THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **WALTER BAREISS (WB)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **60 EAST 42 STREET**
NEW YORK CITY

DATE: **SEPTEMBER 25, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: Mr. Bareiss, let me ask you my first standard question: tell me where and when you were born and just a little bit about your family background.

WB: May 24th, 1919, in Germany. My father [Conrad Bareiss] was born in Chicago and came to Germany before the First World War and married my mother, who was a German, from near Stuttgart.

SZ: Was your father German?

WB: He was born in America, but his ancestry was German. His mother was already born in the United States, but his grandfather came over from Germany, on both sides. Definitely of German extraction, but born in America. He came over to Germany as a very young man, before the First World War, and married my mother in 1914, just at the beginning of the war.

SZ: He was born in Chicago but his mother moved back to Germany?

WB: His mother. His father died and his mother decided she couldn't stand living alone in Chicago like that, so she moved to Europe in the '90s of the last century. My father, who was born in 1880, went along. They lived near Stuttgart, and there she remarried and her name became Bareiss. His real name would have been Christophe, but he changed his name to the name of his stepfather Bareiss. He stayed on in Germany. He had certain troubles during the First World War because, as an American citizen, he was an enemy alien, so he had to report to the police every day, but it wasn't that strenuous. In 1917 my sister was born, and in 1919 I was born. We moved to Switzerland for the first time in 1920.

SZ: So he was educated in Germany and Switzerland.

WB: He was educated in Germany. He studied in Switzerland and in Germany. As a child, I had only one trip to the United States, in 1921. I had the privilege of having whooping cough in the United States [LAUGHING].

SZ: But you don't remember that.

WB: It's a very odd thing. I remember even at the age of two certain specific little vignettes. I told my family I remembered something in the United States, only when I came to live in the United States or came on a regular basis, from 1936 on, did I suddenly realize what I saw, because I saw, for instance, an American Pullman car, which I described and had only seen [in the United States] and nobody knew what the hell I was talking about. On my first Pullman trip from New York to Chicago in 1921 to visit the family in Chicago I suddenly realized, There are those hangars--those double hangers on the upper and lower berths. None of this existed in any European sleeping car.

SZ: It's really unusual to have such clear memories from the age of two.

WB: They're real memories because nobody could explain to me what I saw. This goes on; I could talk half an hour about this alone [LAUGHING]. I went to grammar school, elementary school, rather, in Germany and to the so-called gymnasium in Stuttgart until 1931, when I was twelve years old. [TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

SZ: That leads me to ask you, did you grow up bilingual?

WB: More or less. My English was not as good as my German today. I think I'm completely bilingual. I really do not notice what language I speak. I have an accent, naturally, but one thing I try very hard to avoid is what we call Nato English or Nato German, which means to mix the two languages. That's rather strenuous, usually, the first week or so after I come back from Europe. I'll do something terrible like using a German word, or the other way around, when I get to Germany I suddenly use an English word. Otherwise, I've been bilingual all my life.

SZ: Your mother was fluent in German?

WB: Fluent in German, yes. You see, she was German. She was good in English but not fluent in English. We spoke English and German at home, but since I went to school in Germany, obviously, I more or less refused to speak English, as most kids at the age of eight or ten speak what their classmates speak and nothing else. We moved to Switzerland in '31.

SZ: Because?

WB: We had nothing to fear from the Nazis particularly, or we didn't think we would have anything to fear. My father, being a businessman...he was not Jewish, so from that point of view there was no problem; still, he did not like what he read. He was one of the few people I know who had read Mein Kampf. I didn't know about this because my father didn't want it to be generally noised about. One day he called my sister and me into his study and said, "Pick one medium-sized suitcase that you can carry yourself and put only your personal, favorite things in it. Don't worry about clothing or anything else. This is going to be your only responsibility. We are leaving tomorrow morning at eight for Switzerland," even though it was a year before Hitler actually took over. But my father was a fairly important businessman. He had been on the board of directors of Deutsche Bank and he had a fairly large textile business, and he felt he did not particularly want to give any reasons why he was leaving. So we moved to Switzerland and I went to school in Zurich. We had the great pleasure, and this is one of the fantastic experiences of my life, of spending five months in the Dolder Hotel Zurich and meeting people from all over the world. Being a thirteen-year-old, nobody disturbs you. There were not very many other kids, only a few, and I met amazing people, everybody from the Maharaja of Baroda, who had a big table.... My mother always said to me, "You always have to get up when ladies come into the room or to the table." So I was sitting at the table at lunch one day and there was the Maharaja of Baroda, and who got up? His wife, when he came to the table. [LAUGHING] So I said to my mother, "Now look here. The Maharaja didn't get up, his wife got up. This is the way it is." She said, "Once you're the Maharaja of Baroda, you might be able to do that also, but, in the meantime, you live with us." It's a funny thing, that memory picks that vignette. Many of the early refugees from Germany, for instance, a very nice family, they also had a son but he was somewhat older than I--who came from Berlin and then they came to the United States. Their name was Klotz, and they all were staying in the hotel Dolder with their families and they had the greatest collections of art. To this very day, I believe, some of their things exist in their home in Virginia or wherever they are. Among them, for instance, was the man with the syphilitic nose [Portrait of Gérard de Lairesse, by Rembrandt] that Robert Lehman bought, which is now in the Metropolitan, and the Erasmus by Holbein [also in the Lehman Collection], things like that. It was sort of a very interesting thing, and at the age of twelve one is a sponge; you see and you observe everything and you are not part of it; you can observe, you go in and you go out, and nobody worries about what they're talking about when you're there.

SZ: But you knew that things were going on.

WB: My God, yes. Things were going on, but I was not included, let's say, in any political discussion; I just listened. I might have been today; my grandchildren probably are. But in those days.... I must say, to this very day, these four or five months before we bought a house in Zurich is something that is clearer to me than anything else I can remember. Also, I had discussions with many different people. Later on, I met Mr. Kamarsky, for example--you know, that fabulous collection--the one who owned the [Vincent] van Gogh sold recently, and they had these beautiful Cézanne watercolors. All this I didn't know. My art education was just beginning. He came from Berlin and stayed in the Swiss mountains, and I met him there. I didn't know him, and his son, who is now in his sixties, was much too young for me. But people like that were all thrown together. The wealthy German refugees and the Maharaja spent months on end in the same hotel, and German nobility who were also afraid, but they had to go back because if they had stayed on they would have lost all their property, their country estates and everything else, and they obviously didn't have enough money outside of Germany. My father was very smart. After the First World War he had transferred the headquarters of his business to Switzerland. From '29 to '58 he always had an office in Switzerland and always tried to keep his finances centered in Switzerland.

SZ: That was a business decision, not a political one.

WB: No. the political decisions became very strong, obviously, in the '30s. I went back to Germany to go to boarding school. I was not a brilliant student, so the adjustment to the school, my not being Swiss but German, was not very good.

SZ: Was that different?

WB: Oh, yes. The Swiss spoken language almost goes towards Dutch. I can understand it, I can even speak a few words of it, but it's a real slang, and it's the real language that the people in the German part of Switzerland speak. So I went back to Germany and graduated from school in Germany in the spring of '37. I was at the end of '37 the only foreigner left in the school and the only person who was not a member of the Hitler Youth. Funny enough, that didn't dispirit me at all, but it was an interesting experience, because, on the one hand, people tried to convince me to join in everything. I would not say that I had great political astuteness, but certainly at home we were not pro-Hitler, but for me, personally...it was terribly inconvenient. Good God, who wants to march and who wants to stand around and listen to hours and hours of speeches and all that. So I do not want to claim that at the ages of fifteen, sixteen and seventeen that I could see what was going to happen.

SZ: But you were there in those years.

WB: Oh, yes, from '34 to '37. I saw it. I remember in '36 we went to the Swiss mountains. I had a good friend at school, a German, and I invited him to go. My sister had a classmate who she also could bring along, who was Jewish. We were in the hotel in the Swiss mountains on the day before we all had to go back our own ways. My sister was going to school in England, I was going back to my boarding school in Germany and this friend of my sister's was going back to Stuttgart. At the close of that day I could have killed my father. He said to my sister and to me and to the Jewish girl, a very nice girl, "I will not allow my children to see you again after today. This is going to be the end, except on the one condition that you come to my house in Zurich. I will not allow any contact in Germany, but if you want to come, you are always welcome in Zurich." The result, and I think that was the great thing about my father--I don't think he was terribly political; he was doing things automatically for other people but it was not professional, his trying to help people. However, her whole family emigrated:

he got visas for them to the United States. Thirty-five of my sister's friends emigrated because he said this cannot go on. But at first, when he said, "I forbid you to see them," I did not know what he had in mind. It was only afterwards. My sister, everybody, was in tears, naturally, as you can imagine. Only afterwards, almost a year or two afterwards, because it took that long to get everybody extricated, and my father never talked about it.

SZ: So he had that in mind.

WB: Obviously. He was at that time fifty-five and I was fifteen or sixteen. I didn't have any idea. But anyway, it was an interesting experience.

SZ: You also said that in boarding school in Germany you were a foreigner.

WB: Absolutely a foreigner. I didn't suffer, funnily enough, because even though they applied very great pressure to have me join the Hitler Youth, and when the school examiner from Munich came and I was the only one not in a brown shirt and had to appear, nevertheless, he absolutely screamed at me, "I never want to see this again. Next time I come here I want you to be in [the Hitler Youth]." So the next time, I said to the headmaster, who was a good friend of mine and who was also anti-Nazi--he managed to survive in a little chalet in the mountains--I said to him, "I think the next time I'd better get sick before the man comes." He said, "No, you better not get sick, because if you do that and if he finds you, if he by chance takes it into his head to find out where you are, all hell breaks loose, if someone hides you or something like that." It was my last year before I graduated, '36; I graduated in '37 at the age of eighteen.

SZ: And you didn't consider, once you graduated, going on there.

WB: No. I went to Switzerland first and then my father and I decided that I should go to the United States and try it out. In those days you still went to universities, you have a semester here, a semester there--no problems about admission and all that. So we decided that I would go to the United States and try out an American college.

SZ: That was as much because of what was happening in Europe?

WB: Certainly. I didn't want to go back to Germany, my father didn't want me to go back there, and he felt much better if I was in the United States. After all, I was an American citizen, even though I had an awfully thick accent. So I did go to the United States. Luckily, on the boat I had the great pleasure of meeting President Hutchins of Chicago University, who used to be the dean of Yale Law School. I had an interview with him and he talked all about Chicago and how he would let me get through in two years or something, whatever I could do and all that. As we were leaving, after an hour or so, on the Bremen at that time--because obviously we had to use up our German marks; We wouldn't think of arriving on another ship--he said to me, "If I were you, I would go to Yale." I remember my relatives in Chicago had all gone to Princeton or to Harvard and I did not want them to look over my shoulder. Primarily, did you know that at Princeton in 1937 you had to wear a beanie as a freshman? I mean, the idea of putting on something as silly as this! [LAUGHTER] This was the most horrible idea. So I did eventually go to Yale and had a very interesting three years, a very enjoyable time. I studied applied economic science. Luckily, my senior year, when I got my B.S., in 1940, or rather, during my junior year the head of the department called me in and said, "We don't give B.S.'s anymore, we give B.A.'s, so as far as I'm concerned, this is the last year where we give a B.S. So why don't you look around and take whatever courses you like in the whole field of economics, and I will approve them for you. You will not have to complete a set course of study." And this was the most wonderful time I ever had!

SZ: You were a better student at this time?

WB: Oh, I was a good student. I was on the dean's list and everything else. Primarily, I really learned English and American literature. You see, I took English and American literature courses, and it was a great experience, and I took art history courses. My closest friend from those days is George Hamilton, who is a trustee of The Museum of Modern Art. He's ten years older than I, or nine years older, and he was a great influence on me, I think. I loved his courses, they were very tough, and we have remained very good friends. I'm godfather to his oldest son, he's godfather to my youngest son. He lives in Williamstown now. But he introduced me to The Museum of Modern Art, because in those days professors still took their students, if they wanted to, to New York, on Saturdays or on Sundays. So, whenever we had a chance, we went to some museums. I forget when the Museum of Nonobjective Art was started--the original Guggenheim museum. I also remember going downtown, to the Village, to the Whitney Museum. We did go visit, on a regular basis, The Museum of Modern Art, whoever wanted to come from our class could go. He asked, "I'm going to New York on Saturday, and who has a car?" In those days you still drove to New York, not take the train.

SZ: It wasn't that bad a trip, was it?

WB: Trains were good, but by car it was easy. As a young man that age, having a car was such a wonderful thing anyway, so obviously I always said, "I have a car, I have the space." So all of us went down, many times, to The Museum of Modern Art.

SZ: You lived on campus?

WB: Yes. I lived on campus, first as a sophomore, because I came in as a sophomore there--they gave me credit for supposedly advanced education in Germany, so I could start as a sophomore, and so I did Yale in three years. Eventually, I lived in a so-called fraternity--in those days you still had residential fraternities--because I had some problems. I was accosted, and nobody knew how this all came about. There seemed to be a feeling that it was for the reasons that I was fairly well-to-do, I was not Jewish, and what was I doing in the United States? I must be a spy. I went out to a dude ranch one summer, out West, and the story came back to me, indirectly, that I went out--this is crazy--to buy up Western farmlands with Nazi money. Then, the head of Sheffield Scientific School thought I was safer, not in a regular college, but in a smaller fraternity house, where maybe thirty residential people live, where everybody knew each other much more intimately than you do in the colleges. So I stayed in there. Two or three times I was accosted.

SZ: I was going to ask you if you felt in danger.

WB: You know, at that age you don't feel danger. I just thought, What do these foolish people want?

SZ: Did it keep you from feeling part of the university?

WB: No, absolutely not. It was absolutely terrific. I must say, I have to thank one professor at Yale who was one of those wonderful teaching professors but not publishing professors, so he was an older man, he'd never made full professor, he was always an associate professor. His name was Professor Crawford, and he taught me English literature and he gave me special courses in English. I must say, he did more for me to get involved in the English-speaking life than anybody else, all through sophomore year and all through junior year. Then, unfortunately, I had taken all his courses, and that was the end, but when I took courses in "American thought and civilization," things like that, I began to get into American life. I had no problem. I was a fairly good tennis player, so I was on the college team, only on the college team, not on the university team for tennis, we had intramural matches. I remember I spent infinite hours playing squash and infinite hours drinking ale thereafter at Mory's.

SZ: That was another sport.

WB: Yes. [LAUGHTER] So I really had no particular problems and I did meet an awful lot of people, although I did not know one single soul at Yale when I started, because, as I said, relatives of my age were either at Princeton or at Harvard.

SZ: So you made your own way there.

WB: I had to make my own way, and I felt much better about it, because I just didn't want them to look over my shoulder. Anyway, that's how I got to The Museum of Modern Art and that's how I got into modern art.

SZ: I read somewhere in something that I found at the Museum that your father knew art.

WB: Yes, my father collected art, but old masters. Still, they were good-quality old masters. Maybe not necessarily as good as the ones I was talking about before, not as good as the Klotz painting, the man with the syphilitic nose at the Metropolitan, but really outstanding works of art. It's a very sad story. My father's favorite painting was a Rembrandt, one of the Apostles. Eventually, I inherited it, but I had to pay inheritance tax on all the things, so I sold it and it landed at the Cleveland Museum [of Art]. Now, on the latest statements from the Gerson committee, or whatever it is, it's not a Rembrandt anymore. At any rate, it was in the big Rembrandt show in Amsterdam, it had always been exhibited as Rembradt and it was for years at the Cleveland Museum. I don't know what happened there, I haven't looked, but they may still have it [LAUGHING].

SZ: It's probably in the basement now.

WB: But there were other pictures which are not. As a matter of fact, another picture, I found out, which belongs to my sister, has just been upgraded.

SZ: So it evens itself out. [LAUGHTER]

WB: But my father was a collector. It's an interesting thing, when we were in Zurich, in '32, there was the first Picasso retrospective in Zurich, at the Kunsthaus, and my father and I went twice to see that exhibition on Sunday mornings. The ladies in our family did not feel it was necessary. When we left the museum we were both smitten, and we "allowed" that Picasso was a good draughtsman. That was in 1932; no, '33, I believe it was. Thereupon, I, on my way home, passed an art gallery and there was a Picasso print in the window, so I told my father I didn't want anything else for my birthday that year, I wanted that particular print. So he did go down and bought it for me and gave it to me. I still have it. It was my first artwork. It's very good. It's the Dance of Salome, one of the early Picasso prints.

SZ: But modern art, at that time, was for you something that....

