

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: HELEN FRANCO (HF)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

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11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK CITY**

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: This is an interview with Helen Franc for The Museum of Modern Art Oral History Project. It is April 16th, 1991, and we are at The Museum of Modern Art, which is at 11 West 53rd Street in New York City.

HF: In case you didn't know [LAUGHTER].

SZ: It's for my transcriber, who knows also, very well. It's for posterity. Helen, tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your family background, if you would.

HF: I was born in New York City, on 100th Street, West 100th Street. My father was a lawyer from Toledo, Ohio, who got his B.A. at the University of Michigan and then came to Columbia Law School and settled in New York. My mother was from St. Louis, and when her father died and she was a young girl, she moved with my grandmother to New York and they lived with her older sister, my aunt, who was already married and living in New York. A rather amusing thing about that is that the house they lived in, from which my mother was wooed over a number of years and from which she was eventually married, was 235 West 76th Street. In the winter of 1962-63, I moved into the apartment I now have, which is 320 West 76th Street, so we've come sort of full circle. I was born on May 17th, 1908. I had an older sister, Ruth, four years older than I, who was very precocious, very bright and very pretty,

and always had her nose in a book. I was a tomboy, and the envy of my life was my sister's bright golden curls. I had obdurately straight brown hair, and who ever heard of a fairy princess with straight brown hair? My sister always had her nose in a book, and I taught myself reading defensively, because she wouldn't play with me. And I have a picture of myself standing up--I mean a mental picture--painfully working out words phonetically, so I knew how to read before I went to kindergarten. I went to a very small school, a little private school whose only advantage was it was two blocks away from where we lived. I went to kindergarten there and then first grade on, for several years. Because it was a very small school and they didn't know about these things that early, they kept pushing me ahead on the basis of my reading and writing. So, while I was reading like a whiz, arithmetic was my *bête noire*; I hardly knew that two and two made four. So I fell back on everything to do with mathematics, to this day. Always way ahead on the verbal things....

SZ: I take it that school doesn't exist anymore.

HF: Oh, no, it was a very small private school.

SZ: What was it called?

HF: Delancey School. It was run by two elderly maiden ladies. Then my sister started to go to Horace Mann School. Horace Mann School, in those days, if you don't know this, was on the northeast corner of 120th Street and Broadway. It was part of Teachers College, which was part of Columbia University. In those days it was both experimental and college preparatory. And later, when Lincoln was started....

SZ: Lincoln School.

HF: It became the experimental school.

SZ: Of Teachers College, right?

HF: No, I don't know that Lincoln was part of Teachers College. I don't think it was.

SZ: It became the....

HF: ...experimental school, and Horace Mann continued to be the college preparatory school, and the demonstration school: All the tests for reading and all the tests for arithmetic were tried there. We were the guinea pigs and we always had rows of observers from Teachers College sitting in the back room. Anyway, in the fifth grade I transferred there, where my sister was already in junior high, I guess. At that time, up to the sixth grade it was co-ed, and then the boys in junior high and high school went up to Riverdale, which much later became co-ed. It did have wonderful instruction. In the seventh grade, when you started the equivalent to the first year of junior high, you had the choice of starting Latin and taking it for six years or taking a modern language. If you took Latin in that year, you started a modern language in what would be first-year high [school], and vice versa. I elected to take Latin and started French in high school. The only proper French I ever learned was the very first year, when we had a very charming youngish professor and it was direct method, no English in the class. It went downhill from then on [LAUGHING]. In my class there were two other Helens, and this French teacher decided that that was two too many. You know, kids at that age love to change their names, [but] instead of saying "What would you like to be called, Helen?"--I would have chosen something like Solange or Mélanie--she christened me Babette, which is a name I would never have chosen. The result was that when she called on me, I wouldn't react, and they'd have to poke me and say, "She means you." I was wonderful at sight-reading; I was bored with grammar. So I always got through on the reading.

SZ: But you liked school, obviously.

HF: I adored school, it was a wonderful school. History was done by the project method. We had a very dynamic teacher. We had a wonderful Latin teacher. The only math that ever made sense to me was geometry (in spite of the fact that I didn't like my teacher and she didn't like me, because it was visual). I loved all the apparatus of it, the protractor and the compass, and I liked the sort of compulsive thing about dividing into two sides with a vertical line with a statement on one side and the theorem it's based on, on the other, and then finally, Q.E.D. (Quod erat demonstrandum). It was logical, it built up logically, whereas algebra, to me, for all they say it's great training for the mind, I really don't believe it, because it's straight memory. The formulae derive from higher mathematics from what you have had; if you mix up an "a" and a "b," you're lost.

SZ: Did you go to museums when you were a kid?

