was, I know, fluent in French. He spoke it very easily.

CC: The health thing I think would be an important thing to track, because if it is true that her [Abby's] health began to fail—well, Mary "Tod" said that it was after 1916 or so—well, it was not just '16, but she could sort of see it go.

PJ: It was gradual.

CC: She wouldn't have been around then, but she knows that she was heavy, and she was beginning to have breathing problems, and that sort of thing. And I guess she kept to New York—then she would travel with him, and then they'd be away, but, well, she was getting older, too. She was 54 in 1929, so as the thirties go on, you're a little bit less active than you might have been.

PJ: And she'd had a number of children very closely spaced, which I guess was not uncommon for women to do in those days, maybe even now. But in 1916, I notice for the first time, she spent an extended period of time away from New York. She went down to the Homestead in Virginia, and they were down there for a couple of months. This was after the birth of David.

CC: We have a couple of long letters about that. Some big businesses going on, troubles with Alfred Barr, and she would write long letters, but thank god she went on the trips or we wouldn't have had any records.

PJ: Yes, exactly. It's been very helpful. I have whole boxfuls of letters from her to her older son that have been produced by those kinds of things. But there are these kind of domestic vacations, where they [would] go to the Homestead or

down to Yeoman's Hall in South Carolina, and then eventually, out to Arizona. Also they spend some time in Florida, Ormond Beach, with Senior, because Senior is still around until 1937.

CC: Do you think they found, the two of them, Abby and Junior, they felt that they were doing what they could? With that burden, with that money, every year, the 400 whatever—I mean, that's a staggering amount of money. Do you think they felt that they were—? Is that what pushed them? Is that what made Junior almost like a workaholic, and really having to serve? Because you're earning without doing.

PJ: He had been that way all of his life. This was a very early—these characteristics emerged at a very early date. He was a very intense, concerned kid; at the age of 10 he was busy doing things.

CC: They must have been terrified of getting spoiled, or of spoiling their kids.

PJ: There seems to be a very strong part of that in there. It's a Protestant ethic that was very, very strong, a missionary view of the world, a burden, a feeling of guilt, the need to be saved; all of these things.

CC: Especially in the twenties, when other people were going whole hog and Jay Gatsby had 600 shirts.

PJ: Exactly. The difference between Junior and a Jay Gatsby is just dramatic. Junior was also during the twenties working very, very hard at industrial relations, trying to talk businessmen into changing the way they work. And he had some rather impressive people that were helping him do that kind of thing. Frank Vanderlip, who had been the head of what is now Citibank, was also a great believer in that sort of—

CC: Could you almost say that there were people—? I mean, not with the same wealth, but look close to it, or even half, or who cares? I mean, half of $200 million is enough per year. But were there other, many, many families that you could see that this is only second-generation wealth now.

PJ: Yes.

CC: This is the Junior, and he is 40 or whatever, in the twenties.

PJ: No, he's born in '76, so he's in his fifties.

CC: Late teens and early twenties—that they could have just dissipated a lot? They could have just spent and traveled and that would have been it?

PJ: They could have.

CC: There must be countless families from Buffalo and Rochester, Cincinnati, that did that.

PJ: [Yes], that did those kinds of things.

CC: Who just let it go.

PJ: Yes. They just never did. They were very, very careful. Of course, another element in Junior's life—

CC: Is the fact that Senior is alive in that time?

PJ: Senior is alive, and Senior is very straight.

CC: So that's important.

PJ: That's very important; Dad's still around. The other thing is that the actual transfer of wealth to Junior, giving him substantial sums of money that are his own, does not occur—it starts in about 1919 and carries through to 1923.

CC: So he's already 47 years old.

PJ: Yes, before he all of a sudden has enormous sums of money. And before that, he obviously had a lot of money, but he—

CC: So Senior was aware of these things.

PJ: Senior was aware, obviously.

CC: Senior was very careful of what was being done with the money.

PJ: Senior had created the great foundations before he transferred his wealth to his children. What is now Rockefeller University was set up in 1901.

CC: So he had a sense of philanthropy himself.

PJ: He was worried that: if I give, nobody has ever experienced this kind of money before. I have to be very careful. I can ruin people as well as ensure their prosperity and happiness for the rest of their lives. So consequently, he was very careful about what happened. Jack, how are you doing? Meet Carl Colby.

CC: Hi.

END OF INTERVIEW at 0:45:53