WB: I was just beginning to see it. I was too young in the '20s to appreciate the terrific development of German Expressionism--and they were recognized; or think of the French collections which were built in the '20s--and in the '30s it was all forbidden in Germany, you couldn't see anything. There was no Cézanne on view. There was certainly no Picasso; they had to be removed. There were none of the German Expressionists. So, to me, the late '30s and early '40s were such a revelation, it was completely new, and I absolutely ate it up. This was the so-called contemporary art. I'd never seen [Edvard] Munch, I'd never seen [Ernst Ludwig] Kirchner, I'd never seen a [Emil] Nolde, even though I'd lived in Europe, because it wasn't there. My father, as

I say, was more interested in old masters, except that he did allow for Picasso. The first Picasso painting I bought for myself I actually made a deal with him--actually, it was a financial deal so that he paid for it at the end of it--that I would loan it to him for his house, so that he would get to know Picasso, and he in turn would loan me an old master picture, which I kept in my apartment in New York. So we had a deal, but it was more or less a one-sided deal. [LAUGHTER] But that was right after the war, you see, and I did not see my family until '45.

SZ: The years that you were at Yale, did you go back and forth?

WB: Yes, when I was at Yale I went every summer, so that was very interesting. In 1939 I had the most fantastic experience. I was in Germany and I saw the second of the big shows of Nazi art, in the Haus der Kunst, and I saw the Degenerate Art show. Then, also in 1939, I went to Geneva with my family, and there all the pictures from the Prado were on view. As a contrast, to see the "degenerate" art, the contemporary art, and all the Hitler art, and then to see the art of the Prado. It was a great, great experience. I'll never forget the first time I saw Goya; in '39 I was twenty years old, and that was a revelation. I also, in '36, went to the World's Fair in Paris. My father had a great friend who was an art dealer, who died in New York at the age of one hundred a couple of years, and he came to my father and said, "Conrad"--my father's name--"you have to see this," and my father would always say, "I haven't got time, I have so much else to do, take my son." So he took me to the great show in '36 at the World's Fair in Paris, where I saw Picasso. Guernica I saw at that time, before it came to The Museum of Modern Art, so I was already sold completely on contemporary art. The comparison for me, always, was that the old masters of my father, they were wonderful pictures and all that, but...that it was like jewelry, a beautiful diamond or a beautiful ruby, a marvelous thing, to be enjoyed and to be admired, but I couldn't love it. Whereas, if you have to fight to understand or feel a picture, if you have to fight with yourself, if it has a rather harsh bite, then you have a completely different feeling for it, you can one day hate it and then one day like it again, and so forth.

SZ: You have a life with it.

WB: Yes, you live with it, whereas with the other one, older art you're just a voyeur. [TAPE INTERRUPTION]

SZ: Then you went back to Paris in '36.

WB: Yes. So I see many things, and I also had a great number of experiences with art in Switzerland. Later on, in '39, they had the Lichtenstein collection on view in Luzern. We had tickets for the music festival in Luzern--[Arturo] Toscanini was going to conduct all of Beethoven's symphonies. We went in '39 to Luzern, after the war had broken out; we were at the Swiss hotel in Luzern.

SZ: You were still in Europe on September 1st?

WB: Yes, September 1st. College in those days began about September 27th, usually, pretty late. I could not go through Germany anymore, you could not go through France either, so eventually I went on the Italian ship Rex to come back to the United States because Italy then decided not to go along with Germany in the war. But the great thing in Luzern was, when we went to the hall to hear this concert, that at dinner beforehand we saw British cars, French cars, German car, Swiss cars, all of them. The war had already broken out, you saw the license plates all over the place. Then we went into the concert hall in Luzern, and the manager of the concert series came on stage first and said, "I don't have to tell you how sorry we are about how everything is going here. This is the last concert. We are breaking off the music festival. The lights have gone out all over Europe." Toscanini--that was the first concert of the series--conducted the first and second symphonies by Beethoven, and you can imagine the atmosphere at that time. Then I was able to get back to the US, on the Rex, and went back to Yale my senior year, my last year. I did go to law school for a while afterwards.

SZ: So you didn't see your family throughout the war?

WB: No, from '39 to New Year's Eve in '45, because in '45 was VE Day, in June, so I was able to go. It was very difficult to get there, but I got there via London and then from London to Zurich. By that time, I was married and had one child.

SZ: But they were alright.

WB: Yes. My parents were in Switzerland, living in Zurich. My father was the only male American citizen left in Zurich who was not either employed by the government or employed by an American corporation--the only private individual who stayed on. There were plenty of women who were married to Swiss men. Upon the wish of the consulate, he had his car prepared to be the emergency driver for the consulate to go up into the Swiss mountains should Hitler ever invade. He had rented an apartment way up near the highest peak of the Gotthard to take all papers and everything else up there, the Gotthard was best because we knew that that was going to be the place the Swiss were either going to blow up the mountain or blow up the railroad line, so he thought if there would be any chance of survival, that's where he and my mother were going to go. We kept that apartment; I spent the night there once, in 1947.

SZ: Did you worry about them during the war?

WB: Naturally, and they worried about me, because I was in the American army--not for very long, because I am very nearsighted and don't see well out of one eye, so I had the privilege of spending twelve months in Texarkana, Texas. You see, my sister was married to a German cavalry officer, so I was not a very trustworthy individual....

SZ: Do you think that's why you didn't get sent abroad?

WB: I'm almost sure that was the reason. It's a very interesting thing, because my aunt, my father's sister, was originally also an American citizen, but in those days, when a woman married a foreigner, she automatically became a citizen of the foreigner['s country], so my cousins, the children of my aunt from Chicago, they were Germans, you see, and I and my sister were Americans. My cousin on the German side, who was older than I, had a fairly good post in the German state department and even wrote to me while I was in the army. You should see that letter, censored and stamps on it and all that. I had the illustrious grade of private first-class, so I took this letter to the commanding officer of our camp and said, "Now, what do you want me to do about this?" They took me to Dallas, to the headquarters of something or other, but nothing really came of it. Later on, my cousin was one of the people in the uprising...because his great friend was a man called Gerstenmayer, who was one of the people who were involved in the uprising on the 30th of July in Germany. After the war, my cousin did all sorts of things. He was the German consul general in New York, and from there they transferred him to be ambassador to Egypt. Can you imagine being in New York and then going to Egypt? In New York there were all the refugees, all the Jews, anybody who was anything, the German Jews who were his main constituents; he had to serve the restitution claims and other things. And then from there to go to Egypt! Naturally, since Germany then recognized Israel as a country, Egypt broke relations with Germany and he was kicked out. Then he was ambassador to Belgium for a while, then he was made head of the personnel department of the state department in Germany. He eventually retired. But he was an interesting individual. He died, unfortunately; he must have been twelve, fourteen years older than I.

SZ: You said that you went to law school?

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

WB: I went to Columbia Law School, and had the privilege of being drafted from there into the army.

SZ: Did you like law school?

WB: Yes, I really liked it, but I did not particularly like being at school when so many exciting things were going on everyplace else. I was not unhappy to be drafted. You see, I couldn't volunteer; in those days, I didn't know that because of my many Germany connections that this was probably the reason. But I couldn't get anywhere for another reason: I was "limited service," because my eyesight in one eye is not completely correctable.

SZ: So you had to wait to be drafted?

WB: To be drafted, yes.

SZ: But you had no burning desire to be a lawyer, I take it?

WB: No. After the war, you see, when I got out, after a year and a half of limited service. The people who could not properly shoot--because of this eye I could not possibly...I could probably not shoot a gun, but I wouldn't know when I hit anything [LAUGHING]--so they let us out fairly early. In time I got married and came to New York.

SZ: You married an American?

WB: Yes. My wife, her father was also a Yale graduate and her great-uncle was the then-Secretary of Defense, Henry L. Stimson. Her maiden name was Stimson. Henry L. Stimson helped us a great deal after the war to make sure that our property in Germany--not the factory; that had nothing to do with it--but our house would not be occupied. He said, "Yes, you are American citizens, and you should not be kicked out." That's where my father's art collection was.

SZ: I was going to ask you, did he take his art collection with him to Switzerland?

WB: No, that he couldn't do.

SZ: So it all just stayed there in the house.

WB: Yes, and it survived the war. The wonderful thing is, the Nazis spent so much time in the '30s and '40s to confiscate everything my father owned, to blackmail us and everything else under the sun, but luckily, they were not very well organized. One department, under [Hermann Wilhelm] Goering, and the other one, under [Heinrich] Himmler, were fighting each other over who would take our property, so by the time the war was over, they had never really decided yet who would collect the spoils. So everything was just the way we had left it. We were lucky, except for whatever we had in East Germany, which we are working on right now on. My son is a lawyer in New York, and he and his wife, who is a German lawyer, are in East Germany right now, for about the fifteenth time, to see what can be salvaged there. But there is nothing we have to be desperately concerned about.

SZ: But it's interesting that nothing is forever.

WB: No. [LAUGHING]

SZ: So you got married, you got out of the army....

WB: Yes, I got married and had five children. So, that's what it is. My mother never knew my wife until she came over in '47 for the first time, because of the children and all that. In '47 we brought the two older children; at that time we had, I think, only three, so the two older children we brought along to show her. That was quite a trip, because in '47 it wasn't quite so easy. We went to Zurich and spent about six or eight weeks in Europe. Let me see, in those days we could already fly; we had DC-4's, and that's the way we'd fly to London. It was quite an excursion, too. It usually took about thirty-six hours if you flew. I know Newfoundland intimately, and Prestwick, Scotland. Even better, the nicest thing was to visit Shannon, Ireland. I always liked to be stranded there; I was stranded there four or five times, for a day, courtesy of whatever airline we were flying.

SZ: So you went into the family business?

WB: No, then I had my own business, here in the United States, a textile business, but more or less trading wool, especially cashmere, and vicuna and human hair and goat hair--everything. I had my own business from [the time I left] the army and didn't go back to law school until I sold it in '56. My father was not really well--he died in '58--and then I came over and eventually took over the business from him, after he died. Even though we liked each other, we both had different ideas, so I could not have worked for him, and he didn't really want me to work for him, either. We got along perfectly well, but we both knew that absence makes the heart grow fonder.

SZ: There's a reason for that saying.

WB: Yes [LAUGHING]. He didn't continue collecting art, and since that time my major hobby has been art collecting and being productive at museums.

SZ: How did that come about? You told me the story about the first thing you bought.

WB: Yes, and then I was in New York. Before I got in the army I wanted to buy some drawings. I had some money. Then, something which may have been right or may have been wrong, but I had a certain amount of money which didn't really belong to me, and they were going to freeze it. It belonged to my parents, actually, so that if an emergency would come, I would have money here; I had it in a separate account. I invested a substantial part of that in some very beautiful pictures. Not all, I had a cash reserve, but I did buy some very good pictures which, eventually, in '58 or '59, through the will of my father, then belonged to me. So that's why I had an opportunity to buy a very beautiful Cézanne, a beautiful [Pierre] Bonnard, a wonderful [Henri] Matisse. Let's see, Cézanne, Bonnard, Matisse...there was one more picture. Oh, yes, and a Picasso, an early 1910 Picasso. So that gave me the confidence, since I did feel that I should invest a part of the money so that it couldn't be taken away from me. We didn't know what American laws were going to be. They did freeze all foreign assets, and they would have frozen those assets from me if I hadn't used the money. I didn't need it to live on, so that was alright.

SZ: Did you visit galleries?

WB: Yes. My whole theory is this, which I tell to everybody, and I did it all my life: nothing goes over visiting museums or galleries. I'm an absolutely inveterate, enthusiastic sightseer, to this very day. I'm a little bit more tired today, I don't spend that many hours at it, but nothing goes over visiting museums, whether it's in New York, where they have an incredible variety, it's almost too much, or in Munich, where I do spend quite some time now, maybe two or three months out of the year. Even though I sold my German business eventually, I still have an apartment there because, after all, when you sell something you usually get something in exchange, so you do have to look out for what you're getting. So I go to Europe about three times a year. I used to go five times a year, but three times a year now because I consider myself, really, retired, although I and my older son are sort of doing a lot of things together and he does a lot for me, particularly in finance. He likes to do it on his own and he does perfectly well. So I do go to Munich, but I also have an apartment in Venice and I spend a great deal of time at the museums there. I started a gallery association for the Bavarian state museums for twentieth-century art twenty-six years ago in Munich. I retired from that; I'm still a member of its board but not the chairman anymore. I was also the chairman of the board of a boarding school in Germany--not of mine, another one. I have been a member of the governing board for over thirty years of the Yale University Art Gallery. I'm still, as you know, involved in two committees at The Museum of Modern Art. I was a trustee and I was head of the committee of painting and sculpture, a successor to Jim Soby. I'm on the visiting committees of the Metropolitan Museum for twentieth-century art and for Greek and Roman art. I'm also an honorary trustee of the Toledo Museum of Art, to which I'm supposed to go to occasionally [TAPE INTERRUPTION]. So I've had all these many interests. I pinch-hit as acting director at The Museum of Modern Art when Bates Lowry was asked to leave; this you know perfectly well. It's a beautiful story. I was lying in my bed in the Munich apartment at one o'clock in the morning and Bill Paley called and said, "Walter, can you be in my office tomorrow morning at ten." I said to him, "Even if you send me a jet from the airport I don't think I could make it. Do you realize it's one o'clock in the morning?" He said, "My God, I thought it was one o'clock in the afternoon! I waited purposefully because I thought I could now reach you someplace." I said, "I'm coming back tomorrow anyway, so I can be there on Wednesday at ten o'clock."

SZ: Did he tell you what he wanted?

WB: Well, yes, they felt that Bates Lowry should probably go and they would have a trustees meeting--I was a trustee at that time--the following week. He wanted to talk to me about whether I could pinch-hit, because, he said, and quite rightly, we couldn't promote anybody at the Museum. Once you promoted one to be the director you couldn't then demote him; they would walk out, you know, and we didn't want to lose anybody we had, because René d'Harnoncourt had just died, Alfred [H. Barr, Jr.] was sick with Alzheimer's disease, and there was really nobody else. I had to pinch-hit for Alfred Barr once before for a couple of months in the Department of Painting and Sculpture. I never did any work, but I was technically the head of it. I didn't really know about it until Grace Glueck called me, and I just had to wing it [LAUGHING]. In many ways I'm the culprit in many things, because when I spoke to Bill Paley about this and said, "You know, this is very hard to fire Bates; after all, we hired him away from the very good position"--he was at Brown, you know--Paley said, "but the financial matters are completely out of control." I suggested, rather than have a big, formal board meeting where this whole thing would come up, with some thirty members of the board and maybe five or six staff members, a secretary, etc., wouldn't you rather have me go, or have somebody go, to see Bates Lowry and see if he doesn't resign? There are thousands of reasons, and he might perfectly well say that he wants to go back to teaching or writing, and if you permit me to offer a good amount of money"--the board was very generous, he and David Rockefeller were very generous and allowed me to do that. Then I called Bates Lowry, whom I knew well, and I asked to see him. He thought it was just sort of a social visit because we had seen each other before. I went to his apartment; I think I even had supper at his home. I was uncomfortable about it, but I had to do it. Then I started with the opening question, and Bates couldn't imagine why he was supposed to resign. His wife...my lord. You see, he understood but she didn't understand...I remember still this statement of hers. She said, "Everybody should have a day in court." I said, "Yes, you can have a day in court, you can do anything you want. You can go to the board of trustees to say anything you want, to give you reasons. Do whatever you want. But what good does it do you if you then resign or are fired, whether you get more money or whatever it is? The main thing is to have a smooth passing-on and to have you go on to something else, and to give you enough money to have a sabbatical, let's call it, in the meantime." He then agreed to resign, and he and I worked on the idea that he felt he would like to go back into teaching and that he might like to write a book in the meantime, and that was all fine. Then the unfortunate dinner party occurred at John de Menil's. Somebody from the press was there, too, and somehow after a few drinks the whole story came out. Then, unfortunately, I think his wife could not contain herself and said what a terrible thing she felt it was that Bates didn't have a chance to defend his position. So from that moment on the whole world knew that he was fired, and there was nothing you could do about it. That whole elaborate system collapsed. Then something equally bad happened, partly because I had had this discussion with Bill Paley and David Rockefeller and they had agreed that it shouldn't go further among the trustees and from there to the press. Obviously, Blanchette Rockefeller would have known; I'm sure Nelson Rockefeller would have. But Ralph Colin and, I think, even Jim Soby--both were vice presidents--did not know about it. That part, according to my thinking, was not my job. I wanted only to save the Museum and Bates Lowry the embarrassment. Then the formal meeting of the board came up. Bates Lowry was already out. I was sitting up on the dais with Bill Paley, and the whole matter came up, and unfortunately Ralph Colin attacked Bill Paley, saying that he, Ralph being one of the oldest members of the board of trustees and a vice president, should have been consulted. All that business. I was allowed to speak--Bill Paley allowed me to speak--and I said, "Look, we thought it was better for the Museum to get this arranged without any great excitement about it." But Ralph wouldn't stand for it. Nobody who knew Bill Paley would publicly attack him, would say that he acted in bad faith. Nobody could possibly do that and get away scot-free.

