DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH: **BLANCHETTE ROCKEFELLER (BR)**

INTERVIEWERS: **CARL COLBY (CC); RUTH CUMMINGS (RC)**

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BR: Greatly aided by her wisdom and judgment.

CC: I think so. In the readings that I've done, it seems to be that he was very, very devoted to her and with very good reason. She just was an exemplary woman.

BR: Yes, but she never was domineering.

CC: We wanted to see—as far as trustees are concerned, we're seeing David Rockefeller and David Rockefeller, Jr. also. We wanted to perhaps hear the view of the early—and John Parkinson.

BR: John is very active in the Museum.

CC: In the Photography Department?

BR: Well, he's on that, that's one of his interests, but he's also chairman of our Finance Committee. He's beginning to take more and more responsibility. And he works with Citibank; he's got a good business background. And I'm sure we need that because we need—you know, most museums are very sloppy with their business affairs.

RC: [INAUDIBLE: 00:01:04] we were quite surprised but understood that the financial body of personnel at the Museum now outnumber by far even the curatorial staff.

BR: Well of course we have a very complicated project, but we're much more businesslike now than we were.

CC: It would probably be good to hear from someone like that though.

BR: He's a very nice person, you know.

RC: Mrs. [Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson] Cobb was very happy that he is involved in that way and very connected.

CC: Third generation.

RC: It'll be nice to see the connections between—

CC: Gifford Phillips.

BR: And he's very good, very much interested in art and knows a great deal about contemporary art.

RC: John Parkinson?

BR: No, Gifford Phillips. He's a cousin of the Phillips Gallery.

CC: Right, Duncan. Also Joanne Stern.

BR: She's head of our International Council and she is a superb lady. She's just wonderful. You've heard about the International Council?

RC: Yes from Waldo Rasmussen.

BR: That's one of the most extraordinary things that ever happened.

RC: It is. There's almost like a waiting list to get on it?

CC: He said there's a waiting list of, what? A year or so, to get on it?

BR: And you know, we all go on these trips; we've got to know each other. And you know there are 23 countries and I don't know how many states of the Union belong to this thing. And we've all gotten buddies, you know, and the husbands come along or the wives.

CC: Sure.

BR: And we go in busloads of 140 people sometimes.

RC: I wonder what those meetings are like. [Laughter]

CC: It sounds wonderful, though. You must meet the most extraordinary people.

BR: Well, the thing that is interesting about that is that we are so welcome in these different countries because we're all interested in art. And when we go to their art institutions, we're a special kind of group because we all get together and—.

CC: Absolutely.

BR: I didn't mean to—

CC: Oh, no.

BR: That's a very important part of the Museum, to me.

CC: We wanted to emphasize that also in the film, and probably we'd like to do so by having a short interview with, well, a European or Japanese, or someone who—let's say, Mr. [Dominuque] Bozo who directs the Beaubourg.

BR: Enthusiastic members, or some of the—

CC: Or one of the International Council [members], maybe, just somebody who would be able to—

BR: Bozo is already sold on us because he did the [Pablo] Picasso show [*Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective*] with Bill Rubin.

CC: I hear he's very—

BR: Oh, he's a lovely man.

CC: A terrific personality.

BR: I think he's probably prejudiced toward us. [Laughter]

RC: We were thinking of also speaking with Pontus Hultén.

BR: Yes. He's also very friendly.

RC: [Laughing] We haven't found too many enemies. We haven't found too many people who aren't friends.

CC: And then we're seeing, well, a number of people: Paul Gottlieb, Walter Thayer, Thomas Carroll. They were recommended to us to speak to.

BR: Yes, they're different areas of [INAUDIBLE: 0:04:10].

CC: And Elizabeth Straus.

BR: Yes, Beth Straus.

RC: We're seeing her this afternoon.

BR: Oh that's nice, because she's [INAUDIBLE: 0:04:17].

RC: She's out of town; right.

CC: And then others.

BR: Beth Straus was on the Junior Council, one of the first members I got.

RC: Oh, good.

BR: Well, that was my first job, was to form this Junior Council. And someone told me that she'd be good. It was Lincoln Kirstein who told me that she'd be good on there. She's a California lady but she was living in New York.

CC: What is she doing now, primarily?

BR: She's been a trustee for years, and she's been very active. She's the chairman of our Membership Committee and very competent, very intelligent woman.

RC: Great.

CC: Great. And some of the ones we've seen; well, we're also going to be seeing William Paley, I think. And we saw Donald—

BR: He adores the Museum. You'll really enjoy him. I hardly know him, but he really had been a wonderful chairman for us.

CC: And we spoke to Donald Marron.

BR: He's quite new. He's just been on about three years already, and he's *very*, very good on finances; he's really brilliant.

CC: He seems quite devoted. It's good to get these financial people on.

BR: Well, we need it; we need it.

RC: Sure, and he was all excited. He gave us some very good information about the Tower and how it came to be.

CC: He gave us a very quick [summary], and I think it could be very usable because, to be able to describe how the Tower came to be and the necessity of it and really the arrangements that made it what it is is very complicated. And within 45 seconds or whatever, he can—it was very, very good. We spent about an hour and a half talking to Richard Koch about it, and then we spent 45 seconds talking to Donald Marron about it. [Laughing]

RC: And he said, "Here, I'll give you a thumbnail sketch," and he explained it.

CC: He was very, very quick. He also feels a growing responsibility, I think, for contributing in an enduring way to the Museum.

BR: Yes.

CC: I pointedly asked him, does he feel now some of the responsibilities that the original trustees would have felt, the Goodyear or the Rockefellers, others who began things, do you feel a long-term commitment or is this something temporary? And he said no, he feels now that he knows that it's not all his collection; that when he buys now he's buying with an eye towards the Museum and that he wants to consult with them. He wants to keep his independence to some extent, but he also has a growing feeling of responsibility for what his position is as a trustee; that it's not simply a plum or it's not simply someone with a title.