SZ: But somebody did do that.

WB: Well, Ralph first lost Bill Paley's personal account, and then the famous statement "You are not my friend, you're my lawyer." Then, afterwards, he lost the CBS account, which for his firm at that time was a terribly important account. So the whole thing was an unholy mess.

SZ: Did you agree? Did you think that was the right thing to do?

WB: Yes. I agreed firing Bates was correct. I'm basically an accountant. I did study economics, after all, and I knew that too much money was going out.... Sure, you can always fall back on the Rockefellers or the Paleys or the Whitneys--I'm sure they would never let MoMA go down--but you cannot run an organization with that philosophy. For instance, the whole International Study Center. We had hired a very nice lady from Bryn Mawr to run it, Anne Hansen, but there was no department; there was no funding for the department, nothing. She was one of the people I had to let go during that year, it was terrible. I fell so successfully on my feet in this that I was able to put in a good word at Yale, which was looking for their first woman professor in art history, and they were so delighted to get somebody with her credentials. So the end effect was that, later on, she thanked me, and said, "Wasn't it a lucky thing you fired me."

SZ: But what you're saying is that he was spending money in a way which was not....

WB: Which was not thought out and not organized. You see, you cannot set up a department and staff and suddenly have no money to pay the staff. I'd known this from my business. I'd had years and years of experience, and you simply cannot do it. Sure, you can run a deficit in a public institution for a year or two or even for a longer time, provided it's under control. But we were running at the end of Bates

Lowry's period a deficit of a million and a half dollars a year, which today wouldn't impress anybody, but in those days it was very impressive. So it had to simply be stopped. I had to.... I never wanted to be the actual director; therefore, I was only the acting director and the chairman of the management committee with Wilder Green and Dick Koch, because I did not want to usurp Museum functions, except on a temporary basis. Originally, I thought it was for three months and eventually it was ten months. It would have been for a whole year if John Hightower had not been a little bit difficult.

SZ: I don't know whether it was Grace Glueck who wrote it or not....

WB: Grace wrote one article about the Bates Lowry matter, yes.

SZ: ...but I read that it was also a question of his attitude, that he was very presumptuous and that that was something that rubbed the trustees the wrong way.

WB: No, no. You know, they were perfectly happy with him. They did not like to see the deficit figure, which they would have to cover. No, actually the relationship was pretty good with the trustees, except on that. After all, putting up that International Study Center was not his thinking.

SZ: It was René's idea.

WB: It was René's idea, you see, so we cannot blame Bates for that, but he, as director of the Museum, was responsible for keeping things under control, and that he simply couldn't do. That was not his nature, but you cannot expect it from a university professor with little administrative experience, necessarily, that he can run a department. I mean, what did he have at Brown, maybe one other person? What did he know about Brown, where the money was coming from? So I understand his point, but he could not be the director. It was completely different with Alfred Barr, who grew into the job first, from nothing; after all, he was twenty-seven years old when he started this job, and so he started off worrying about a ten-thousand-dollar-a-month payroll. And then René d'Harnoncourt was already an experienced person in many ways. He was probably financially a much smarter man than Bates Lowry, but Bates Lowry, not only did he not have a bad personality, he was not, as far as I could see, except maybe in some of his sayings after he left, he was not a man who was really presumptuous. I know this, for one reason, because during Bates Lowry's period I was spending a lot of time going back and forth to Europe, and I was asked by, I think, Paley again, because he was president, to go look at the Alice Toklas collection, and my connection with the trustees was Bates Lowry. He had made the liaison between Bill Lieberman, who came over to England, and me, who came over from Germany to England; we started in England and then went to Paris. Bates Lowry was also the liaison with the trustees, the six or seven--David Rockefeller, Nelson Rockefeller, André Meyer, who was not a trustee, and Jock Whitney and Bill Paley, naturally--who took shares. I think David Rockefeller took two shares and the others one. My only condition for working on it, and at that time it actually worked out marvelously, was that I said I would agree to do the negotiating work on all this, together with Bill Lieberman, provided the people who were buying saw their way clear of leaving--I didn't say giving--one of the pictures to The Museum of Modern Art in their wills. I thought, as chairman of the committee on painting and sculpture, that I had the right to ask for this; otherwise, what was I doing there to negotiate a six-million-dollar deal? Six million dollars was a lot of money, at that time, for pictures. The reason I do know that Bates had a good connection, he telephoned at least five times during the twenty-four hours and said, "Yes, I spoke to Bill Paley, I spoke to David Rockefeller"--because he wasn't able to speak to Nelson Rockefeller--"and yes, they are all in agreement and this is the way we're going to do it." That was a few months before these same people thought that he should leave the Museum, so I don't think there was any personal aggravation. The aggravation came with John

Hightower. There there was a clear-cut fight.

SZ: Next time.

WB: Yes [LAUGHING].

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **WALTER BAREISS (WB)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **60 EAST 42 STREET**
NEW YORK CITY

DATE: **OCTOBER 2, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SZ: I thought we'd start this morning by my asking you how you got to the Museum, who recruited you, if that's what happened.

WB: I'd been a member of The Museum of Modern Art for quite a number of years, since my college years since 1940 or so, I would estimate. In 1948, a friend of mine, Mrs. Richard Deutsch, the daughter-in-law of Mrs. David Levy, who was a trustee of the Museum, invited me to a meeting of the Junior Council of the Museum, which had just been formed by Blanchette Rockefeller. I went to Mrs. Rockefeller's house, a lovely house built by Philip Johnson on East 52nd Street. I enjoyed the meeting, they asked me join, and then they asked me to be chairman after Mrs. Rockefeller, who obviously had other things to do, gave up the job.

SZ: That was a few years later.

WB: No, within a year or two, I think around 1950. She gave up the job being chairman of the Junior Council. I didn't stay chairman too long because then Harmon Goldstone became the second chairman and, thereafter, Anne Jones. The reason I gave it up was because I simply traveled to Europe too often, but I started the Art Lending

Service.

SZ: I understand that was totally your brainchild?

WB: I originally had the idea of using works of art, like prints, which the Museum might have in duplicate and loaning them out to members of The Museum of Modern Art, but then it worked out much better to get new drawings, prints and all that from the dealers with an upper price limit of seven hundred dollars; we only worked with the dealers. The idea was that people could borrow for two months and the borrowing fee would be credited to the cost of the work of art if bought. We had made an arrangement with the dealers that the Museum would get a ten percent commission on the sale of any work of art. So we came out perfectly alright, even though ten percent doesn't sound like an awful lot, but it was, after all, a nonprofit idea. The whole idea was to get people interested in contemporary art without their being scared off by dealers. In those days, people didn't really want to visit dealers, because they thought, "If I go to a gallery, I'll have to buy something." We tried to avoid this, the whole atmosphere of collecting was quite a bit different.

SZ: Could you just tell me more of what you mean?

WB: Yes. You see, people didn't have the self-confidence to go to a dealer and go through all their stock or whatever they showed and then walk out again, or even ask for prices. After the war the whole question of collecting was really beginning; a completely different crowd of people collected. The works of art we had on view were priced, at least at the beginning, at no more than seven hundred dollars and we started at maybe fifty dollars, so one could always make arrangements with the dealer to pay fifty dollars off at twenty-five dollars a month or something like that. It gave the possibility [of collecting] to people of modest means, secretaries, anybody; you didn't have to be a capitalist to collect. That was the whole idea, and people could see what many galleries had to offer; they didn't have to go around to all the galleries themselves. People didn't have the time; don't forget, people still worked.

SZ: Who selected the works?

WB: There was a committee of the Junior Council under the guidance of Dorothy Miller, or whoever was assigned by Alfred Barr to take care of it. Riva Castleman did; I don't know for how long. Bill Lieberman helped. Obviously, we took suggestions from the commercial galleries. I remember going to Curt Valentin and asking him what he could offer us for the Art Lending Service. He was terribly cooperative, and you wouldn't believe it, he lowered the price of a perfectly marvelous [Max] Beckmann portrait from, I think, nine hundred dollars to seven hundred dollars, because seven hundred dollars was our top limit, and he gave it to us. It wasn't sold, but it was quite an achievement to get a Beckmann portrait for seven hundred dollars. I think he also gave us Kirchner drawings. Remember, after the war, beginning in '47, the whole cornucopia of art that was available, which had been completely stopped due to the war and, in Germany, due to Hitler, was suddenly coming to New York. There were artists whom most certainly I and most of the friends of the Museum had never even seen with the eye to buying them. You never had an idea that you could buy a drawing by [Oskar] Schlemmer, or that you could buy a Picasso print. The standard price for good Picasso lithographs in the late '40s or in 1950 was between fifty and a hundred dollars. Even if you take the devaluation and multiply this by ten, it was still an extreme bargain, and that's why the dealers were cooperating with us, because it gave them another window onto a group of people who would normally not visit.

SZ: A new market.

WB: Yes, and they did very well. For instance, Nelson Rockefeller used to come in around November or in December, and we had pulled out all sorts of things for him and he would buy his Christmas presents there, at the Art Lending Service. I think even a [Kurt] Schwitters watercolor would go with our price range, so there was a great deal of opportunity. We also did sculpture sometimes. We did play it like bureaucrats, if you found something very interesting.... A good friend of mine was Tom Hess, who was editor of ARTnews, and I asked him who we could get. We visited the studio of an American artist called [George] Spaventa and saw some bronzes. Spaventa was very eager to get into the Art Lending Service. I think he was represented by one of these cooperative galleries. I decided to risk it, so I bought a piece for two hundred dollars from him, a little bronze, and gave it to The Museum of Modern Art with the idea of having it in the Art Lending Service, that somebody would come up and salute by buying it or renting it and then if it was sold, it would be a cash contribution, the Museum would get the two hundred dollars rather than me, and Spaventa needed the money, he needed that two hundred dollars. And a wonderful thing happened, which I think is the greatest accolade. When we had an exhibition, and we had regular exhibitions on the roof of the old Museum of Modern Art, it was stolen--the only thing in those days that was stolen. I said to Tom Hess and I said to everybody in the Museum, "Isn't this fantastic, that somebody steals a small sculpture by a completely unknown artist?" Obviously he couldn't sell it; he must have really loved it but didn't have the money to buy it. Then the insurance paid the two hundred dollars, I got my tax deduction, the artist got the two hundred dollars, the Museum got its two hundred dollars, and somebody has that little sculpture by Spaventa. [LAUGHTER] Things like that happened. It was a very intimate, very simple thing that first year. Everybody here on the Junior Council who was interested in art and who heard of an artist would say, "Hey, I saw these things we could get, we could get some of these drawings," and we got them on consignment and the art galleries usually paid the insurance, and so we got it into the Museum. For instance, we were practically the first people in New York who had photographs by well-known photographers or who became better known later. Arthur M. Bullowa was on our committee, and he found the photographs and he knew a lot about photographs, he was interested. It was the first time, in 1949 or '51, that we even followed through on the idea, Is photography art? At one time the Museum said it was, but not many other people said it was. Things like that, which you could hardly imagine now, happened at that time. For our opening show, for instance, I remember a marvelous bronze by [Elie] Nadelman was five hundred dollars, and that was a great thing. Usually, you asked the dealers to give you a three-months' minimum consignment, then they could call it back, but for three months they had to guarantee the price and leave it with us. Then they would say, "Hey, we want it back," or, if we didn't find any interest for it whatsoever, we returned it. The dealer had no expense. We picked it up; he didn't have to pick up the works of art, so we didn't have any shippers. But the whole life was a much more intimate thing. Basically, you realize, in 1950 on two Saturdays you could see most of the important galleries. If you visited thirty or forty galleries, you saw most anything that was new. Now, what do we have--fifteen hundred galleries, three thousand galleries? I don't know how many. I remember Pierre Matisse in the early days. We had a watercolor by Picasso, a nice little thing for about three or four hundred dollars. Somebody bought it, I believe, and he immediately telephoned 'round to a few other dealers and said, "Somebody's buying Picasso watercolors. Have you any that we can have?" So then we got two more, which I think we sold, too, in that price range. If you went around for contemporary art you saw Pierre Matisse; Sidney Janis; Paul Rosenberg; Wildenstein, obviously. [Alfred] Stieglitz, naturally, wouldn't give you anything, because he thought it was degrading. I remember talking to him myself. He represented the estate of [John] Marin at that time; he also had Georgia O'Keeffe. He was the first one who put a price of four thousand dollars on a John Marin watercolor, which is like a hundred and fifty thousand dollars today. It was unheard of. I have to think of others. Who was the woman who died, who was a sculptor herself and was the first person to see Jackson Pollock? What was her name? [Betty Parsons] Her gallery was in the same [building as] Sidney Janis's on 57th Street; [Janis] was up front and she was in the back. She died and now the gallery continues with her assistant. She was a sculptress, a wonderful person. For instance, we had three-hundred-dollar Jackson Pollocks in the Art Lending Service--not the tiny ones, no, but perfectly good-sized pictures. All the great American Abstract Expressionists we had in one form or the other--[Robert] Motherwell...I don't think we ever had [Mark] Rothko because they were from the beginning on too large. We tried to have a size so that people could take it; we had little cases made so they could carry it home and hang it over the mantle or in their bedroom and then bring it back. We almost never had a loss, really, because it was a privilege of membership. People had to become members of The Museum of Modern Art, so we had a certain selection as far as credit and insurance was concerned, so we really never lost anything, except Spaventa, and we felt that people would have to invest fifteen dollars to become a member, so that's why [the Department of] Membership liked our idea, too. As far as I know, at least during the first years when I was actively connected with it--I don't know what happened later during the last twenty years with the Art Lending Service; it became more elaborate, we upped the prices and all that--but I remember our first opening show, every single piece was reserved, either bought or borrowed.

SZ: These were by members of the Museum who had seen them.

WB: Yes. We wrote to all the members of the Museum and said there was an opening they would be invited to. In those days, there was never anything served at the openings, neither a drink nor was there ever any dinner. I still remember the first time at The Museum of Modern Art where anybody served food was a dinner of scrambled eggs and peas, and we were most proud that that was for after an opening; it must have been in the early '50s. These elaborate affairs of one, two, three, four, five openings are all a development which came much later.

SZ: What about some of the other early activities of the Junior Council?

WB: First and very important, we started the annual appointment calendar, which we organized and obviously we tried to use works from the collection, let's say, American drawings of the war period or something like that. That was a very important thing and we did make a net profit out of that that was used to pay some of the expenses of the Junior Council. We would have these special exhibitions of drawings. Dorothy Miller had paintings, but nobody had really done so much about drawings, so we tried to do drawings, or--and I think Bill Lieberman created the word--"paper goods." Then we had sculpture exhibitions. They were all very successful, were very good as exhibitions. The catalogues were not as professional, because we didn't have the money to pay for it. Nowadays, you really cannot have a show without every piece being illustrated. Even if the illustration is not great, there should be recognition photos that people who will buy the catalogue will, when they go back home, remember, looking at the catalogue and say, "Ah, yes, this is what I saw." So this was a very key thing. Then we organized some visits to private collections, always for contemporary art. The classical contemporary was more or less handled by the Museum without us, but we were continuously looking for as-yet-unknown artists.

SZ: And you, as members of the Junior Council, would make these trips?

WB: Yes, I would make these trips and generally nobody objected if you brought anything in for viewing. The insurance was a mild affair. We also coordinated the suggestions of any curator or curatorial assistant who said, "Hey, this would be a good idea for the Art Lending Service," then we went out to get the stuff. You never shipped anything; you always picked it up yourself and brought it to the Museum. We always said we would not ship a work of art to any member of the Museum because it was too expensive; they would have to carry it and bring it back.

SZ: How do you think the Museum saw the Junior Council in those early days?

WB: I would say they obviously wanted to broaden the interest in contemporary art and the interest in The Museum of Modern Art and wanted to get people involved who would not be trustees. [TAPE INTERRUPTION]

SZ: You were just saying that members of the Junior Council were not future trustees.

WB: They were not, but out of them they might find some who became trustees anyway. After all, I did become a trustee.

SZ: But it wasn't a trustee-in-training program.

WB: No, certainly not, but quite a number of people from the Junior Council became members of the acquisitions committee. In those days, there was only one acquisition committee where everything was presented, because, after all, Alfred Barr was more or less in charge of accumulating for the Museum. But then, I was first a visitor through that committee, and then I became a permanent member of the acquisitions committee of The Museum of Modern Art.

SZ: Which you could be without being a trustee.

WB: Without being a trustee. Eventually, I was asked to be a trustee, and then I was a trustee for fifteen years. Then eventually, I think we broke up that big committee, because it was simply not possible for Alfred Barr to be involved in buying something for the photography department or buying for other departments.

SZ: That came later. You were in the middle of that.

WB: Yes, exactly. They also probably dreamt of the idea--I don't know whether that is the truth--that they might get somebody interested in the Museum who would eventually perform the same job for the Museum as the committee of which Nelson Rockefeller was, I think, the chairman. They were called the "Young Turks."

SZ: It was the Advisory Committee.

WB: Yes. That was clearly the beginning of a potential trustee committee, so, since the Advisory Committee ceased, they thought maybe the Junior Council would help out. But it was also a public relations idea to popularize the Museum with younger people. Naturally, when we started, we had the idea that the people on the Junior Council should all be under thirty. Naturally, by the time it was organized and was going, we thought, "Well, under forty." Then it sort of was dropped, and before you know it, we had people in their fifties in there. That was all before the International Council was also started. Naturally, some members of the Junior Council then moved into the International Council.

SZ: Mrs. Rockefeller did that.

WB: No, Mrs. [Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson] Cobb. She was the first chairman of the International Council, I think, maybe with Mrs. Rockefeller.

SZ: I think it was Mrs. Rockefeller and then Mrs. Cobb.

WB: In either case, Mrs. Rockefeller always started things off and then tried to find somebody to do it, just as she found me to take over the Junior Council. It was her idea, and then I got into it, primarily with the idea of starting the Art Lending Service as the first project.

SZ: This was fun for you, I think.

WB: Oh, yes, very interesting. I learned an awful lot, met a lot of people. It was great, great fun, and, as I say, in those days I worked in New York, so it was my Saturday-morning occupation to visit galleries and so forth.

SZ: When did you start to get a sense of the Museum itself and the kinds of issues that it was concerned with?

WB: Right then. Being on the Junior Council, you also had a means of getting closer to the staff, because the staff did not have to sit in awe of us. They might sit in awe in front of Stephen Clark, who was a trustee, but there was no problem having a person-to-person relationship with the staff. That, I think, is worth a great deal. This person-to-person relationship is, I think, the most essential, positive part of the Junior Council and positive for the Museum. I really quite honestly don't know how it's being done today. I think it's gotten to be such a large organization, The Museum of Modern Art, that this sort of intimate connection is not there anymore, except, possibly, in the various committees that still exist. I do know, for instance, that Riva Castleman has a separate group of people who are interested in prints; I'm sure that there the social level and the intimacy still exists. But we had it in the Junior Council with the Museum as a whole. We got along just as well with the registrar and the framemaker; we had to worry if they would have a chance to make our frames for us, because we didn't want to go outside because it would cost too much, so we had to negotiate within the Museum with various people. Obviously, we all got to know Alfred Barr quite well, and Dorothy Miller, who were the two key people who were building the Museum, and Bill Lieberman. Those three were at the beginning the people that had the greatest influence over the Junior Council.

SZ: What was your impression of Alfred Barr, where he stood, at that point, in the way things were functioning?

WB: I'm a great admirer of Alfred Barr's, and I was so impressed with the flexibility of his mind and the incredible interest he had in all sorts of art. He saw works by painters which I still remember thinking, "What is he thinking, why is he buying that?" It turned out to be a Frank Stella, and he brought it into the collections committee or he suggested it to the Art Lending Service. It was absolutely the most amazing thing. I remember a long discussion when he brought in the first Stella painting, one of those block paintings, where we all discussed, "Is the block painted and the white just left, or is the white painted on top of the black?" That was the obvious discussion, and it was a long, long meeting, I would say almost half an afternoon, of the collections committee, in which we went over, "Is this really art? Should we really have this?" And Alfred Barr was absolutely steadfast. Obviously, I supported him, and so did a lot of other people, but it was a great question: Is Stella an important artist? The black-and-white pictures were, after all, the first thing that Stella became famous for, and think that was in the early '50s. Things like that. Alfred Barr had great courage. He also told us quite often the stories of developing the Museum, for instance, when Mrs. Stanley Resor and somebody else gave him something like two thousand dollars to go to Europe and buy art for her, which she then eventually would give to the Museum. He bought one of the most beautiful [Paul] Klees you have ever seen out of that, for much less than two thousand, maybe a hundred dollars out of this whole thing. Then, she wanted to give it to the Museum. We said, "Wonderful," but, luckily, Alfred was smart about it and said we all on the committee have to tell Mrs. Resor that she is giving it to the Museum but she better have it appraised, because even when she gave it to us it was worth four thousand dollars, and she was going to give it to us and take a deduction of only one hundred dollars.

SZ: Because that's what she paid.

WB: That's what she paid. It never entered her mind, until somebody told her, that she could use the appraised price, and I'm sure in those days that people like that paid, fifty, sixty, seventy percent in income taxes. I remember that little vignette. One of the most beautiful paintings, out of the '20s, I would say. It's still in the collection, actually, and I still remember it as I saw it then. Alfred told us when he went to Germany for The Museum of Modern Art in 1932 there was an exhibition of Schlemmer [paintings]. The day he arrived there, the Nazis--this may have been 1933--had closed the show; it had never really opened. He was allowed to go in from the back, and he bought the fabulous Schlemmer The Staircase. He told us this story, and it made it all...for me and for a great number of other people on the collections committee and on the Junior Council more lively. His stories brought the whole contemporary art world closer to us, because there was nothing much written about it. There was the war first, things were forbidden in the '30s, and then only at the end of the '40s and the early '50s did this great cornucopia empty itself over New York, with all the great paintings. I remember still there were Picasso paintings for a thousand or fifteen hundred dollars, and Matisse.... That's why we have such a fabulous collection of Picassos and we have such a fantastic collection of Matisses, and of many other artists. He picked not only a lot of pictures, but also the best. Who could imagine in those days that somebody could select and buy the Demoiselles d'Avignon? It's a fantastic thing. Or the Three Musicians by Picasso? These are works of art that don't exist in the Musée Picasso in Paris. The Guernica we lost, unfortunately, but Alfred brought the Guernica to the States in '36. After all, it was painted for the World's Fair in Paris in '36, and then obviously Picasso didn't want it to go back to [Francisco] Franco's Spain, so he [Barr] negotiated that for the United States, for The Museum of Modern Art. In those days, how old was Alfred Barr? In '36 he was still in his late twenties or early thirties.

SZ: I think he was born in 1901.

WB: He was in his thirties. That's why I saw he was an absolute inspiration. With his writing he had great difficulty; he didn't write easily, but what came out of it was superb and was the first thing all of us ever read about contemporary art. That's why, quite honestly, it was a great, great tragedy that he got Alzheimer's disease, and he saw it coming. I remember he had already semi-retired but he was coming to the trustees meetings--he was still a trustee--and I was at that time, it might have been 1968 or '69, acting director of The Museum of Modern Art, he walked in and said, "This is terrible the way the members' roof has been hung. You have to get those pictures out, this can't be done. You've exchanged...," then he couldn't remember the artist's name anymore and he said, "Tell me, who is this by?" So that was an absolute tragedy for all of us at the Museum who admired him such a great deal. Let's face it, as wonderful as René d'Harnoncourt was--he was a wonderful organizer; he knew a great deal about South American art, primarily; he was a very charming man, which I believe Alfred was not, he would rather say nothing than talk with some people who he had to talk to at the Museum--Mr. Museum was Alfred Barr. I think the team of Alfred Barr and René d'Harnoncourt was an absolutely superb team. René d'Harnoncourt also appreciated Alfred and knew what he was good at, what he could do, and helped him in every possible way. There was never a fight between Alfred Barr and René d'Harnoncourt; there may have been a fight among the trustees or by people thinking there would be a fight, because Alfred Barr obviously never gave up his museum. It was his museum, which it was--not his money, but his museum.

SZ: Tell me a little bit more about the collections committee meetings. For instance, you were talking about his ability to find wonderful pictures, but wasn't it also said that things like the New York School he was slow to appreciate, and that there was friction between him and Stephen Clark over Matisse?

WB: Over Matisse, primarily; that was the whole thing. I remember sitting next to Stephen Clark as a guest--I was still a member of the Junior Council, not a trustee--on my first visit as a delegate from the Junior Council....

SZ: You were a delegate from the Junior Council to the collections committee?

WB: No, to the trustees' committee. I was a delegate to the collections committee, but also, I was the delegate to the trustees. I sat next to Stephen Clark, and I was a young man in my thirties, and Clark said, "Aren't Alfred's Matisse paintings terrible? I told Alfred to get rid of all those Matisse paintings in the Museum." He didn't say, "Don't you think so," but presumed that I would agree. I didn't dare say anything against Stephen Clark, so I hemmed and hawed, but I thought, My God, what's going on here? Obviously, Alfred Barr did not sell the pictures and obviously nobody else could have ever done so, but Stephen Clark resigned as a result. As a result of that, and I hate to say this, now that I'm chairman of the governing board of the Yale Art Gallery, we got these wonderful paintings which Alfred Barr had selected for Stephen Clark with Stephen Clark's idea that they would go to the Museum--the famous Picasso The First Steps; The Rooster, that big 1920s post-Cubist picture. The First Steps is the most outstanding picture in that group. But can you imagine what a man like Alfred Barr had to go through to survive these trustees? Stephen Clark was in his eighties by that time and there was some stubbornness of age, and when he made up his mind the Matisses were nothing, out! He was past the idea of recognizing that as a trustee of the Museum he had other responsibilities than his personal taste. But most everybody who worked with Alfred Barr learned to appreciate him. He didn't talk very much, but he made you look. For instance, he made all of us on the collections committee go around the Museum as it was hung and select our favorite and our least favorite picture, and, if possible, if you felt inclined to do so, to write a reasoning doubt. Being more or less the youngest person, I eagerly fell into that plan of his and really worked on it. I could not stand Max Ernst. Later on, I changed my mind, but Max Ernst never turned out to be my favorite Surrealist; he's not my favorite for many reasons. Then I said to Alfred, "Did you see...?" He said, "Oh, yes, I saw your notes. I didn't really worry much about what you liked or didn't like, I wanted you to look, and I knew if I made everybody on the committee go through the Museum and look at everything they liked or didn't like, they would be better members of our committee."

A wonderful idea. He definitely was sensitive to what the committee could do. He also was a man who always stood his ground. On very rare occasions did he willingly go and change his mind.

SZ: Can you think of one?

WB: I can't think of one, but I presume. Interestingly, about the American [Abstract] Expressionists, I do remember that he was not very eager. I think he was fairly late on Jackson Pollock but still was one of the first museum men who did buy. He was late on [Willem] de Kooning. He was earlier on [Mark] Tobey and [Philip] Guston. I do remember I bought a Jackson Pollock in the same year the Museum bought its first one, in 1950, not from Sidney Janis, but from the other dealer, Betty Parsons. I was offering a Rothko to the Museum. I moved to Europe late in 1959. Of course, I couldn't curatorially take care of it because Rothko had painted all the canvas around the frame so it was always exposed, the frame was no protection. I knew I couldn't keep it at home, I had to move to Europe, so eventually I gave the University of Illinois, because Alfred didn't want it. He did like [Arshile] Gorky, however; in fact, he was very interested. Obviously, for American art I always wonder whether Dorothy Miller might not have been the greater influence for American art. But for European art, for Picasso, for Cézanne, for Matisse, for Bonnard, he was right there in the forefront. Americans...I don't want to make it out as though he did not agree, because we did quite a lot, but we could have built up a Pollock collection in those days just like we built up a Picasso and a Matisse collection, but it didn't happen. He was not aggressively against it.

SZ: How did he and Dorothy Miller relate, especially in this?

WB: At first, Dorothy was sort of his assistant. I think they did really quite well because he gave her more or less a free hand with her exhibitions of American artists, all these many marvelous shows. I remember Morris Graves, who was, I think, the first American artists the Museum discovered; Jasper Johns was, of course, much later, but the Museum gave the first show to him and really discovered him. Another parallel to that, they took people who are better than we think they are but who did not have success, like [Pierre] Soulages and [Lee] Bontecou, [Serge] Poliakoff. I'm not talking about the minor ones. Again, the Europeans...Alfred was intent upon getting us the best [Constantin] Brancusi collection that he possibly could. He was very important for [Alberto] Giacometti.

SZ: Wasn't Giacometti another one that Stephen Clark did not like?

WB: No, Giacometti hadn't gotten to the forefront yet. I'm sure Stephen Clark wouldn't have liked him, but, by that time, Stephen Clark had gone.

SZ: I thought I had read that.

WB: You see, early Giacometti was the Surrealist Giacometti, but Giacometti as we know it, the elongated figures, really came up after Stephen Clark retired from the board.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2

SZ: Anything else you can tell me about Dorothy Miller?

WB: Yes, but one thing more I wanted to say about Alfred Barr is that he, for instance, was not terribly interested in drawings and watercolors, and I know that Bill Lieberman always complained to me that he didn't have the chance of bringing drawings forward to the committee or getting the funds. If you are really concentrated on Picasso paintings you don't necessarily at that same moment worry about the illustrated book of Madame Lefaux's David? Picasso's oeuvre is that of a man who could practically do everything. You need one person just to take care of Picasso in the Museum because there's nothing that you could look up and say, Hey, look what Chicago bought or what Boston bought. The Museum of Modern Art was the first in almost every single case, except for one relatively small collection built with relatively little money, and that was the Société Anonyme. Mrs. [Katherine] Dreier bought [Marcel] Duchamp, which eventually came to Yale because for a while nobody else wanted it. But that was the only other collection of contemporary art in the country, so everybody looked to Alfred Barr, and Alfred Barr had to develop himself. He could not look around at all.... The directors of museums today, all they have to do is look at the catalogues of every other museum and they know what's missing. Very few of them are willing to do that. It's one of my arguments with The Museum of Modern Art. I never particularly liked this idea of filling in when we don't have a Picasso or Matisse or, for that matter, a Juan Gris from the year 1924, we only have one from 1923. I was always eager that we should buy the contemporary things, because I always said buying new work is the least expensive way for a museum to build its collection. Even if you are wrong, if you are right thirty-five percent of the time, you have it made, because you know what happens to prices. But if something is established internationally, the best pictures are gone, and for the best, prices are out of sight. Anyway, Alfred was the inspiration for going out and buying things that nobody even had thought of. I remember even at the end of his life, his picking up an artist I was not particularly eager for, but I liked [Renato] Guttuso, the Italian who became a communist and had to give up his abstract painting because of the communist dogma. I think he was--he's dead now--a good artist. Alfred Barr brought him into the Museum. Obviously, his [Barr's] influence on Nelson Rockefeller's collection, as far as sculpture is concerned, was great--the Henry Moores, and for the Museum, the buying of Matisse's Backs. It's not that you say, "I have a Matisse sculpture and the Museum has the Backs, now I need a cast, too." MoMA had the cast first and then everybody else wanted one. Dorothy Miller was, I think, concentrating primarily on American art. As such, she must have put a great deal of work into it, but she was not active on the collections committee. She curated the show, of, let's say, Fourteen Americans or Fifteen Americans, and then she picked the works for the Museum and then presented them to Alfred, who, if he agreed, presented them to the committee, who then okayed the purchases. But I think Dorothy very rarely appeared or defended a picture in front of the collections committee.

SZ: Alfred would do that.

WB: Alfred would always do that. You see, Dorothy and Bill Lieberman didn't, because they were not really in decisionmaking positions. Alfred was. It was his committee.

SZ: Just give me an idea of what a typical meeting of that committee would be like.

WB: We were sitting around the table.

SZ: In the trustees' room?

WB: Yes, usually in the trustees' room, although sometimes we had to go next door because maybe it was prepared for some function, so there was an extension towards 53rd Street. We sat there and then we got our agenda. We didn't even know, sometimes, what was going to be shown. Then pictures were coming up, right then and there; we didn't have a chance to look at them beforehand, except in some cases when there were pictures out of shows which had been at the Museum, so obviously some of the things we knew. In my mind there was never a great deal of doubt. I never had the problem Stephen Clark had about a specific artist. But in some cases, for instance, I remember I proposed the first de Kooning for the Museum. I had even arranged to buy it for MoMA. I saw it and they said, "Yes, bring it up," so I arranged to have it brought up. It was eight hundred dollars, a big thing, twice as big as the painting back there, and it was turned down.

SZ: You had seen it and you had liked it.