BR: He hasn't had a chance [yet], he's been so very busy, both with what we assigned him now as the head of the Committee on this development, and that was really when he was quite a new trustee. And then at the same time he was doing his own downtown stuff. He's put together a whole bunch of companies, it's really—

CC: His collection, too. He's buying fresh off the canvases. It's incredible.

BR: He's good. But he hasn't done this sort of thing before, so best to remember [INAUDIBLE: 0:07:40] trustees responsibility [INAUDIBLE: 0:07:44]. But, he's great; he's very fine.

RC: We're also seeing Ivan Chermayeff this afternoon. I was just thinking of other trustees.

CC: We spoke to a number of dealers, too; very fun. It's so funny to see people like Sidney Janis, Leo Castelli, and particularly Pierre Matisse. They could appear to be very impervious at times, but as soon as you talk about the Museum, it's as if you were talking about their old hometown or whatever; they wax—

RC: They totally break down because we've seen done art films before and seen them interviewed, and this was a totally different side of all of these people, which was lovely.

CC: Some people, you'd think it's a chore, but to them, they just—especially Sidney Janis was so hilarious.

BR: Well he's been most—you know what he's done? He's just given his whole collection to the Museum. It's incredible.

CC: He was talking about a painting, and then he reached into his trash can and pulled out one of those *Time*/*Life* books or flyers about art books or whatever, and it has all of the masterpieces on it, and he opened it up and he goes, "Oh, that painting, 'The Dance' [*Dance (I)*] by [Henri] Matisse, here it is," [laughter] "This one," Alfred [Barr] did this and that with this picture. And then he goes, "Oh, and this [Vincent] van Gogh," and it was just so funny because these are common objects now, the cultural icons. Some of the pictures in the collection are just so world famous now.

BR: I have to say, I'm afraid I'm taking your time; I have to say that the Museum has had the most wonderful staff all through its history. And one of Alfred's major breakthroughs was to prove that modern art was just as important as ancient art, and that it had to be judged in a professional way, and not just sort of amateurs picking out things. It's been very, very strict, and I think that Dick Oldenberg has continued this policy, and I think our staff are just absolutely [INAUDIBLE: 0:09:44]. Now probably I'm prejudiced, but I think that, you know, the number of people that want to work at the modern museum, they usually come here first. The National is of course huge, and they have many more, and I'm not downgrading anybody else, but I think this was a first for contemporary art, that believed that that ought to be handled in a really professional way, not only by clear records but by the choice of what is taken into the collection.

RC: The critical analysis and the catalogues [INAUDIBLE: 0:10:21].

CC: And some of the people, too, are just extraordinary. [For example,] your resident Will Rogers character, John Szarkowski. [Laughing]

BR: He's a great man.

CC: A fantastic person, really. And what he's done for photography, and I don't think it would be too much to say that the Museum has had a great hand in the creation of modern appreciation for photography, especially in the last 10 years. You can see it surface. He's a wonderful scholar. He jumped out of his chair and compared one [Eugéne] Atget to another and said, can you see how this is the negative image of this. Someone who still has all that almost collegiate fervor for his profession, it's really touching.

BR: One thing I want you to be very clear about is, and that is not to exaggerate my role in the Museum. I don't know, there seems to be some feeling that I had done something that nobody else has done, and the reason is that I got into all of this *after* my children were grown up. And my husband was very occupied, and then he died four years ago. Now I've been able to give an amount of time that other trustees haven't been able to do, and I keep getting upset because people keep saying [laughing] nothing would have happened if I hadn't been there. Well that's just absolutely not true. The only thing that I've been able to do is to be consistent and to go to most of the meetings and I know what's going on. But I mean, what other people have done and the time they've spent on getting us through this project—so please, just put that in your minds.

RC: The type of things that we were talking about today that you mentioned in terms of Mrs. [Abby Aldrich] Rockefeller and your connection and—

BR: Yes.

RC: And just items. You'll be presenting yourself, so, we wouldn't take anything out of context.

CC: But, for instance, in terms of the impact, there's no overriding narration in the film. There might be factual—the narration that we would use in the film would be very sporadic and only informational, really. It might be told in sort of a light way that this happened and this happened.

BR: Yes.

CC: Just so the people themselves don't have to recite all of the facts. But it's mostly going to be opinion and feelings, reminiscence, ideology.

BR: It won't be to do with the actual managing of the Museum.

CC: No, it won't be.

RC: We'll get that from the people who were there—

BR: Yes, yes.

RC: And their recollections of their thoughts and feelings. So it's a very intimate portrayal, not, this is the definitive film that will tell you everything.

CC: And backstabbing, backbiting, we don't really have any room for that; it's very silly.

BR: It's too small.

CC: And if there are conflicts, let them be ideological, let them be that someone felt that it's gone too far.

RC: That direction.

CC: Or that it hasn't gone far enough. That's fine; that's healthy. But no one's interested in personality conflicts, clashes.

BR: Well we had a very turbulent period about 10 years ago when we had two different directors for less than a year each, and they were just bad choices really. One wasn't but he became ill, and the other one was just not the right person. So that left the Museum in real chaos. After that, Dick Oldenburg was chosen director, who had been on the staff in Publications, and I was made president. And we have worked together for these 10 years, and it's just happened to be a very happy—he could be my son. And we've just had a very good relationship, uncomplicated, and he has developed *enormously*; he's really an excellent director.

CC: He's very complimented all around.

BR: Yes, he's very much liked; he has a sense of humor, and he's very conscientious.

RC: [INAUDIBLE: 0:14:33].

BR: Yes. And so you know, we've just had a lucky, lucky time.

RC: Well of course because even now you're undertaking this big evolutionary step, so obviously, the ship is running smoothly.

BR: Well, we just have to get it launched. [RC laughs]

CC: Just to reiterate, what we're panning to do is to have at least the first half hour or more of the film be those early days of the first 10 years. That is very key and that will be—really, it's the legend of the Modern.