WB: I liked it. I saw it in de Kooning's studio. I must say, that was not my genius. Tom Hess said, "I tell you, you have to go." You know Tom Hess? At one time de Kooning couldn't pay his rent, seventy dollars a month, for his loft. I remember going to a dinner at Mrs. Katherine Deutsch's in Greenwich, and Tom Hess came with a portfolio under his arm and said, "I don't want you to leave tonight without each one of you buying at least one drawing by de Kooning-they all cost between fifteen and twenty-five dollars--because he needs to pay his rent." So I think we got together four hundred dollars that night so he could pay his rent for four months. Alfred, as you said, quite likely would not have done that.

SZ: So the de Kooning....

WB: The de Kooning was brought in and it was sent out again. Same thing with [Conrad] Marca-Relli. I proposed Marca-Relli. Eventually, Marca-Relli was bought. Eventually, de Kooning was bought, outstanding de Koonings were bought, but not on the first try, because Alfred had really not spent any time thinking about de Kooning or Marca-Relli or even [Jackson] Pollock. He thought about Jasper Johns later on, very much so, and [Franz] Kline and [Frank] Stella and, I would say, [Piero] Dorazio or Clyfford Still, later on. I mean, it all came later. It took him some time to get into American art. He was never aggressively against it, but, quite often, I had the feeling the things he didn't like did not show up really because there simply wasn't enough time. After you sat there for three hours were in those meetings, nothing would interest you anymore.

SZ: For instance, with that de Kooning painting, were you then called upon to explain why you liked it?

WB: No. We didn't have time, and I was, after all, not a staff member.

SZ: So people would just look at it and then there would be a vote?

WB: Yes. The fact that it even was shown was, I think, courtesy to me in that case. I thought Dorothy Miller probably might have been in favor of it, but she probably wasn't at the meeting. Of course, she probably knew already that Alfred didn't like it, so she thought she'd better not show up.

SZ: What about for a picture that Alfred liked or maybe one that Alfred had brought to the committee--how would that go?

WB: There would certainly be a big discussion, but those pictures, the discussion was more about finances--for instance, like when Mrs. Resor decided to give her Klee, that discussion was a special thing. But then, naturally, we had this fund, the Guggenheim--of course, all the big pictures were given by Mrs. [Simon] Guggenheim--so they were brought up and Alfred proposed that they should be bought using the Guggenheim funds because Mrs. Guggenheim always said that as long as she was alive she was trying to give us one or two pictures every year, but once she was dead, there was no way of doing anything because she said actually she had no money, she only could spend the income out of the trust fund she was entitled to. Alfred was very open to Klee, for instance. He was not, in the beginning, so open to [Wassily] Kandinsky, and I know he was not very happy with a lot of the German Expressionists. Therefore, they came a little bit late into the collection. I remember I proposed a Franz Marc that I had seen in Munich, and it was turned down, I couldn't even come to the meeting. Also, there was a question of the money it would have cost--thirty-five thousand dollars at that time--and two weeks later, Alfred caught me and said, "I've thought it over again. I think we ought to get this picture over here, I think we should buy it. Can you arrange to have it here?" I called, but, unfortunately, it was gone. It was bought by a museum in Munich, the city museum, the Lehnbach museum. The same thing with Kandinsky; I think he was a little late in getting the early Kandinsky. We did eventually get this series of panels. Alfred was early on [Fernand] Léger, and many others, so you cannot expect him to be enthusiastic on everything. But there was not ever any contretemps, any difficulty. It was always a question of whether he didn't really like it that well, because he did consider the Museum as his.

SZ: One of the committee's issues would be the finances involving something that you would want to acquire. What about works that were being donated? Did you also pass on those because they were up to collection standards?

WB: Oh, yes. In those days, things were still very, very pure in spirit. I remember one of the most beautiful pictures was Broadway Boogie Woogie by [Piet] Mondrian, which was proposed; it belonged to the husband of the secretary of our Junior Council. There was a big, big discussion whether we should buy it for the Museum because he wanted twenty thousand dollars for it and had only paid sixteen thousand dollars for it. In those days, that was still an issue. You could not sell something to the Museum if you were connected with the Museum at anything more than the price you paid for it. I remember the remark, "Well, at least let's give them a certificate." The Museum could still say, "Yes, it's worth twenty thousand dollars."

SZ: You mean it's donated, but it's worth this.

WB: Yes. So that he could deduct the difference between the sixteen thousand dollars and the twenty thousand dollars for income-tax purposes. So the seller did get almost his price, as in those days we did pay higher taxes, it was pretty good. That was from

John Senior, Jr., I think that was his name. Nowadays, he wouldn't even think about this. I did like the certain purity. Don't forget, Alfred had a lousy salary. Only later on, as part of the second fundraising drive, was a pension set up for him. His salary was outrageous. I think a secretary would have gotten just as much.

SZ: And he never would ask for it.

WB: No, no, no, no. Eventually, pension for him and then for everybody. I think it was the second fundraising drive when reasonably good pensions [were established]. Luckily for all the curators, they did get as presents from artists quite a number of works of art, and you were allowed to keep them in the beginning. The first problem was, "Yes, you can keep it, but then [if it was important] you have to donate it or leave it in your will," which was the agreed thing. But still, things were not as tight. Also, things were not as valuable. Actually, today, when you suddenly think a [Roy] Lichtenstein drawing is worth five hundred thousand dollars, if somebody gets that as a present for making a show or doing anything else, obviously it would be an issue--in every museum. It's not unique to The Museum of Modern Art. I think The Museum of Modern Art has as good a morality in this field as any museum I can think of--I think better than some of the other museums in this country. I don't want to cast aspersions on others, but I do think quite often, not at The Museum of Modern Art, that trustees consider one of the main functions of a museum was to help them build up their own collections, which I don't think The Museum of Modern Art did or needed, because even though the curators helped the trustees, it didn't matter. I remember when Bill Lieberman and I negotiated for the Alice Toklas-Gertrude Stein collection for the five or six [trustees]--for David Rockefeller, Nelson Rockefeller, Jock Whitney, Bill Paley, André Meyer, maybe somebody else--nobody else would have bought them, and I bet you half of those pictures eventually landed at The Museum of Modern Art and another third or quarter of them, at least another substantial number landed at other museums, so it was still a proper thing to do because there was no way the Museum at that time could put up six or seven million dollars to buy the whole Toklas-Stein [collection].

SZ: It was just another version of, as you say, Alfred's picking out and buying something for someone with the understanding it would be left.

WB: Exactly. Usually, or many times, it worked, but, I notice, as people get older, they become more crotchety and if they promised, they might afterwards not remember what they'd promised or they have the idea, What the hell do I care about what I said yesterday? [LAUGHING]

SZ: So, what's the answer? Get it in writing?

WB: I think so. I think, for instance, when Bill Lieberman and I were involved in buying the Alice Toklas collection for these trustees, I said, as chairman of the committee on painting and sculpture, after Jim Soby retired, I said I didn't really want to work on this unless I get in writing a definite okay that at least one picture would either be given or left in the will of each one of the six groups that were going in, and they all agreed with that. Only then I thought I had the justification, as a collector but not in the league of buying those sorts of pictures, to go out of my way and start buying pictures for the group I mentioned. But they were naturally incredibly generous with art, which to my mind is always more important than money. Think of what Bill Paley has done now, his estate--all eighty-two pictures, I believe, have gone to The Museum of Modern Art from the estate.

SZ: Anything else about the collections committee, acquisitions, that you can think of?

WB: Only one thing, that many of the other departments got short shrift, simply because there wasn't enough time. That was the reason the [acquisitions] committees were separated. I don't know how the other committees work, like the photography and architecture and design [committees], because, when I was a trustee, the only time we noticed acquisitions was when a selection was presented at a trustees meeting. [INTERRUPTION]

SZ: I wanted to talk a little bit about the painting and sculpture department, that you were called in to "fix it." Maybe you can give me whatever background you need to on that.

WB: It was a very simple thing. I was not active in the painting and sculpture department while Alfred Barr was there, except as a member of the committee and got to know everybody, we talked about things, but I had nothing to do with organization, except occasionally I was asked, for instance, to sell some duplicates in Europe. I forgot who this very nice girl was, who moved away from the Museum after Alfred left, who for years and years and years kept our records in the painting and sculpture department, and she knew everything. I'm sure you will find her record.

SZ: Betsy Jones?

WB: Betsy Jones, yes. She asked me whether I could find things to sell. They wanted to raise some money for it and I was able to work out things to sell in Europe. That taught me one thing, that it is always a mistake for a museum to sell pictures unless you have exactly a swap or something better by the same artist, because, you wouldn't believe it, how much we sold, and today are very sorry, I'm very sorry that we sold some works by [Henri] Michaux. Now, Michaux was not very popular, but suddenly, looking back, Michaux becomes, to my mind, very important. I'm thinking of Marino Marini; I didn't mind selling his pictures. I don't think there was a strength. But I think we even sold one sculpture that was very good. We should have kept it. More important, I think, were paintings by [Christian] Bérard which I sold. I didn't sell them exactly; I negotiated the sale. They were sold at auction in Europe. I think the great danger of selling works of art that one doesn't like at a certain moment in time is that one should consider that a collection transcends the lifetime of the collector, whether it's a curator or a trustee, and one's taste changes, too, and one suddenly realizes how important it is. For instance, a lot of pictures by German Expressionists were sold after Alfred Barr [left the Museum]. Don't forget, he did not sell them, except in one case, and I did not think that that was a wise move. I thought, on the contrary, we should have strengthened this section, or they should have been sold for something by the same artist. That's why I think the German Expressionist collection at the Museum is somewhat weak. You have that fabulous Kirchner which was sold, but it was the only time I was involved in selling. I had nothing to do with the big auction sale; that was around 1950 or whatever it was, which was justified in some cases but which was not a good idea. I notice it today, since I have been very active with the Yale [University] Art Gallery, I said one vote against selling should be like a veto. A majority should be enough to buy, because if you buy, you have to have the money, and if worst comes to worst, there are ways to raise money; but if you sell something it is permanently gone. Therefore, a vote against selling by one member of the committee should be enough. One vote should be enough to make people think twice and not sell or to at least bring it up before the committee several times more if you want to sell it. For instance, The Museum of Modern Art has one specific case--it's one of the reasons, basically, why I resigned as a trustee, other than the fact that I was living in Europe too much and couldn't attend the trustee meetings--it was the sale of a very late pastel of two dancers by [Edgar] Degas which had been given by Bill Paley that was to be sold for purchasing a Brancusi, an enormous rooster, that was supposed to be cast in stainless steel. It never worked, it never was done, but the picture eventually was sold. I was chairman of the committee [on painting and sculpture] and I didn't think too much about it. I wasn't aware of the problem of why it shouldn't be sold, until a friend of mine, who later became my successor as chairman of the painting and sculpture and drawings [committee], called me and said, "Walter, I think we made a mistake. We should not have approved the sale of that pastel unless you have another one of the same period in the wings from other trustees, because it is, after all, let's face it, for The Museum of Modern Art much more important because of its influence on twentieth-century art than the few other Degas which we may like better out of the nineteenth century. I think it is a very important link to the whole beginning of what happened later." He told me about it and it appealed to me and I thought it made sense, so I called Bill Rubin and Dick Oldenburg and said, "I think George Hamilton's reason is correct and I don't think we should sell it." They said, "Well, it's already been approved by the board of trustees." "It hasn't been sold and if there's good reasoning for it, I think the trustees could just reverse themselves. What difference does it make? If it's already been sold, that's something else, but it's still here." Then this big argument went on, but they wouldn't bring it up for discussion anymore, so I said that I would resign as chairman of the committee, because I feel that to be a member of the committee, you should have the right to think about what one has voted on, because it goes very fast and one should be very, very careful. That's when I set up the rule for myself. One reasoned vote against a sale should be a veto; for purchasing, a simple majority should be enough. That's my philosophy since that time and that's the reasoning for it. I think we did sell too many things. I knew it was very hard to get the money together, but I think it might have been sometimes better not to put all the new purchases into the collection and keep, particularly, things which at the moment don't look so great, like the French postwar school at the moment, like Soulages, etc. Think, after all, for a museum, how very important it is, the second-generation French, and some of the individual works come out surprisingly strong. Remember when all the Tiffany glass at the Museum was sold and then had to be bought back later in smaller quantity at infinitely higher prices. That's what I felt was a problem, that painting and sculpture was so desperate to buy new things but didn't think out completely what one was really giving up, just because one didn't like it at the moment. My philosophy was, for instance, if you had had ten paintings by [Karl] Schmidt-Rottluff, okay, sell two, but I think, except for one I gave, we sold every other Schmidt-Rottluff at the Museum. In retrospect I don't think that was a wise decision, even though I approved it, I was part of the committee. Since that time, I've become more careful. My relationship to the Museum committee on painting and sculpture became much stronger when Alfred Barr resigned fast as his Alzheimer's was taking over and they had to find somebody to pinch-hit, so they called me and asked whether I would be willing to take over from Alfred Barr and be a nominal head of the department until they could find somebody else.

SZ: He was head of Museum Collections, that's what it was called. But I guess it had been a while since he was really acquiring....

WB: Exactly, and the very logical reason why I was doing it, because it's very hard and I know that you cannot promote somebody from within and then demote them again later, even though they go into the new position knowing that somebody else would take over the job, it was fairly much of an emergency, so I was officially the titular head but did not have much to say, because I think at that time Dorothy Miller and then Bill Rubin had taken control of the department....

SZ: So [Peter] Selz and [William C.] Seitz were both gone?

WB: Yes, Selz and Seitz were gone.

SZ: They had just left.

WB: Yes.

SZ: Do you know anything about their departure?

WB: Andrew Ritchie had also gone. Of course, he went to Yale. He was also a member of that department. In his case I think there were plenty of hard feelings. I don't know about Seitz so much because I think there was justification.

SZ: There was some story that there was a misunderstanding, that René d'Harnoncourt said something, but nobody seems either to know or to care to say.

WB: I think that was with Seitz, but I think Seitz, even though I liked him personally, was not a very efficient person. I don't think he could really hold the job the way he should. He had a great sensitivity toward painting and wrote a very good catalogue on [Claude] Monet at that time. Then he died. He may not have been well already at MoMA. I think Selz was a little bit too abrasive. Again, I think that happened because Alfred Barr wouldn't stand for this, and then he went to California, and I think Dorothy Miller wouldn't stand for this either, because he was more ambitious, he was also a person who would like to take over.

SZ: That was clear that early?

WB: Yes. But, in itself, why not? I don't have any objection to people who have ambitions to try to take over, and then, if it doesn't work, they go and make their future at some other institution. It is nothing negative for their character. There are certain institutions who cannot afford to have kings and princes. You might have one king, or one chief and then a lot of Indians. So, as I say, I was involved in that for a while.

SZ: I guess it hadn't happened yet, but there was some talk of putting...painting and sculpture had been split up. There was acquisitions and then there was exhibitions....

WB: Exactly, but that was done without Alfred Barr's approval, and then later on, in '68, when I became acting director for a year, it had not yet been done properly because it simply didn't work, because the loyalties...people had to obviously work in both departments, and those things never work unless you have a clear-cut head of a department. After all, the trustee committees or outside committees have more of a control function; their job is not to run the Museum. We have it at Yale, too; the council should give advice but the staff should run the museum. The council should give advice and maybe put a veto in, sort of like the outside members of the board of directors of a corporation. I think it's asking too much from a businessman or an artist or anybody else, a housewife, to be on a committee and do more than specifically listen to the arguments that are presented why a work of art should be bought. Ask, for instance, have we got the money in the bank? Is this the best picture by the artist? Do the prices compare to other things on the market? Why did we buy it there? Why is this the only thing available? Then express your personal opinion, I like it or I don't like it. But basically, the outside committee members are not really equipped to make a serious decision. That's why I feel, coming back to this deaccessioning/accessioning of a picture, if you make a mistake in voting "I like it" and afterwards you kick yourself around the block, "Why did I do such a foolish thing?," no great harm done; but if you sell something, great harm may be done. When the split-up really came, just about the time that Alfred Barr did resign, or, rather, had to resign, then the great tragedy, as you know, happened. René d'Harnoncourt had to find a successor for himself. He found Bates Lowry, and I think the only reason I was asked to pinch-hit after Bates Lowry left the Museum was because I was the only person who had expressed doubts whether he could do the job. That was very simple, I had inquired among some of my friends with CRIA [Committee for the Rescue of Italian Art] in Europe and other places, and they just didn't think he had the administrative ability.

SZ: So you had new credibility.

WB: I had new credibility [LAUGHING]. I may have met him, but I had no judgment of my own, but I did hear he had run afoul of quite a number of people in previous positions.

SZ: You talked about your part in seeing him out last time, but I just wanted to ask you one question, that I guess Grace Glueck said that John de Menil said, which was that the staff had done him in, and whether you thought that was valid.

WB: No, absolutely not valid. No, I think it was really clear-cut, the fact that he did not have administrative control and the board of trustees fired him. Otherwise, if staff had finished him off, he would have had some inkling, he would have had some enemies. He didn't have any enemies on the staff. Maybe they felt that he was possibly a little too easy-going or a little bit too flamboyant. He enjoyed his position.

SZ: High-handed was a word that was used to me.

WB: Yes, maybe, but he did not have the knowledge, for instance, that he could do anything to Arthur Drexler or to Willard Van Dyke or to Bill Lieberman or to Riva Castleman. He wouldn't dream of doing anything. There was a period when we just had the money drive behind us and we had established the international center for art [International Study Center] and had hired Anne Hansen to do it then had no money to run the department, no space, no anything. There, for instance, in hiring Anne Hansen and getting this international center worked up, this should not have happened. He should have looked around and asked, "How can I run it? Where is the space and where are the people, and how can I finance it?" How to run it and how to finance it--he was out of his depth. That you might call high-handed, that he made decisions in that sphere, but I don't think he made decisions interfering in the individual departments. I know he didn't. I don't know what happened between him and Bill Rubin, I can't say, but I doubt it, really, because otherwise he would not have had the surprise. But there were so many programs that were going to happen, all with this great amount of money they had raised, and although the amount of money was that great that they could do it, they didn't have all the space and all that. He may have been high-handed toward Dick Koch, for instance, because Dick Koch was the one who was supposed to keep the thumb on the money in the bank and he probably would have had to argue with him, "Hey, Bates, you can't do this." I'm sure that Wilder Green, who was working with him at that time, had to take quite a bit of saying, "Well, let's do it this way," but it did not affect the basic operations of the Museum. I know that because, after all, I worked very closely afterwards, when I took over from Bates Lowry, with Wilder Green and Dick Koch, and I would have known what would have happened. I would say the only crisis we had was the departure of Bates Lowry, which we discussed last time. The big other crisis was [INTERRUPTION] the Bill Lieberman-Bill Rubin problem, and the third crisis was the whole revolution that was in the air, since 1968, the student uprising at Columbia...and then women's rights and union's rights, that was all during that time.

SZ: So we'll do that next.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SZ: We just talked about the two other crises that you had to deal with. Why don't we start with the two Bills.

WB: The crisis of the two Bills was obviously the most difficult one, and it lasted way past my eleven-month tenure. I had known Bill [Lieberman] for a long time and knew that he was excellent, not a scholar like Bill Rubin, but he knew a great deal, had very good connections and as far as I was concerned, he could run the department of drawings and watercolors and prints--in those days it was combined--in a very efficient way. I thought, since I did not get along with Bill Rubin right from the beginning, that he [Lieberman] would be better to run the department, and let Bill Rubin do the exhibitions and have them be on a parallel basis. Bill Rubin wanted to do the collection; he said that Alfred Barr had put him into that, had hired him for that reason. I checked with others: there was no truth to that at all.

SZ: It wasn't true?

WB: No, because Dorothy Miller said that to me, and I spoke to Mrs. Barr about this also because I was curious: what exactly did Alfred Barr have in mind? He was most disappointed in Bill Rubin because he was trying to change the Museum, and that's what I was afraid of, too, that Bill Rubin was going to change the Museum. I think Bill Rubin is very knowledgeable, has an enormous amount of energy and drive, or had an enormous amount of energy and drive, to do all this, but he was a person that if he didn't get his way, he just talked you to death. There was no way of arguing with him on any subject whatsoever, even the question of whether we should have fish or meat for lunch. He was an extremely difficult person to get along with. I got along with Bill Lieberman much better. Eventually, and you wouldn't believe it, I did manage to have the two Bills agree that, as far as their relative positions were concerned, Bill Rubin's would have been more like a staff position, writing and doing exhibitions, and Bill Lieberman would run the department. But all that, though very neatly agreed, was very difficult. I remember a lovely story. Bill Rubin came into my office and absolutely hit the ceiling, and I said, "Now, Bill, before you do anything more, how about a Librium?" And he took the Librium out of my hand and took it [LAUGHING]. "Let's wait a few minutes and I'm sure you'll feel better." It really was a highly tense situation.

SZ: What was the dynamic between the two of them?

WB: Both were jockeying for position, who was going to be the boss. Bill Rubin always said, "Bill Lieberman doesn't have a Ph.D."--I don't think he has--"and I'm the only person here at The Museum of Modern Art who has a Ph.D. I'm the only one who really is entitled to do these things. I am the successor to Alfred Barr." I said, "Who says you are the successor to Alfred Barr? I'm sure you're a great scholar, you're a good teacher and you want to write books, all these things, but I don't think you have ever had an administrative job before." Bill Lieberman always had an administrative job, whether or not he did it exceptionally well, but certainly for thirty-five years he did run the thing; he did do the shows, he did do everything and kept everything under control. His problem was that he was so in love with the Museum, Bill Lieberman was, that he always.... I remember I had to save myself whenever he came to visit us at home always before I knew it he would see something and say, "Walter, we really need that for the Museum. Can I take it along?" I wanted to make damn sure he wouldn't take something particularly valued by me. If I argued, he wouldn't argue, he wouldn't insist, but he was definitely the type, the Museum was everything for him. So you can see that Bill Lieberman was high-strung and is high-strung, and Bill Rubin was high-strung, so to have the two work together.... Obviously, the trustees wanted to have both of them, and neither one of them wanted to give in to the other. So I had this rather tentative situation, but we had about three months of peace and quiet and I was quite happy, until the most outrageous thing happened. We obviously had a budget crunch. [INTERRUPTION] That was the period of the Stein show, that marvelous Gertrude Stein show, which was an absolutely great show [Four Americans in Paris: The Collections of Gertrude Stein and Her Family]. That was just the time when John Hightower relieved me. I think John Hightower was the greatest mistake by far, outweighing the mistake of Bates Lowry. It was just hell. I was not asked whether I would approve of John Hightower or not. I said he should be capable, but what a disaster he was for the Museum. It only became clear when he was there. The first thing he did when he was hired and I said to him, "You're supposed to take over in about two weeks. What would you like me to do, what would you like to know about what's going on in the Museum? I'm at your disposal to talk about it." He said, "I think the best thing is I'd rather have you not look over my shoulder. Would you please not go up past the third floor of the Museum after I'm there?" I said, "Fine, I'm perfectly happy to do that." After he had taken over, I did protect his job once. There was a question of whether we should close the Museum in solidarity with black or other minority artists. He wanted to do that, and the trustees did not want to do it. I was a trustee, and I also knew from Bill Paley that that was the last thing they wanted to do; they did not want to get themselves involved in some sort of a political thing like that. Single-handedly, he then did the opposite: he kept the Museum open on the day when it was officially closed in order to have the people who could not go to the other museums come to The Museum of Modern Art, and in that way have this as a sign of solidarity with the crowd. I don't know what he had in mind, but he decided to announce that without checking with the president of the Museum, which was Bill Paley. I protected him because nobody crosses Bill Paley without getting hurt somewhat. I said, "He's new and he didn't understand quite what your instructions were as far as declaring solidarity with the black artists. I think he didn't quite understand. He thought, since one you did not want the Museum to close, he made a point of showing solidarity by inviting everybody in free of charge." I think one did not have to pay an entrance fee on that one day. He had wanted to make some sort of a show. Bill Paley forgave him, but from that moment on, I knew that things wouldn't work.

SZ: He was destined for....

WB: Disaster. Within the first four weeks of his being at the Museum, he challenged the authority of the president. At that time, it wasn't Blanchette Rockefeller, but to challenge the authority of Bill Paley, this couldn't end well.

SZ: You were telling me about the Stein show and the budget cuts.

WB: The idea was that Bill Rubin had made an application that he wanted to only work a partial year like the university year, which was eight months out of the year, and then he would be willing to take two months without salary and two months as vacation, and that he would use these two months to write a big book. I don't know what he wanted to write about, but that seemed to me quite a sensible idea, because if he was really doing primarily writing and working on specific exhibitions, that would work rather well. Before John Hightower took over, I didn't say that it was a good idea, but I was going to recommend it to Bill Paley that we might save money that way, because he wanted us to cut the budget of the department by x; I don't know how much. I didn't think about it further. I told it to John Hightower and Dick Koch knew all about it and Bill Lieberman had known about it. After John Hightower took over, he called Bill Rubin in to him and said, "Discuss your specific job, tell what you're doing. Bill Lieberman suggested that, in view of your writing plans, that we reduce your salary by twenty-five percent." At that moment, had there been a window, I'm sure he would have been out. He [Rubin] raced downstairs to where Bill Lieberman was installing the Stein show. He was doing something quite smart. I remember he always had a wheelchair in which he'd go around and install; it's awfully strenuous otherwise--hard on your feet to install a show. He said, "Is that what you call a budget, with you suggesting that my salary be cut? How much is your salary going to be cut?" Bill Lieberman called me after this and said, "My god, what can I do? You were present and Dick Koch was present." I said, "Yes, so what you do now is call Dick Koch, because I can't do that for you. He was present, so discuss it with him and see whether your statement is correct, ask for a meeting with John Hightower and Dick Koch and, if possible, if he will go, Bill Rubin, in the offices of John Hightower, and have Dick Koch explain the story of how this whole thing about cutting two months' leave of absence out of it came about." They did have the meeting, and Dick Koch did confirm what I said, but peace was absolutely not to be, because John Hightower's system was to sow unrest among the staff, to rule by pitting people against each other, he said, "Isn't that what we said before? That your salary would be cut by twenty-five percent?" But it was not supposed to be cut; he was supposed to get a leave of absence to write a book, on which he would earn a royalty theoretically. As a result, it was terrible. Bill Rubin did win out in the end and Bill Lieberman was relegated to write certain things and do a certain number of shows. I had said to Bill Lieberman when I left six or four months earlier, "Bill, if I'm not there anymore, you're going to have one hell of a time at the Museum. Figure out what you can do. Isn't there another job you could get?" Luckily, that job opened at the Metropolitan Museum and they were delighted to get him to be the director of the department of twentieth-century art, because Henry Geldzahler had decided to retire and become parks commissioner or something like that.

SZ: Commissioner of cultural affairs.

WB: I said at that time to Dick Oldenburg, "You are making a great mistake for the Museum, because you're letting one of your most important fundraisers and collection-getters out of the Museum, a man who is a hundred and fifty percent loyal. He may not be pleasant many times, but he is a hundred and fifty percent loyal to The Museum of Modern Art. He's never had another job in his life; he went from graduate school straight to the Museum. You don't know what you're doing, and there is nothing worse than somebody spurned. Now, if he goes to the Metropolitan Museum, he will have to say to them, 'I will show them, I will show them, I will show them.' That, I think, is a great, great mistake. Bill Rubin, after all, did say that he did want to do more writing." A few years later, Bill Rubin was trying to maneuver himself out of administration by putting Kirk Varnedoe in as his successor, still keeping control of it. I think it turned out to be a great mistake. Maybe Bill Lieberman may have been untenable, but, except for the job at the Metropolitan, where he got the most unbelievable collections--the Gelman and Heinz Berggruen collections, and many others. He was very close to [Walter] Annenberg. All the things he's gotten. I don't like his space up there; I don't know why he got the hundred Klees from Berggruen. Things like that. God knows, he's got the greatest collection of [Egon] Schiele drawings. I don't like his space up there; I think that there's an architectural problem, because it's out of proportion, some of it.

SZ: They're redoing that now anyway.

WB: Yes.

SZ: Let me go back. You said maybe Bill Lieberman would have been untenable. Why is that?

WB: Because of Bill Rubin. If there had been the two of them, everything would have been in turmoil. Maybe it was untenable to have Bill Lieberman and Bill Rubin. I think it was an armed truce that I was able to arrange; I think it might have worked, even though John Hightower brought the worst out in both of them, trying to pit them against each other.

SZ: Then let's go back to something else you said. From the beginning, or from the time you really started thinking about it, you were concerned that Bill Rubin was going to change the direction of the Museum and other people had the same concern. Was that a widely shared concern, and what does that mean, exactly?

WB: I think Bill Rubin is so ambitious. In business one could almost call him a megalomaniac, not in the psychiatric sense, but in the sense, "There are things to do, I want to do it, it's my job, I'm the boss." As such, to him the shadow of Alfred Barr was a deterrent. He didn't like it. He wanted the Museum to be known as the Bill Rubin museum and not anymore as the Alfred Barr museum. I think in that, luckily, he was not successful. He did not manage it, except for terrible things like the reframing of the collection. They look as if they were in a production line sequence. If I look at [Cézanne's] Château Noir, with that gilt frame with the little spots on it, I mean, that's just terrible. I have had it to here with this. Things like that. He had this one-track mind. Picasso, the relationship with Jacqueline, and he was doing well in that, but I feel the semi-paralysis in his back and the death of Jacqueline probably took the stuffing out of him, and I think he probably realized he could not change any more. Also, in contrast to Alfred Barr, he was not really very interested in contemporary art, which was a great mistake for the Museum. Bill Lieberman, with the good guidance and good help of people, could have been a very good man for contemporary art. Even though I don't quite agree with all his purchases for the Metropolitan Museum, he has an open mind, and I think anybody who would come to Bill Lieberman and say, "Don't you think this is important, can we do this?," he would have listened to them, while Bill Rubin wouldn't think of it. This is, I think, the great, great problem that we have had at The Museum of Modern Art, and I hope Kirk Varnedoe is different. I hope he will follow up the ideas of Alfred Barr, that The Museum of Modern Art should be a museum of modern art and modern art does not end in the year 2000 anymore than it ended in the year 1980 or something, nor will it end in the year 2010. If the Museum survives, it will be The Museum of Modern Art and, as such, has the responsibility to show and collect whatever happens to be going on. I know there's a space problem. We have a collection at Yale from one of our great donors of sixteen hundred paintings of contemporary American art. Now, this is a completely separate problem that can be solved maybe on the basis that the Whitney does it and the Guggenheim tries, although I don't think with the Guggenheim it is working, but the Whitney does with its branch museums at the Equitable [now closed] and at Philip Morris or in Stamford [now closed]. The Museum of Modern Art could have tried to loan to other institutions or help by setting up a department of long-term circulating exhibitions of contemporary art. But all that is not possible to my mind with a man like Bill Rubin. It's not a character flaw, it's purely not his interest; he has other interests. A lecture of his on certain aspects of Picasso is a fascinating lecture; he knows more than anybody I can think of. To my mind, it was a shame that there was no way of continuing the temporary truce between the two Bills. That was really John Hightower's problem, and that's why I feel John Hightower had this high-handed way and right from the beginning had a chip on his shoulder against the trustees. He started with a chip on his shoulder--why, I don't know.

SZ: Other than the way that played out, you think there's no other reason why Bill Rubin ended up on top of that?

WB: I think Dick Oldenburg was afraid of him. He was not afraid of Bill Lieberman, but he was afraid of Bill Rubin, for reasons I do not know, but I've had God knows how many lunches with him when he, practically in tears, complained about Bill Rubin. I said, "Look, if you cannot work with him and you don't feel he's good for the Museum, work out something with him. Have him become a senior advisor, give him the money to write books, do a few shows, and maybe, with his health problems and the fact that he built a house in the South of France, who knows? If you do it right, it probably can be done." He wouldn't dare, and that, I think, is the big problem. I don't think very many people would dare cross Bill Rubin. I think a lot of people were afraid of him, even among the trustees; maybe not physically afraid that he could do something to them, but afraid of his almost unbelievable need to persuade you. I don't know whether you saw the Lyndon Johnson series on public television. Lyndon Johnson needed to be loved, he had to have everybody on his side. "Why did that five percent vote against me?" Bill Rubin had such a basic insecurity that he could not stand having somebody not be of his opinion. I remember when I argued with him he would come back ten times to discuss the same subject, and I always said to him, "Bill, you have an opinion, I have an opinion. The end of the world isn't here. Let's forget it, let's go on to the next problem." Those were non-decision-making problems, that he'd try to convince me to do this and that, and I think this has been a very, very difficult thing, and I can only hope that Kirk Varnedoe has freed himself from that influence, that he can be his own man. I presume that he can, but that he can do what he thinks is right without having to worry about past history. John Elderfield, obviously, is absolutely in the line of Bill Rubin. John Elderfield is a very pleasant man, but he goes exactly in the line that Bill Rubin sets. He's really not particularly interested in contemporary art either. The only person there who is interested in it is, in the drawings department, Bernice Rose. Kynaston McShine is very interested in it. I don't think he's a good organizer; I think he also has problems with feeling "Why am I not number one?" That show Berlinart sort of knocked him for a loop, because, certainly, there are few shows, except for the first show of Kirk Varnedoe, which have been panned as badly as that, and unjustifiably so. It was a very good show, but I happen to know German art, so I know what went into it; but to put up a show [and to include] for each artist only one work of art usually is an impossibility. It's asking for trouble. So I think it's a big problem. Oldenburg, I had the privilege of hiring him during my year there to be in charge of the publications department. He's a very enjoyable man and all that and gets along very well with the trustees, but I think maybe he gets along with the trustees almost too well and does not really control the staff at the Museum so well. Maybe I'm so far removed now I don't know how he works. I love the shows, I love to go to the Museum, but I now go to it purely as an inveterate sightseer. I love to go whenever I have some visitors from abroad; it's the first stop on Monday morning, because that's the only time The Museum of Modern Art is open and the others are closed. Like everything else, it is a personality problem. I think Bill Rubin is a tough person to deal with. He's probably one of the best teachers and one of the best writers; he probably knows more than almost anybody else. But whether he's ideal to run a twentieth-century museum is another question. I mean, contemporary art does not end; every year, contemporary means one year later.