BR: And that's what today's people don't know about.

CC: Right, and that's what we want; that's the great story.

RC: Absolutely; it's for staff, people who don't know Alfred Barr is, which is unfortunate.

CC: That'll occupy—be quite nostalgic and very interesting, I think. It tells a great not only cultural but social intellectual history of New York and of the times. It really is very descriptive.

BR: I just think it's going to be a most *wonderful* thing for the Museum and for the public. I think it's a marvelous thing that you're doing.

CC: I think it'd be nice if they'd come in and feel that this is a place that, well, [that] you then know a bit about it. You know who built it, and why it was built, and who this Barr was whose name is in the gift shop under his catalogue, and who created—whoever had the idea to have a Film department in the Museum. I think these are questions people ask themselves when they go to the Museum, but they just take it for granted that oh, someone did it. But there's a great dramatic story there. And then we spend the last 15 or 20 minutes of the film really right to the present. We're not going to tell the story of the fire or the story of the strike or the story of that; it's very boring, and really, it's not interesting. We'll probably go right through the later years, right to the present, and talk about

the Museum now, [and] what are people's expectations, are you happy, are you unhappy, what are the projections for the future, do you like what you see; it's necessary for its survival; all of those. And that's where we'll be talking to the Trustees; to Donald Marron, to Arthur Drexler, to Bill Rubin and what's the direction now, to—Bill Lieberman will reappear; having told things about Barr, [he] will reappear and talk maybe about what he thinks it ought to be. Philip Johnson, having said things earlier about Barr will reappear again about the direction of the Museum. Whatever. We hope to have a lot of people repeat through the hour; that you might meet someone early, and then you come back, such as yourself, [where you] might tell something of Abby Rockefeller, and then reappear later talking about how excited you are for the future of the Museum. That way there's an easy familiarity with the people. You trust someone. If you see them on film a number of times in the course of an hour and you like what they say, you begin to trust them. They're your benchmarks, really, in the picture.

BR: Yes. Tell me, are you going to be able to get the Museum in when it's finished? Or is this going to have to be done before the building is finished?

CC: I think it'll be—

RC: This has to be done before—we were told that they want the film, the product, to be delivered February '84.

CC: They wanted the film at the opening of the Museum. To coincide with—the idea was to have it on PBS nationwide, then to be shown in Europe and all over the world just when the Museum opens again, so that it would come all at the same time.

BR: But you won't be able to show pictures of what it looks like, because you would have had to do that when?

CC: Do that this summer.

RC: We'll have to say, "And if you'd like to see what it is now..."

BR: Yes, yes.

CC: We'll try our best to get as—that's the other thing, the visual content of the film will be not only these close-up faces speaking, but also if someone tells a story—for instance, Jay Leyda yesterday we spoke to, who's a great film scholar and who was involved with the Museum on and off, he told a story how Iris Barry and he rescued a particular film, and it was a nice, funny little story. Well, we might see a few clips from that film.

BR: Yes.

CC: If Sidney Janis talks about how Alfred and he negotiated for a particular painting—

RC: The [Henri] Rousseau painting.

CC: Then you might see the Rousseau. If John Szarkowski suddenly talks about Atget and how the French ignored Atget and only thought of him as an itinerant photographer not to be bothered with, he suddenly might say, "Look at these pictures;" and then on the screen for 10 seconds or 15 seconds you'll see a succession of three or four, and he'll say, "These simple pictures, if you look closely, they're—." That kind of thing, and just enough to be a lure.

RC: To get you to come see the Museum.

BR: You will be able to represent the different departments, though?

CC: Oh yes.

BR: You won't be able to show the [INAUDIBLE: 0:19:25].

RC: The breadth of the collection.

CC: No.

BR: That's going to be so beautiful.

CC: It's very difficult to show great architecture.

RC: You can't create the excitement of being there in the real place, or even seeing a real object, so to just suggest what it is is the way to go. And the people are the interesting part of this particular film.

CC: It's unfair, and I think it answers people's—people were worried, they thought, will cable television ruin museum attendance? Will everyone just watch—?

BR: Cable television won't do anything very well. [Laughter]

RC: CBS Arts didn't last too long.

BR: They did a thing about Rockefeller Center.

CC: Yes, the Entertainment channel, too.

BR: We knew that wouldn't work.

CC: You knew that?

BR: Well, I mean, some of us were skeptical. But it's a surprise, because everyone thought it was going to take over.

RC: People still like to get out of their homes, I hope.

BR: Yes.

CC: People love to go to an exhibition. There's no—we can't attempt to—we don't want to represent this as: Well now you've seen it, now you can stay home. The idea is: Now you know the history.

RC: This might add to your enjoyment of the place.

CC: Now you know how everyone feels about it, and you've met the people who built the Museum and who made it. Now come.

BR: I think that's good. It's a little bait for them.

RC: Exactly.

CC: And in an hour, if you have 25, 30 people, back and forth, talking and telling the story, it moves relatively quickly. You'd be surprised.

BR: Yes; yes.

RC: It will be intimate. It won't be news or comments as we're told in the history, Russell Lynes's book [*Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of The Museum of Modern Art*]. We're going to try to probe and make people feel comfortable that

they should share their recollections, their intimacies, about this place, that is like a family member.

CC: That was one of the troubles we found about the book, too. The book told everything, or it was so gossipy. You don't need to tell—

BR: Yes, it was just like a newspaper.

RC: It was a good start, though, for us.

BR: It mostly is factually pretty good. He did do quite a lot of research.

RC: People have said that.

CC: We're checking with the Museum, too. What we'll do is, we'll probably be screening the film in the later stages with some of the people at the Museum so that in terms of factual accuracy, that we'd be as close as possible. [Tape break at 0:21:35] even had a little session with Lincoln Kirstein, believe it or not.

BR: Yes, but that's important.

CC: He's quite important to it.