SZ: But that's what happened.

WB: Yes, as far as I'm concerned. I think it's interesting I didn't have much to do with the other departments. I obviously have had a great deal to do with Riva Castleman. She is an ideal museum person, even though I don't always agree with her taste in things. Her being a deputy director there is a very good thing, because I think she helps Dick

Oldenburg a great deal. She also has something which is dear to my accountant's heart--I'm basically a bookkeeper--she does not buy anything without knowing how to pay for it. [LAUGHTER] You never have that problem with Riva, and she does delegate a great deal in her department to the other girls, whether or not she agrees with them. I think she is a natural museum person, and the Museum is very lucky to have her on the staff, because I think she is a very strong and self-confident person and a person who can draw a lot of people in from the outside. I think there's a great loyalty to her, to her department. I almost wish that she also ran the Department of Drawings, because I think Bernice is a fabulous writer, does wonderful shows, but I think is not a happy person at the Museum. She told me once she doesn't want to do the administration without being actually in charge and she would rather not be in administration; she would rather do shows and write, which I fully understand. Elderfield, who I also like, I knew because he worked on the art committee for Bennington College--we were all fired by the director of Bennington College. Elderfield was very, very helpful, thoughtful, and a very nice guy, but I think Bernice has a tough row to hoe. Maybe it's her personality; maybe she's not aggressive enough, maybe she doesn't say, "Oh, well, if that's the way it is, I won't do it," or something like that, which is very hard, the politics. I know nothing about the successor to Arthur Drexler; I've never even met him. I liked Arthur Drexler, even though he was also a very difficult person. When I was the acting director at the Museum, I had these weekly staff meetings, and everybody had a brown paper bag for lunch, like we did today. I don't think that sat too well, but I said, "We haven't got the time to go out and have lunch. We have to try and use the time here because there are so many other things we have to do." So Arthur Drexler probably felt he was not given enough of his due, but actually, he ran his department very well, whatever people say. He was certainly not easy. Nelson Rockefeller said he learned all about politics at the Museum, and I'm sure Drexler was one of them he learned from, but his department worked.

SZ: Speaking of that, were you aware of the fact that he wanted to be director of the Museum?

WB: Sure! [LAUGHING] It was not possible to be unaware of it. When Bates Lowry was gone and the day I came--you weren't at the Museum then; that was in '69--I gave a cocktail party for everybody, the guards and all the staff. I came first and said, "I would like you all to come at six o'clock, just drinks and pretzels, nothing fancy, but I want to meet you all and I want to talk to everybody, I want to go around. A beautiful May day, I think it was. It was perfectly nice. As I was walking down from the third floor of the Museum--after all, they didn't have the new section yet--the first thing I see is the secretary of Bates Lowry. I didn't immediately take her on because I hadn't made my mind up what I was going to do. I also did not really feel like moving in to Bates Lowry's office. She came down and said, "I just wanted to let you know that Arthur Drexler just handed in his resignation." I said, "Oh, isn't that too bad. I'm awfully sorry." Then the secretary came down again and said, "Willard Van Dyke's just resigned from the Museum." I said, "Oh, isn't this just too bad." I got all the way down and I said to myself, "If they want to resign, the world doesn't come to an end. There's always somebody else who wants the job." Naturally, at that time I did not know that each one had its group of trustees. Then I immediately got calls. I'd also invited many of the active trustees to be there, too, if they wanted to come. They said, "You can't let Arthur Drexler go." I said, "I didn't let Arthur Drexler go. He decided to resign." It was, I think, Mrs. Parkinson who said, "I'll speak to Arthur Drexler." By the end of the cocktail party the resignations had been withdrawn, and Willard Van Dyke came by next day or something like that. That was the way it had to be done. It was a very difficult thing. I'd never realized how difficult it was to be acting director. You see, the reason I did not want to be director, why I also liked to be chairman of the managing committee of Wilder Green [Dick Koch and myself] was because I did not want this to develop into a permanent position. Secondly, the reason I was asked to do it was, again, the situation of, if you had promoted Arthur Drexler, you could not have demoted him again. It would have been much worse. That's why I said, when Bill Paley spoke to me about it, "We can't promote Arthur Drexler, we can't promote John Szarkowski." You could not, obviously, promote Bill Lieberman or Bill Rubin. Riva Castleman had not yet reached the level of consideration, so it would have been only Willard Van Dyke. We could not promote anybody. It was a tragedy. Alfred Barr was in the hospital and René d'Harnoncourt had been killed by a drunken driver. That's why I pinch-hit; I was told it was for three months and it turned out to be nine months. It would have been ten months or more if it hadn't been for John Hightower being hired.

SZ: But you didn't want to do it on a permanent basis?

WB: No.

SZ: That was never a question?

WB: David Rockefeller always wanted me to do it, but I said, "I can't. I have an active business. Until I sell my business...." "Well, can't we buy your business?" I said, "You can indeed." Then I had all hell to pay because suddenly he asked the Chase bank to see what they could do, and before I knew it, there was a newspaper article, "What was this plant that was for sale in Germany?" Everybody knew it must have been our plant, and you know, there's nothing worse you can do for your customers than to suddenly announce that you want to sell. You announce after it's been sold. Anyway, I sold it many, many years later, in '84. It didn't really work, but it was not that hard, between Wilder Green and Dick Koch and me, to really run the Museum on a routine basis because, even though we had the problem of unionization, we had the problem of the black wing, we had the problem of women artists and all that, but those were all problems which you can deal with. I asked everybody to tell me or Wilder Green or Dick Koch immediately if a television crew came up to the Museum, because then we knew that in half an hour something unpleasant was going to happen [LAUGHTER], either nude bathing in the pool, or that fellow who later became the art gallery [owner] who had these ox-blood bladders under his heavy painting clothes in front of the Guernica.

SZ: Tony Shafrazi.

WB: Yes. He's a gallery owner now. All these things happened during my interregnum, but it was not so incredibly difficult. It was the time element, because I had to go to Europe on the morning flight, arrive late in the evening at the airport and ask all business people to meet me at the Orly Hilton for a conference the next morning at eight o'clock, and I flew back that night from Orly to New York. When I had to run the Museum meetings I made a rule and said, because my feet get cold from the [lack of] circulation, that if the cold reached beyond my knee, I was going to go home. Anyway, that all happened during this year. It was an interesting experience.

SZ: You were in the middle, as you said, of a very exciting and somewhat confusing time politically.

WB: We had the period, for instance, in the film department about what films could they show. You see, there were a lot of rather indecent, hard-to-take films that came in from Japan, and so I was supposed to then decide whether they could be shown. I figured out nobody had control. There could be a ten-year-old person or a twelve-year-old person [in the Museum theater], and we simply didn't have the right. So I had to figure this out, and I said, "Those films we cannot show with the general admission. We have to somehow make them available by invitation only and do it after-hours or something like that. We cannot have them as part of the regular programming." I also remember we were asked for a copy of the famous [D. W.] Griffith movie Birth of a Nation by a rather activist, aggressive Harlem group, and whether I would say it was okay to give it to them. I said, "Who are they?" I had forgotten what all Birth of a Nation contained.

SZ: It was about the Ku Klux Klan.

WB: Yes, exactly, and they wanted to show this as a rallying point of how terrible the white people were. I had a very great difficulty in making the decision. I didn't want the Museum to be involved in this political action. I couldn't allow it, because everything involved Bill Paley, but I had to make the decisions and we loaned the film. Generally, I had one rule that I think works well with everybody. I announced to every department head, to everybody in every department, that everything that needs my decision and everything that comes on my desk, I will make decisions as fast as I can, but no decision I make will be valid for forty-eight hours. Putting the procrastination on the other person, if, say, Arthur Drexler didn't want to come to me and I made a decision that affected his department, it was his fault. So he had to come to me and say, "Walter, this doesn't work. I can't have this." The same thing with Bill Rubin, the same thing with John Szarkowski. That turned out quite well, because you cannot sit down and learn; you have to godrex in and do it. I knew enough of the general arrangements. We also had at that time something else that did not work out well because they were much too technical, these management engineers, called Cressup, McCormick and Paget, to improve our organization.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 2

SZ: How was that decision made to bring them in?

WB: We felt, since we were in the process of running such an enormous deficit, that we should get outside help to see whether we could reorganize the administration of the Museum and to look at something of the salary structure. David Rockefeller said he would be willing to have the Chase Bank at that time contribute the time of Cressup, McCormick and Paget for doing this survey. It was interesting, but it didn't work out because they investigated the Museum more like a medium-size business, which it isn't and wasn't and never will be. A museum is basically a collection of individual fiefdoms. Every department has its own rights and privileges, nobody cares what the other one does except for the interrelation relative to who gets what exhibition space when and for how long.

SZ: And they didn't understand that?

WB: Yes. They prepared an enormously complicated salary chart, and I said, "I don't think I'd worry so much about the salaries. What I would like to know, where can we save people?" Don't forget, I had to fire or get rid of within that one year, out of five hundred and twenty-five people, over a hundred. This was a ghastly thing. I mean by attrition that a lot of people left, and luckily, the trustees were extremely generous. Whatever the budget was, they were perfectly willing to pay very good money to Bates Lowry and to Anne Hansen, who had been hired, and to other people who left. So it wasn't that bad, but it wasn't a pleasant position, because everybody must have looked at me as an executioner. The problem was always the number twos or the number threes, was this curatorial assistant not needed, or.... It was really a very, very difficult time, and I must say that that was not something I particularly enjoyed, but I tried, obviously, to tell each department, "Where do you think you could save some money?" They did the greatest amount of money-saving through less unnecessary traveling and to have less outside expenses.

SZ: Such as lunch. [LAUGHTER]

WB: That's why I had a brown-paper-bag lunch every day. I didn't need to be supplied by the Museum cafeteria. You know, there's a lovely story, that after Bates Lowry left, I had to go and approve the rest of his expense vouchers, because any expenses he had not yet claimed he had to put in, and they had not yet been handled --his salary and all that. I ran across a voucher: "Business lunch with Wilder Green, two bottles of gin." [LAUGHING] He always had a bar in his room; he probably did have some gin and his secretary said, "We ran out of gin, and here, for gin and tonics, you need two bottles of gin." She couldn't think of anything else, so she said this was "working lunch with Wilder Green, two bottles of gin." Wilder and I knew each other well enough, but it was very funny, things like that. I think there was some savings possible and we did not reduce the deficit during that year when I was there, but at least it did not go up, and all deficit reducing could only be done in the future. If you let somebody go, you pay them through the end of the year, whatever it is, and then make a settlement on it, but the savings will only come the following year. So I felt quite satisfied, because I knew that the program basically had not been hurt, except for the fact that the International Program never got started and had to be cancelled--had to be cancelled on paper at least. That was the only project which was cancelled. Later on, very intelligently, the International Council began using all the departments to produce the shows which they need for their program. I think the International Council is not a drain on the Museum. I don't know how it is today; I don't believe it is. I believe it's a contributor to the overhead and reputation of the Museum, so from that point of view it's okay. We had not dismantled the program, and since we never bought works of art out of general funds anyway but only through individual contributions of money to the collection, I felt that we made good progress. At the rate Bates Lowry was going, the following year there would have been a two-and-a-half-million-dollar deficit. Again, he simply was not up to it; he'd never learned it. I say that to my daughter. She's a teacher in Boston. I don't expect her to make a long-term budget for children's education and all that. Why should she? She's never learned it.

SZ: This is all part of the tumult of the times, the ad hoc committee that I guess Arthur Drexler chaired--that was under you, too, right?

WB: Yes. I could not be there all the time and he chaired it with the idea of coordinating exhibitions and coordinating problems. Naturally, the biggest problem was how to deal with the union, let's not forget that.

SZ: That was starting.

WB: Yes, starting at that time. We had, I believe, our first strike at that time. Don't forget, it was still the system of working at The Museum of Modern Art was something that only girls who lived at home could really afford to do. I don't know how it was later on; it must have been better. I don't think The Museum of Modern Art was ever brilliant in payments. [LAUGHTER]

SZ: Maybe it's different now.

WB: The union still exists. Is it still part of the Teamsters?

SZ: Yes. It's not for management, either.

WB: You have the guards and all that, but the professional [union] was also under the Teamsters.

SZ: That's right. It's sort of an interesting pairing, wouldn't you say?

WB: Yes, exactly. [LAUGHTER] My daughter in Boston is a member of the Auto Workers of America because she teaches a course at a management center of General

Motors in Boston, and in order to take that job she had to join the union. Now she's the head of a union section at General Motors, at that training center. But at that time the whole union question meant a great strain on the budget, because up until that time the people in the book shop and the curatorial assistants were lucky to make ninety dollars a week; even in 1969 that was not brilliant. I got a hundred dollars a month on my first job, at a bank. That's where they started at the First National Bank of New York. I had the privilege of being a messenger for six months. What else would you like to know?

SZ: The other thing I wanted to know, in terms of this time, was this report that I guess you had done, and I don't know whether Mildred Constantine worked on it--Connie Constantine....

WB: Yes. What's become of her?

SZ: She's around. I've seen her.

WB: God, she hated my guts, because I had, I think, something to do with her departure. We had to cut...she was, after all, number three, and I don't blame her, but there was nothing I could do--by not promoting her and all those things she thought I was doing, terrible things, to the Museum.

SZ: It was called an aide-mémoir.

WB: Yes.

SZ: What you were thinking of when you had that done?

WB: I was trying to get a concept for the future development of the Museum. Don't forget, it was never completed. I wanted to have the input from everybody, the trustees and the staff and everything else, of where we'd go in each department. In general, I wanted to put in a statement of ethics, how you'd not sell works of art, how you plan exhibitions, who does the fundraising--nowadays, every department has to practically raise their own money to make a show, which is not a good idea. They should be included, but they should not be in charge of the fundraising; they would be casually told, "Hey, you need two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to put on this show. Go get it." To my mind, if that's the case, I felt it was important that all fundraising matters be channeled through one person and that that one person should not be with the development office, but rather, the development office should be a tool for the fundraiser, which should be a staff position under the director. That was the idea, and we were beginning to get into that, to try to also incorporate some of the ideas of Cressup, McCormick and Paget. But that never...I mean, I could do only so much in nine to ten months. John Hightower came in, all these things were going on.

SZ: Which brings me to another question that you touched on. For you, then and I guess now, what role did you think politics should play in the Museum, because that was obviously the big bugaboo in the end?

WB: I think politics are always a part of every organization, because I don't think that politics is necessarily a dirty word. It's just a fact of life that you have to make adjustments and compromises; you have to find a way of getting along with each other. However, I am a strong believer in the fact that an institution like the Museum should have a strong, not too ambitious director. So from that point of view, I think Dick Oldenburg is not too ambitious, which I think is very good. He may not be quite strong enough to keep the bag of fleas under the lid. There are too many individual interests, and unless there is a clear-cut court of last resort it's very difficult. That was...when I was still chairman of the acquisitions committee [on painting and sculpture]. That's why I was trying to bolster Dick Oldenburg at that time, when he took over the job. I did not resign from the board until 1973....

SZ: I think it was 1973 you resigned.

WB: Yes, 1973.

SZ: I was actually thinking more of the role of the institution in the political life of the state.