BR: He's a very important man, and somehow or other, he got turned off about the Museum. But that was his idea of art, he didn't like the kind of art we did.

CC: We would fail in our mission if it's simply gossip or personal vendetta.

BR: Or just applesauce, and everything works out. It was a very controversial institution in those days, I gather from what I've heard and read. And there was a lot of writing about policies and philosophies and so on. And Alfred was the best writer of all. [Laughing]

RC: We have understood that Mrs. Rockefeller very much knew how to hold her ground and get her way, but they obviously shared this vision, which is so marvelous to realize that this disparate bunch of people came together and went ahead and were able to make their vision a reality over the years, and it's really been sustained and accomplished.

BR: And that it survived. Because, I can remember, in the early days, when I was observing it quite a bit, you know, one year the artists would be walking up and down the sidewalk angry because we were showing too realistic art. And then

two years later, they'd be [laughing] doing just the opposite, because they were all painting realistically. And then, so, you know, it's just always—it has to be controversial; that's its character. We tried to not let it get too set in its ways; that's the thing you have to keep working toward.

CC: It's tough to run an institution also, on those grounds.

BR: Yes.

CC: You want it to run smoothly, institutionally, obviously, but if the very nature of what its business is is controversy really, its perceptions and people's changing perceptions of what art is—

BR: I find I have difficulty with myself about what's going on nowadays in New York, because there are so many fine museums, and they're all doing everything that we started doing first. And it's a kind of weakness in my character [laughing] that I feel very possessive in view of Alfred Barr's concept of our Museum. But in a way, it's just like having a wonderful employee stolen away from you because you have to think, well, we were lucky to have someone that good for so long. But it's a little bit upsetting, once in a while; almost every museum in the country is going in the direction that MoMA started off. It's quite [INAUDIBLE: 0:24:34], the Whitney having an architecture exhibition, I mean, these are all things that didn't happen before.

RC: But wasn't that part of the original mission, everybody felt they wanted to proselytize this art and get it out, and it really succeeded.

BR: Yes, that's right, so I have to watch myself. [Laughing]

RC: [Laughing] It's good that you can say that; the connection is still that it's your family.

BR: I mean, I say, I keep it to myself, but, I know that competition is good, but these are hard times for everybody, and so if we're all duplicating too much, I think it can get to be difficult.

CC: We wanted also to try to break through a little bit of the mystique surrounding the Rockefeller family in the sense of its participation in the Museum. Because I spoke to Richard Oldenburg and said to him—I think one of the bad things that

happens when someone goes to the Museum and they pay their admission, they go in and they feel, well, here's my three dollars and maybe I shouldn't pay anything because someone else will pay for it or, it's their museum. And these are these misperceptions that people have about what created the Museum in the first place and how an institution like that can exist. In looking back in our research and reading through Mary Ellen Chase's book [*Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*] and a number of the others, you begin to have an appreciation for—and it's not simply a compliment on my part but—for the effort made by your family in promoting and in educating, really, the American public in the ways of not simply modern art but the other arts. And we wanted to make this known really because it's something that, if you don't mention, people take for granted or they might not think about it at all. In your own mind, what was the great overriding desire on the part of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller that she then transferred to Nelson and to the rest of the family? Why was she so intent on doing something so permanent, too, something that would have such a great long effect?

BR: I think that—you know, Mr. Barr was a very extraordinary man in his ability to verbalize about what he had in mind. And I think that he really influenced her a great deal. He was a very young man and extraordinarily young to be taking on a project like this, but he had it all in his mind what he wanted and what he thought was needed. And I'm just guessing this because I never really asked Mrs. Rockefeller why, but she was a *very* intelligent woman, very broad in her education, understanding of people, and of the arts and literature. She never went to college but she learned all these things through her political life with her father and traveling a great deal. I think she felt that what he was saying really made sense and that it was something that didn't exist and needed to be developed, and a more courageous kind of attitude on the part of the Museum in showing things that real artists meant seriously and that they needed to have their chance to be shown to the public. So I don't know if she really thought it out herself. I think she just was very sensitive to intelligent people's thoughts and she was really influenced and encouraged by his ideas to feel that they were very important to do. And she had a lovely, wonderful sort of all-encompassing kind of ability to understand both people and art and all kinds of art. She had been traveling with her husband and they had been to the Orient. I mean, she told me

one time—I asked her how she could like so many kinds of art. [Laughter] Because I was having a little trouble with modern art myself; it was very new to me. And she said, "Well, you know, Blanchette, I think that the more you like one kind of art, you'll find that you get interested in another period. And the more periods of art and areas of art that you begin to learn about, the more you find you're able to like things that are totally different." And she said it builds up so that the more you know, the more you want to know and learn to see what's good in it.

RC: That's still a very good argument today.

BR: Yes, it is.

RC: If people say, "I can't get it;" well, find something you do like and then look at that a lot—

BR: That's right.

RC: And increase your capacity to—

CC: I think your comments would also help the audience, the couple of million people who would see it; they would understand a little bit about what it was about this woman who had this feeling of, well, such generosity is really how you have to put it. And it wasn't momentary; it wasn't a singular gesture. And its concern wasn't simply aesthetic. I think her concern was greater; it was almost educational. I think she must have felt that this would better people's lives. Good design contributes to better homes.

BR: That's right.

CC: I think all of that, it was all of a piece, and it's fascinating to me to read Barr's initial words and follow Philip Johnson's initial enthusiasms about art and architecture. You begin to get a feeling of zealotry almost, that this was a great movement that would redress things, and it's a new way of looking at the world. And it wasn't simply one artist doing one thing or a period. It reflected more than sensibility; it had more power than that.

RC: Yes, and her involvement in my mind seems, for the general public's knowledge, to almost temper that—the two men, Johnson and Barr—because she almost

had a bigger view, in a way. She was a mother. She's such a great—she was a great woman in all of those capacities.

BR: Yes.

RC: And her devotion to her children, that she really spread this part of her to the family, and it comes from the mother, which is just wonderful, I think, to evoke her [INAUDIBLE: 0:31:52] by remembering things, your contact with her. I think that's an important way to start the film.

CC: After that period, after World War II, and then in '59 when you came in and were formally involved with the Museum, had it become very institutional by that time, and was that big and cumbersome?

BR: No, I don't think so. I think it was still struggling along. We were all in that one old building, and it was growing, but I think that it was still—all the Trustees who were wealthy on the Board pretended to buy something and give it to the Museum with Alfred [INAUDIBLE: 0:32:49]. It was a very sort of special way of running the Museum, and until a little bit later on, it became clear that it was a sort of, almost like a plaything among these special people who—Philip Johnson kind of. And I suppose you've read about this committee of younger people.

RC: The Junior Advisory Committee.

BR: Yes, who Lincoln Kirstein and, I forget who they all were.

RC: Eddie Warburg.

BR: Eddie Warburg.

CC: Eliza Parkinson.

BR: And they were just to add in, you know, to bring something, and they were really out of hand in a way, because the Museum was supposed to decide what paintings would be brought in. But they would just buy a painting and give it to the Museum whether it wanted it or not. [Laughter]

CC: So they were like a big club.

BR: And it finally got disbanded, you know. They got disbanded because they'd gotten out of line. [Laughing] And the first thing I was ever asked to do was to

develop a Junior Council, which was the same kind of idea, to get more young people coming along and [people who were] knowledgeable. But I was warned by the then president, don't let it get out of hand and try to run the whole Museum. This is simply—what we want now is a group of young people who will do volunteer jobs and be around the Museum and grow in it, so that they will end up perhaps being trustees or very knowledgeable and interested. And of course, it did work that way. But we didn't try to get such super minds as [laughing] the first group.

CC: You didn't want any great troublemakers.

BR: No. But anyway, it was still. It was a wonderful group of people, and they—I do want to say that I hope you won't put too much emphasis on the Rockefeller family, because there was no question that Mrs. Rockefeller, Abby, was very key, and then Nelson, as he came along. But there were other really marvelous people on that board, like Mr. [A. Conger] Goodyear, for instance, who had a *very* strong influence. I can't remember without looking through the books. But one of the things that became later on a problem was that it got to be sort of known in people's minds as the Rockefeller museum. And that of course was not good for the Museum, and not healthy as it became larger and spread out and [there were] more departments and more need for fundraising. And actually, that was the thing that I had to sort of try and work on particularly.

CC: You had to broaden the support.

BR: When I came in as president, I was worried about the fact that I had a Rockefeller name, too, and that that would continue the problem. But we just had to—and all the museums had to start looking for the—bringing in and getting people from all walks of life interested and supporting on a scale that they could. And so, I'm just saying this and perhaps I'm being a little defensive about it because there's no question, it was rather dominated.

RC: That's a good point.

BR: It wouldn't be good for the Museum if you left that impression that it was still like that.

CC: I think we're going to try—that's really why I mentioned the fact of, the Director of Development, Jack Limpert, [who] told me a couple of days ago, he said he remembers in the late sixties a young, long-haired boy came in and said, "Why should I pay for admission? The Rockefellers own the Museum." And he [Limpert] said, "If you don't want to pay admission, and you want them to run the Museum, then they should select everything on its walls and determine all the rules." And he [the boy] said, "Well no, I'd rather it be." And [Limpert] said, "Well, you can't have things both ways." And it redresses a misperception in people's minds that certainly for the present and for the future, it's not the Rockefeller museum. I think that helps because from the beginning of the pyramid, the early story, the first half hour of the film will be Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Alfred Barr, the early group, Philip Johnson, Goodyear, [Stephen] Clark, the whole [group] who brought it to life, Lillie Bliss, et cetera. And then as it widens out though, particularly by the end of the first half hour into the [INAUDIBLE: 0:37:45] minute of the film, by that time it's gotten quite broad and you're now speaking of other companies or other individuals who have made great contributions, who like the Museum became so much grander and so much greater, too.

BR: Yes, yes.

CC: With the Photography collection, Film, and areas that were envisioned originally, but certainly were in nobody's control by that time, and it had become a grand institution. And—

BR: Well I think that the Museum now is really a very democratic and properly balanced museum. But the myth still hangs on in people's minds. I'm not a Rockefeller, I'm an in-law, and I can see that it's a terrible burden on this family. For some reason or other they have been singled out with one or two other really large and important families that have to pay this price of sometimes hurting something if they get too interested in it. It's just one of the facts of life that you have to deal with.

CC: That's interesting that you say that in a way, you had to oversee—and you did as President, the—not the disassociation of the family with the Museum, but the end of the empire, the end of the rule, in a sense, of—you were like the last

Rockefeller viceroy at the top of the Museum. You then had to begin to dissipate the influence, or at least the public perception.

BR: I think in the first place, I didn't have the power. My husband [John D. Rockefeller III] was not interested in modern art at all, and he was perfectly willing for me to do it, but his money and his giving went in other directions, although he was reasonably, on account of me, he was very nice and did give some to the Museum, but that wasn't his thing.

CC: Right.

BR: [INAUDIBLE: 0:39:54] but Nelson and David were the two that carried on and who were very generous financially over the years. So it was hard, but I think I was a little bit enough removed from it, not being born a Rockefeller, and the fact that all of the Trustees wanted to get the Museum broadened and more democratic and more visible to people. And now, you know, when you go into the galleries, there's just every kind of person [who] comes there, and they wander around with babies on their backs and they *really* feel it's theirs.