WB: I think it's very important. There I completely agree. For instance, I am thinking of the [Children's Art Carnival]. It was started by The Museum of Modern Art and then eventually went up to Harlem. Betty Blayton started it. She's very good. My son, my younger son, is on the board there and helps Betty Blayton on certain things. That sort of thing, I think, is terribly important, and the Museum does not do enough; there should be more outreach to the community, particularly today. I'm thinking of Agnes Gund and the [Studio in a School], which is a great idea, and I gather [she is] the head of that group, which is much bigger...the Harlem [art] carnival is only for Harlem, but she does it for all of New York. I think it's great that she does it. I do feel New York institutions...The Museum of Modern Art, very frankly, doesn't do enough education work for the schools and the children in New York. It's such a resource. It's not just a question of letting them in free or getting a docent when you go through there; you have to really have both education and, for the children, a way to become involved with an art school. They don't have to do it at the expensive premises on 53rd Street; they could work, for instance, much more closely with the [Children's Art Carnival] in Harlem or with any other organization. I think there is a great feeling that The Museum of Modern Art has a great responsibility. After all, we all know the fact that the attendance at the Metropolitan Museum alone is more than the attendance at all theaters, sports meets, concerts, etc. in New York. It's incredible. The fact that they have seven million people going through this house. It's not the fact of "Oh, well, those are all the visitors." No. The visitors surely go there, but there are a great, great number of people in New York and it's such an incredible resource. The Museum of Modern Art is a resource, but I don't think the resource is sufficiently exploited for the school children of New York. I think this is a department that is still missing at The Museum of Modern Art.

SZ: How did you feel in the late '60s when all these groups came knocking on the door of the Museum, wanting the Museum to somehow be more involved in their concerns?

WB: For those sorts of things, I would not be in favor. I would no more be in favor of an African wing or a women's collection or a homosexual collection--none of those things. I think the Museum has as its prime need education and enjoyment.

SZ: That's it.

WB: And that's it. That is a political statement, the education part, and I think there the Museum should do more. I'm working right now on a project for Yale. New Haven is a city which is in terrible straits, and I felt that the relationship of town and gown could be improved by the art gallery, somehow together with the art school, doing some educational aspects in painting, not art history, but really basically painting, and there one has to start with the young kids; it has to start with kindergarten or first grade and go up through high school. At The Museum of Modern Art I felt a great loss of that. After all, Victor D'Amico had good ideas, but all that has ceased, hasn't it, as far as I can see. At some time, in the late '30s and during the war and shortly after the war, that was a very important thing, just like the founding of the Christmas carnival and then the Children's Art Carnival and the relationship to Harlem. But absolutely not to be involved, for instance, in the question of anti-apartheid or race relations, except what comes automatically is wrong. You don't try to figure out an artist whom you can show with Jacob Lawrence. That is not important. I think it's almost demeaning when you separate Afro-Americans, when you segregate them from other artists. But I do feel that by bringing the children to the Museum or to something sponsored by the Museum, maybe in the high schools, would be worthwhile.

SZ: They do some of that. I don't know that much about it, but they have programs where they send materials.

WB: I read all the calendars, all the notices that they send to contributing or patron members of the Museum. I assume I would get all the publicity releases, and I never get anything about what they do for the City of New York.

SZ: Can we just go back to Hightower? You tell me if this is correct, but this whole question that we're just discussing is what did him in eventually?

WB: No. Certainly, his idea was to politicize the Museum, but he was incapable of running it. I was absolutely appalled by how he handled the staff, particularly...how he tried to play both ends against the middle. I think his interior politics at the Museum was disastrous. I think if he had done something outside, maybe done something for women or blacks, I don't think this would have been so bad. It certainly could have been resolved. [TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

SZ: I know that early on, when the Junior Council and Art Lending [Service] were beginning, there was an exhibition of some of the works in your collection.

WB: Yes, that was true. That must have been 1954. It was just during the time when The Museum of Modern Art almost burned down completely.

SZ: That was in '58. You show was up then?

WB: It was done simultaneously, and luckily, it had been assembled at The Museum of

Modern Art and then brought to Mrs. [Abby Aldrich] Rockefeller's guest house. It was exactly when the fire was. The show was very interesting to me and a great deal of fun. The guest house--it was such a lovely place--was used once for Art Lending Service shows, some rather interesting pictures which we had. I think early in the 1950s we had done it there and people could come and look at it. It would just give the Junior Council a little bit more of a push. But my show, I know, was during the fire, or it began the day after the fire. The fire was a horrible thing. I still see Jim Soby himself helping to take little pictures out. We had a lot of smoke damage, and except for the big Monet that was completely destroyed and I think The Street by [Umberto] Boccioni was damaged and then the [Candido] Portinari painting, the big one...all the big paintings which were put in the walls of the Museum were destroyed, partly by the firemen, who had to use axes to get into it. Most of the [paintings in the] storage areas in the Museum and in the regular collecting area could be saved, but those pictures were too large to move on short notice. I don't think the Pollack was burned. All the big ones, the very large pictures were in danger.

SZ: Because they had all been stored behind the walls.

WB: Yes, you couldn't get them out so fast.

SZ: I guess shortly after that the thirtieth anniversary drive to raise twenty-five million dollars began. I don't know if there's anything about that or about fundraising in general that....

WB: That was the first big drive, and at that time twenty-five million dollars was a hell of a big drive. Today, it's done for a minor boarding school, right? When you think of the amount of money that had to be put together.... We had the art auction, which was an interesting one. It was an auction organized, I think, by the Junior Council to help the drive. Everybody contributed, and in those days it was still possible to give works of art to the Museum and then auctioned them off and the proceeds all went to the Museum and the donor of the picture got a deduction. Nowadays, that wouldn't be possible, because you can only donate something that's to be hung on the wall, not to be sold. That was a very interesting show. We got wonderful things--Matisse collages, a wonderful big Picasso, an early, classical period pastel. I gave a [Georges] Braque painting. It was a good show and a great number of people came.

SZ: And it raised a lot of money.

WB: It raised a lot of money, yes. I think we raised about a million dollars, which was a lot of money, in those days, for works of art.

SZ: I guess this brings me, really, to the final issue, which is the role of the trustee in this institution. For instance, I think it's been said that trustees at the Modern have a lot more power than in other similar institutions, probably because it's a totally private institution. What did you feel some of the obligations were?

WB: First, after all of this started, Mrs. Rockefeller, Mrs. [W. Murray] Crane, Miss [Lillie P.] Bliss--I think those were the three.

SZ: Mrs. Mary Sullivan.

WB: Mrs. Sullivan, yes. So you see, it was a completely private organization, and, after all, their first director was Alfred Barr, who was recommended by somebody, and therefore the involvement of the trustees right from the beginning was much greater, because Alfred, or anybody else, had to ask for every hundred dollars they wanted to spend.

SZ: They were all collectors, also.

WB: They were all collectors. It also meant they all knew something about art or had certain pretensions or predilections towards certain works of art. After all, The Museum of Modern Art is not a one-person or two-person museum like the Guggenheim or the Whitney. Obviously, it's not like the Metropolitan, which is so infinitely larger. Frankly, I don't know anything about the Brooklyn Museum, except that it's under-used--a marvelous museum, but it's hard to get to. The Museum of Modern Art was always carried by its trustees, down to the last. Now it's also bigger and maybe less involved, but, for instance, these acquisitions committees. At the Metropolitan you have so-called visiting committees where you hear about what they're going to do, but the decisions on purchases are made by the director of the department and goes to the director of the Museum and then goes directly to the trustees, and among the trustees there may be different groups. I'm not a trustee of the Metropolitan, thank god, and never will be. It would break anybody's finances nowadays. Not anybody's, but certainly it would break anybody who is not like some of the people are at the Metropolitan. I think the trustees at MoMA really worked well together. The only thing that really became a terrible case was the ouster of Bates Lowry, and that, really, was the only big rift that occurred. It was unfortunate, but I think it taught everybody else a lesson about what not to do in the future. I must say, I still stick to my theory that it was the right thing to do. The fact that Bates and his wife could not accept it--even though on paper they accepted it, they could not emotionally accept it--and as a result, they got John de Menil up in arms. He was a very nice man and a very helpful person and was a perfectly good person. He was not a vice president, and naturally the person who caused the biggest problem was Ralph Colin. I don't think anybody except John de Menil and Ralph Colin took umbrage at the way Bates Lowry's departure was handled, but that in itself was enough, because that sort of thing had never happened at any prior meeting and I would presume, since I'm not a trustee anymore, it has not happened since. I felt also that, on the whole, the trustees worked pretty well with the staff, because we had a system where a group of trustees, officially or unofficially, felt themselves particularly connected to Alfred Barr or to John Szarkowski or to Arthur Drexler or to Monroe Wheeler, who was a terribly important man and did really understand the workings of the Museum, or the film department--I've forgotten who's running it now. I think everybody has their own little niche where they fit in. Then there's the International Council and Waldo Rasmussen. Everybody has their own friends on the board, and I think that works, it's a pretty good system, much more so than at the Metropolitan. It's a little bit similar to...no, at Yale it's really a very close connection between the chairman, which is me, and the director of the museum and all the curators, purely because we are so few people and every decision has so many consequences.

SZ: You really had a very long and varied and deep connection to the institution [to MoMA].

WB: Oh, yes. I'm very fond of it. It's my favorite visiting place. As I say, I'm still sorry that they are not more aggressive, or maybe it's space, maybe it's money, maybe it's inclination, to really follow up on what I call modern art, both here and abroad. I think that's a fundamental problem. It doesn't mean that you occasionally don't have wonderful studio or boutique shows, whatever you want to call them. They are absolutely marvelous, but overall, the incredible importance the Museum had in the '30s and '40s and early '50s it doesn't have today. Maybe maturity in itself brings that, because there are more institutions who have their own programs that will spring up and compete. MoCA versus MoMA. [LAUGHING] So I think that's my only disappointment, but, certainly, that was not my reason for not being a trustee or for resigning as a trustee. It was basically being away so much and that I did not agree with the policy of the painting and sculpture department. Don't forget, I was chairman of that committee. It's better to get out than to just become a member or resign from a committee. I always feel there are three types of trustees at museums. One are the ones who have so much money and give the money freely, let's say like Mrs. Edsel

Ford was at one time. If they don't come, it's fine too; nobody asks anything of them and they are great friends and that's that. That's one type. A second type either do work, which hopefully I was doing at one time and there are other people doing the work, but who cannot give money on the same basis as, let's say, the Rockefellers or Paley or someone like that. The third type of person is the one I detest, and that's also one of the reasons I resigned. I detest them almost in every place, and that's what I call the nodding trustees, the ones that show up at the trustees meetings occasionally, love to take advantage of all the social affairs that they can and otherwise resemble those Chinese figures, a Buddha or seated figure where there is a head that moves back and forth. That's what I call the nodding trustees who don't contribute really anything, who don't contribute work or expertise. Like Dr. [Henry Allen] Moe was a fabulous trustee. Sure, he never had any money of importance to give, but he was fantastic as an advisor to the board, as an advisor on all major policy decisions. I call that just as much work, even though he didn't do like I did, pinch-hit as an acting director. But I could never have done what Dr. Moe did. Dr. Moe had a completely different expertise than I had. That is the sort of trustee that you need. On the other hand, you obviously need the money trustees, who gladly come and you are as nice as possible to them and you hope they enjoy themselves. That's about all you can do. The third one I have no use for. I've been on the board of trustees on quite a number of institutions, and I always try to separate myself from the nodding trustees. I would not have resigned in the last five years from at least four trustee positions if it had not been for my age. I think people ought to get out when they get too old. That's why with the Museum it is all the more important you should not be exposed to another Stephen Clark situation. I think one should know oneself when the time is up. I think the idea of being a trustee emeritus is a very good one.

SZ: Let me just ask you this one other question that I had. I guess one of the things that the Museum has been criticized for in the past, or at least it's something that's talked about--not just at this museum but at others--is the role of the trustee as collector and how being a trustee, being on an acquisitions committee, whatever, how those things interplay and what the ultimate effect is on the art market. I guess that also depends on who's talking about the ultimate result.

WB: I feel, on the one hand, that it is better to have collectors as trustees. Obviously, I'm a collector, so I feel strongly about it, because how else would they know anything about art? But they're maybe not art historians; you might say it might be nicer to have nothing but art historians on the museum board, but it just wouldn't work because they wouldn't have the money and they would have their specific feel. So my feeling is that you have to be a collector. However, I am equally strong in my feeling that a collector-trustee should under no circumstances allow himself to use the museum for his own purposes, and that goes to the point that I feel that a trustee should never, ever get any expenses for trips or for anything else he should not be paid a cent. As long as he has the pleasure of doing that, he should be able to do it out of his own pocket. If he can collect, he can also take a trip to Chicago, if that's where you have to go as a trustee. If he invites a staff member to lunch or another collector for lunch or for a weekend or to try to get him to contribute money it should be paid out of his own pocket. Number one, no expense money ever to trustees under any circumstances, unless they are what I call the pure working trustees, not something else. Secondly, trustees have to be more careful than anybody else when they loan pictures to a museum not to connect this with a sale of the picture. As we all know, there are quite a number of collectors in the past who used their institutions to help their own collection and make a name for it and then they sell their art at auction at a more fantastic price. As I say, we all know what collections they were. So that, I think, is an absolute no-no. Secondly, I think trustees should clearly identify where they have a financial interest. For instance, I have in my life financed two artists--one really, the other one sort of. I made it clear, wrote a letter to The Museum of Modern Art, that any works of art ever considered by this artist, that I do not want to be part of the voting group, and I also said that if anything comes up of major importance by an artist that I am connected with I will leave the room. That, I think, everybody needs to make very clear, but first they ought to make clear what connections they have in the art field. You cannot say you must submit your collection to it, but to be a silent partner of an art gallery, it happens to most trustees sooner or later, not necessarily to make money, maybe also to make money but primarily, really, to help. I've been asked quite often. I was even a member of something called Artemis in England and a member of the board of directors of it, which is an art fund. When I took it on, I was still a trustee of The Museum of Modern Art, I wrote to both Yale and I wrote to Bill Paley that that's what I was going to do and that he could consider this letter as my letter of resignation if he felt it was not appropriate for a museum or he could discuss it among his colleagues. I think those things have to be done and that everyone has to be very, very careful. For instance, and I said this once in relation to the Mondrians, I don't think it's ever appropriate to buy a work of art from a trustee. Things like that. If the trustee should be caught in this position, get a gift from an artist--which happens, but I think in the case of trustees much more so than with staff--it is essential that he will give it to the Museum. With staff it's different, because they usually don't have the money, therefore it's much more important for the collector. There's one other thing as far as trustees are concerned. They have to be more than careful not to do their own purchases at a discount price because they are trustees of a museum.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 1

WB: I could get a specially good price because the Museum also buys a picture. When MoMA buys from a dealer a great painting, let's say, a huge Picasso, and then you go to that dealer and say, "I would like to have that picture over there." That is, to my mind, an absolute no-no. You cannot use your position as a trustee to help your collection, except where expertise is concerned. Expertise, I think, should be free. You can ask somebody, you can learn yourself, and what you have learned allows you to benefit, because you have learned something about art by being a trustee. That you can't take away or evaluate. Otherwise, a collector could not be a trustee, and that could be very bad because you wouldn't get people on the board who know a little bit about art. A typical example is Bill Paley. He has a very good art collection which would have been impossible without The Museum of Modern Art. He did a great thing, he either gave it or left it. That's a perfect solution. Now, not everybody can afford to do that, but I only say that is the way it really should be. I'm giving about a hundred and twenty works of art, although I'm not giving anything that valuable, to Yale, because this is the only year we can give away things and get a reasonable tax deduction. Still, it's very difficult, but at least it doesn't hurt us. So I feel that I have to do it at Yale, being chairman of the Yale. So, that's my feeling.

SZ: I'm going to ask you what may be a stupid question to close it out. What was the most fun you ever had there?

WB: In the field of art?

SZ: Yes, or at the Museum. You clearly love it.

WB: Yes. I remember very much that first show and the collection from the first show of the Art Lending Service. That was a very, very enjoyable thing. I do think we did serve wine at the opening [LAUGHING].

SZ: Take it back?

WB: No. [LAUGHTER] But we did not serve any drinks, I know that, but I think it was a very enjoyable time and a nice party we had and everything was perfectly wonderful.

That's as far as the Museum is concerned. And then, let's face it, I loved attending the acquisitions committee meetings, I really looked forward to all of them. I still enjoy all the meetings. You see so much, find out so much, not necessarily what other people talk about, but suddenly you'll see an artist you hadn't thought about or suddenly you find a new artist. I must say, that's what was the fun part of being a trustee, and seeing something grow. It's always nice to be connected with something that grows. You have a warm feeling of satisfaction.

SZ: Thank you, very much.

END TAPE 4, SIDE 1

SIDE 2, BLANK

END INTERVIEW