CC: It's a very public—

BR: Yes. But one of the things that is important to understand [is] that it has been privately founded and funded, the Museum. And there's a certain amount of bitterness on the part of some of us that the City has not yet recognized us as a museum that deserves some support from the city. And it's interesting, I was just reading about the new lady [Bess Myerson] that's going to be [Ed] Koch's head of the New York City funding for the arts, and it was saying that there were three big museums, the Metropolitan, and the Brooklyn Museum, and the Natural History Museum, [that] are all owned by the city; the city owns their land. Now, the Rockefeller family owned the land we're on. We tried to give the Museum land to Mayor [John] Lindsay, and he ran in the opposite direction. [Laughter] He didn't want to be loaded with such a—then he would know that they would have to help.

CC: It is a burden.

BR: So you know, it's very hard, because we still don't get *any* money from the city at all. And most of the public doesn't realize that. And when you think of the

millions of dollars that the Metropolitan Museum gets, and for capital expenses, and then they're building a whole modern museum now with money from the city and money from very wealthy—they made a great point of having trustees who have a lot of money. And they get—you know, they've got three or four trustees there who just give millions. And we have tried not to choose our trustees on that basis entirely. We do have some, but we want also people who are knowledgeable about art and who have other intellectual capacities besides just being able to pour money into the Museum.

CC: We're seeing one of them later today, Ivan Chermayeff.

BR: Yes.

CC: I know him not as a wealthy man but as a great designer.

BR: That's right; yes.

CC: And that, I think, is indicative of what you're—

BR: Well, we have a number of people on the Board that we try to keep in balance.

RC: What else is interesting though [is] another person we'll be seeing is someone like Frank Carey who is a corporate link for the Museum.

BR: Yes.

RC: It's an interesting and obvious, I guess, evolution.

CC: Also, to hear you say it, I think, means a lot, because people—Jack Limpert, for instance, said it again. He said it's a new age; we have to compete to get National Endowment funds. Of course we try to attract people and collections. And this business with the city is very difficult, and there was an arrangement made for the Tower, but that doesn't answer all questions. In 20 years, there'll be other buildings possibly being built, and you're hemmed in. You can't just take over Central Park when you decide to build a new building; you have to negotiate, and you're hemmed in more. And to hear you say that, I think puts a stamp of—puts an imprimatur on it and makes people realize around the country that it's up to them, it's up to the citizens of New York, it's up to private efforts, really, to keep the Museum funded and keep it the museum that they love and

that's influenced every other museum inalterably. It's extraordinary to see how other museums have—

BR: It's been the mother of all modern museums all over the world, you know.

CC: Film programs and photography collections.

BR: Yes.

CC: And it's really—

BR: And in the earlier days, I can remember when Mr. [René] d'Harnoncourt was director, he used to have people from *all* different countries, and in Asia, and they all wanted to start a modern museum and they wanted to know how to do it and how ours is set up, and we really were sort of a sample for them to try and follow. And I think it's true. There's a big modern museum in New Delhi. It was an extraordinary concept that Alfred had.

CC: Through the 1960s when you were President, was that a particularly tumultuous time for the Museum in terms of, not simply protests, but the changing nature of—?

BR: It was a little more. It was also during a war period and we lost three of our major trustees: Jock Whitney went to England and Bill Braden[1] went to Brussels, [as an] ambassador, and who else did we lose; one other person went to Washington. So there was quite a lot of disruption in our major management group. And I think I was brought in really because there weren't too many other people who would have had the time or the interest to do it. And it was at a time when we were in the middle of a campaign to raise money. And so I spent most of my time just trying to raise money for the Museum. And I was only there—my husband rebelled after that. [Laughter]

CC: I remember reading about that.

BR: After three years I was told to pull out.

RC: That seems to be a current in the family; there would be some members who are like, "Enough." And I think that's very interesting for people to know, too, that it wasn't just a blanket acceptance. It was pretty wonderful that certain people,

[1] William Burden served as U.S. Ambassador to Belgium from 1959 until 1961.

even with misunderstanding, other family members thought [INAUDIBLE: 0:46:52].

CC: You almost had the same, in a sense, a similar career as Mrs. Abby Rockefeller. Her husband tolerated and obviously gave a great deal.

BR: Yes. We used to talk, she and I, about the similarities of our husbands. [Laughter] They were very much alike, actually, in their manners, rather modest and quiet and forceful.

RC: But you were saying that you did discuss with her, that you didn't just come to contemporary or modern art like that?

BR: Oh no, she was the one that urged me to get involved.

RC: And how did she start you off? Did she take you around?

CC: Were you reticent at first?

BR: No, she was such a—it was quite an experience to suddenly marry into a family like this. I just really was very devoted to both the mother and father, and they were wonderful to me. I just lapped everything up. I had been brought up in a cultured family, but not the responsibilities and the breadth of interests that they had. And it was really wonderful. And I just hit it off with Mrs. R immediately, and I just really loved her. So it was not very hard. I am sure I—I hope I absorbed some things from her. And she was—it was interesting, because she understood how important it was for a wife to have something that they were out doing on their own, as well as doing things for their husbands. And she had found that that was important to me and had even given permission to do. I think her husband was very good about it, because he really loathed modern art. [Laughter]

CC: He really did?

BR: I mean, he loved art, ancient marvelous things up at the Met, but it was just a very good thing that she had this on her own. So I think that I was very fortunate, and I hope that I absorbed some of the things that I was lucky that I had.

RC: From your surrounds, it looks like you did.

CC: You and your husband, though, built Asia Society together; that was your project together.

BR: Yes. There was again a thing that I knew *nothing* about oriental art.

CC: It was a great passion for him though, wasn't it?

BR: And this is what I learned from her, from Mrs. Rockefeller, because she loved that, and they had traveled to China and they had all these things that they had collected. So you know, you couldn't help but absorb. And my husband, like all the rest of them, they didn't pay much attention to all of the wonderful things that were around them until they [INAUDIBLE: 0:49:55] and began to appreciate it.

RC: Did she talk to you about the objects, if you came up against a painting that you didn't like at all but that she thought was marvelous? How would she—?

BR: Oh, she would tell—she didn't use professional language at all; she just would say how she felt about it. And she had, as you probably know—obviously you know a lot already about how it started but she had a gallery up on the top floor of their house on 54th Street. And Alfred used to come and help her, I think—I don't know how much he brought things to her, but I imagine he did, and unknown artists. And all of those people are now famous artists. I have a picture of a horse, a white dappled horse, in the stables in Pocantico Hills, that was the first painting practically that Ben Shahn ever made.

CC: Oh, that's right; those commissions.

BR: And what she did was—these artists, as I said, it was very bad times, and they were starving, a lot of them. But Alfred picked out these ones that he felt had promise, and he would bring them to her studio, I think, or at least to talk to her about them, and she had early pictures of all of those artists, either drawings—she was quite modest; she didn't buy very big paintings, but drawings or etchings or small paintings. And I can remember going up there when Mr. Barr was there and just hanging around and listening to the conversations.

RC: Wonderful.

CC: One of the other things that you get a feeling for about the family is the feeling that they felt it was very necessary to engage in public service, that the idea of

being in service really to the nation and not in a political way but to be giving great public service to other citizens was very, very important. Do you think that is a continuing ethos of the family and from the beginning through the generations? Do you think that was again one of the motivating factors for involvement with the Museum? And her generosity then passed on and you were perhaps reluctant at first, but then you did put in many years of very good service as not only Council and Advisory? That is part of your personality then, isn't it, or part of the family?

BR: Yes, I think so. I think—I have to say that my own family were very strong in that also, on a much smaller scale, but they were very interested in doing—helping local hospitals and things like that. We were four girls, and we were all brought up to have a sense of responsibility, and three of us went to Vassar. And Vassar—I think you'll find that Vassar women are almost all—they were trained at college to believe that they were lucky to have a good education and when they get out, they should use it for public purposes and not just be housewives. So there was a very strong tradition—and because my mother had gone to Vassar too. [Laughing] I have to stick up for my own family just a little bit. [Laughing] But, it made a wonderful common interest between my husband and me, because we both had had this training. I think it was probably what perhaps made him be interested in me, that I was a little more serious and more sort of a workaholic type than maybe some of the beautiful girls around New York. [Laughter]

RC: You're very modest.

CC: There's an English critic that we were talking to the other day, Lawrence Alloway. He said if you look at it very carefully it's interesting that American cultural history has in many ways been determined by certain well-educated or self-educated American women who did an awful lot for— who created the museums, who created the things for symphonies, et cetera. Whereas, if you look to Europe, it's not that way, it's more—

RC: They maybe go to horses or to jewelry, the interests of the women, it's more [INAUDIBLE: 0:54:45].

CC: It's more of a selfish interest.

RC: Really projected their education [INAUDIBLE: 0:54:48].

CC: Americans in general appear to be quickly generous; it doesn't take more than one or two—the second generation or by the end of the first, people are giving back immediately. Even people who are making their own fortune at the present moment will suddenly get involved in some public service and begin to do things. And if you look to Europe, it's not all that common; you see much more reticence and it takes generations after generations. Usually they're simply interested in promulgating the assets of their own family rather than contributing immediately, culturally and otherwise.

BR: I think because it started back quite a ways in our American ethic of wanting to help our neighbors and so on. Whether it was to do with the pioneering [INAUDIBLE: 0:55:43] very rugged country at first, but it is—it's something that I think we must hang onto. It's a great pleasure because it really has a big addition to the ethics of our country, that those that *can* should do for others that are in trouble. This is what upsets a lot of people now, I think, [INAUDIBLE: 0:56:09]. But that's something that I think is—I'm not sure if it's just women. Maybe women were more aggressive than European women, but I think it's equal; it's an American trait.

CC: You mentioned the problems with the city in the sense that MoMA isn't supported by the city and the other museums are. Do you think, with the building and the Tower, that doesn't answer all the problems, does it?

BR: Well, the city did concede the fact that maybe we were getting to be important enough so we should get some kind of support. And we were in really a very dire situation financially, because we had developed an institution that had so much liveliness and so many programs that earned money for the Museum, and if you tried to cut back, let people go, give up certain programs, all you were doing was cutting back your revenue. So I mean there was no way we could save. And we were simply running right through our endowment to keep going. And that was why this whole project really had to happen. And we did—it was nice Mayor [Abe] Beame was around in those days, and he was very supportive and very understanding; and Marty Segal had a lot to do with it. Of course, he was a great friend of Beame, and Marty was in charge of—the parks were under him. So I

think that that was a help to get us started on a way of getting ourselves out of this hole.

CC: The Museum doesn't have an endowment comparable to the Met's or to a great—

BR: Well we didn't have hardly anything; we were down to about 12 million dollars and our annual budget was about eight million dollars. So it was really serious. The Met, of course, is a much older museum and it has a lot of money left from the Morgans and all those big families from an earlier era. But we are—this time we're really determined to [INAUDIBLE: 0:58:30], because we're going to have a much bigger museum. The last one—my job right now is to raise the rest of the money, but we've done very well; we're up to 60 million dollars.

CC: Are you very excited about the new Museum?

BR: I am, I am, yes. It's the first time this museum is going to be what Alfred planned it to be, because we're going to have a space for all of these different departments to have their *own* study centers. Say you're a photographer and you want to come in. Always before, you maybe found a photography show, but only about twice a year or once a year, down in the main galleries, which was all we had. Now each of these departments will have their own galleries and their own exhibitions.

CC: It should be terrific.

BR: And this is what Alfred wanted, and most of the public, I don't think, ever got to see those things. And the Architecture and Design [gallery] is going to be fabulous. Have you been around up there, earlier?

CC: We were talking with Stewart Johnson who works with Arthur Drexler, and he was telling us that it'll be probably the first time that people will be able to go in and see models and see the drawings, whereas before, you had to have a mission, a purpose, to go in and examine one thing in particular. But now they'll be on display, and I think it'll be a great boon for the Museum. Mr. Limpert also mentioned that he met with some corporation, people who are involved in design, I think they were industrialists in America, and that they were sponsoring trips abroad in other places to see good design, and that their engineers had been

sent all around. And then they visited the Museum, the study center, and they said, god if we knew that this was here, and now that we know, no one needs to go anywhere else. We can all, instead of traipsing around Europe and Asia, come right here and look at the very best in design work.

BR: Yes.

CC: It's all catalogued, it's all there, there are examples. I love shows like that. I love to see mock-ups like the Skyscraper show [*Three New Skyscrapers*].

BR: Well, it's variety. And the idea was, it was the art of our times, and what surrounds us. And of course, the Museum has influenced the city a lot, with shop windows, and the way people dress, and all kinds of things. But I think to see it right in the building, and if you're an architect and you only have an hour to go to a museum, you'll go right where you want to go and see what's there. So I think that's going to be a tremendous breakthrough, really, for us.

CC: We're planning to see—we're talking to about 50, 60 people altogether, from those who were connected to the earlier days—Eddie Warburg, as I said, that group—and also inside Museum people or people who had been closely connected, [like] Beaumont Newhall. Even some outside artists, photographers such as Ansel Adams or artists such as Sol Lewitt or Robert Motherwell. Critics [Lawrence] Alloway, Robert Hughes from *Time* was very funny and very good; he's a dyed-in-the-wool modernist. It's so funny because even if they had anything bad to say—they say, 'Oh well, I wish it could be just a little bit more adventurous'—and then they go, 'Aw, to hell with it,' they say, 'it's just a terrific place. I can't really—.' I mean nobody—everyone learned there; it's as if they're criticizing their own home. It's so funny. Robert Hughes—

BR: It's a very possessive feeling. All in all the members are—you know, they've been simply fantastic during all this mess. They kept the Museum open and the members keep coming in; they want to see what's happened since last week. And you know, [INAUDIBLE: 1:02:44] has been getting very little for them at this point. So, they've been very good.

CC: Do you think there's anyone you could recommend who might give us any greater overview, a columnist or a historian? I really can't think of particular

names; people have mentioned Arthur Schlesinger or Tom Braden or anyone who might give us, even from the widest possible angle, the sociological impact on the city of the Museum, or the role of the various early participants, your family, others who made a great contribution. We're trying to have a couple of people be able to say something more than simply, I was there and I did this, this and that, and have a larger overview. Would there be anybody that you know who speaks extremely well about?

BR: Well, Tom Braden was only there really for a short while. He's a very bright man, I think. He was someone Nelson brought in. But he didn't have very much on the art side; he was more sort of management, public relations. I remember him quite well. I never even liked him very much [laughing] and I'm not quite sure what he did. [Laughter] But you could try. I mean, he writes well; he's a newspaper person, and I think he's perfectly friendly. And I do think it's good for you to talk with people who aren't friendly, because there are always a few around.

CC: There are a few; well, Lincoln Kirstein was almost. He really didn't want to participate, he just had gotten so—he was in a very bad mood.

BR: Well, he's not well now, but he really hasn't ever been well. He's been very up and down, and he had a great huge fight with Alfred; I can't even remember what it was about. But then he wrote an article ["The State of Modern Painting"] in some very, very important magazine [*Harper's*] just absolutely damning the Museum. You probably have got a hold of that from someone if you haven't. It was, you know, totally overdone and exaggerated. But he's a wonderful man, still.

CC: Yes, he's very brilliant.

BR: He's done a tremendous thing for this city with the ballet.

CC: It was very touching; it was almost very romantic, really. We spoke with him. Afterwards, he stood up, he decided things were over, and he opened the door adjoining his office, and he said, "Look; look at this!" And then there was a room full of people dancing. It was just lovely. And then he, "This is what I do, *this* is art." And then he crossed the hall quickly, and he wears all that black, and he

looks very devilish and all, and he opened another door, flung it open. A piano was being played; girls were dancing. And he just sort of waved his arms.

BR: It's just fantastic. I mean, he created this country to be a leading ballet country; there's no question. And all these other little companies that have cropped up, he's trained a lot of these, most of them. I have tremendous respect for him because he's really been mentally, emotionally unstable all his life, but he has managed to be so productive, at the expense of hurting a lot of people's feelings and being rude at times and so on. But everybody has come to understand that.

CC: Some of the people that we were going to see were also a number of the Trustees. I'll just name you a few to give you an idea of who we might be seeing. We had a very nice visit with Eliza Parkinson.

BR: She is of course really a [INAUDIBLE: 1:07:00] of the Museum.

CC: She is wonderful, really.

BR: She's devoted to her aunt, Lillie Bliss; she was Lillie Bliss's favorite cousin [niece].

RC: She made a similar remark. She said, "I can't leave this city. My husband says —if I could move to Florida." She said, "I can't; it's like leaving family."

CC: She says, "I love to come to the Museum, the Trustee meetings." And then she says, "I go to all the other meetings around." And she told us very nice stories about how, well, she was one of the people on that original Junior Advisory Committee.

BR: That's right.

CC: She told us a very touching story also about Nelson, how he had early on given out of his own funds a contribution, and he wanted it to be anonymous so that his mother would think that those out there were in support. And I think that's a very touching story. She said, the way he said it, too, was very—he was very reticent to say anything and not to admit that he had done something, and it was very touching, really. It's really that sort of thing that, just in a phrase or in a short story or just in a moment, helps describe the humanity of the major players.

BR: Yes.

CC: And not a lot has to be said, but just enough, and then you get a feeling for the characters, you get a feeling for what motivated them. And from then on you can begin to tell the story of then what happened. We'll probably have testimonials from the most unlikely people: Clint Eastwood, Lillian Gish, all these extraordinary people from all walks of life who are associated with the Museum. I would love to see Clint Eastwood.

END OF INTERVIEW at 1:08:53