HF: Well, yes. My family was not at all art-oriented. I would say we were music-oriented; I mean, my mother was more than my father--opera and concerts and things like that. But I had a best friend, Katie Wiehe, in high school, who later--we'll continue with this college story of getting together with Alfred Barr and the rest--and she used to come down on Sunday afternoons just as we were finishing dessert, and we would go out and explore around town together. Very often we'd go to the Metropolitan [Museum of Art], just as a sort of playground, and just wander around looking at things. And I remember that the Morgan Collection in those days had up on the balcony above the entrance hall a great watch collection, and I remember being intrigued by watches made in the shape of banjos and things like that. In those days, also, before the Havemeyer Collection came, most of the paintings were kind of dark and gloomy [LAUGHING], so my very favorite painting in the museum was the Renoir, Madame Charpentier and Her Children, which was not only bright and cheerful, but of course, it had two children and a dog--irresistible. But, the other thing is that we were a great newspaper-reading family, and in those days New York did have newspapers.

SZ: A lot of them.

HF: And we got in the morning the New York Times, which my father took off with him to work; and...I forget whether it was the Herald or the Tribune in those days; and we got the evening Post, which was quite a different paper in those days; and the evening Sun. And current events were very much discussed in our family, and also, very much at school--we were very into that kind of thing.

SZ: There were two girls in your family.

HF: My sister was four years older, and very precocious.

SZ: Your parents obviously were interested in your education, wanted you to be up on current events and all that.

HF: Well, it wasn't that...they were in that sense. For example, we used to go down to the Jersey shore for the summer, and my father always had a map; we always followed the route on the map. Saturday mornings--in those days people worked half-days on Saturday--about twice a year I would come down in the middle of the day to my father's office, which was always down on lower Broadway, the Cunard Building or the Wall Street area; and he would take me out to lunch and we would go to the Battery, which in those days had the Aquarium, or we'd go to the Mint, or we'd go to Trinity Church or something. I remember parades that we went to, things like that; of course, it was the time of World War I.

SZ: Yes, I was going to ask you about that next, too.

HF: My parents were very social, went out a lot. But, except when they were out for dinner, when we were old enough, we were always at the dinner table, [and] there were conversations about what was going on in the world and so forth.

SZ: Were you a religious family?

HF: Well, no. I was confirmed [LAUGHING], but we went to temple only for high holy days and so forth. My sister and I were both confirmed, so we went to Sunday school at Temple Emanuel. But I wouldn't say we were a religious family. We were a typical secular Reformed Judaisic family in that respect.

SZ: So that wasn't a significant influence.

HF: I don't think so. I took it fairly seriously...well, my sister, as I said, was very, very bright--she got into Wellesley at the age of sixteen and later it was learned that she had one of the highest I.Q.'s they had ever had. I was the dumb little sister.

SZ: I doubt that.

HF: I was. I always felt very much academically in her shadow, except my family was surprised that I learned to read with this precociousness. And the first time I showed a glimmer of having any brains was when I won the gold medal that they had at Sunday school--they had tests, you know, on Biblical history and on the psalms that you had to learn, the Ten Commandments and a little bit of Hebrew and so forth, and the papers were handed in anonymously. And I remember my mother hearing me recite the psalms. Everybody was surprised that I won this gold medal. My father was inordinately proud of me--as I say, it was the only time I had ever shown any signs of having a brain. The Horace Mann School was wonderful, but because, I guess, I was reasonably bright, I never really learned to work there. I coasted by on the fact, as I said, that I did my French by sight-reading; and of course, composition, anything like that, was easy for me. I never really learned to work at school, but I

loved school and I loved the whole excitement of learning and so on and so forth. So, what else?

SZ: What made you decide to go to Wellesley? Tell me about Wellesley at that time, what kind of reputation it had.

HF: I decided to go to Wellesley because I had this aunt, whom I mentioned, who had a daughter who even though she was a first cousin was almost twenty years older--well, not quite twenty years older, but enough older to be one of that generation rather than mine--and she was the first woman member of our family to go to college. So my aunt consulted with my father, and my father was influential in her going to Wellesley because he had gone to Michigan, where Alice Freeman Palmer, who was one of the first presidents of Wellesley, had gone. So my cousin went to Wellesley, where she did very, very well--she was in the Class of 1912. My sister then was the Class of 1924, and I was the class of '29. So you can see, there was a big age difference. There was never any question that my sister would go to Wellesley and I would go to Wellesley; we never considered anyplace else. Although my sister, who was very pretty and very popular, really wanted to stay in New York and continue having a good time. She really didn't like going off to Wellesley. However, she went to Wellesley, and in her first year, at Thanksgiving time, she met the man to whom she became engaged, and she left college at the end of her sophomore year, and ultimately got married.

SZ: Helen, before we talk about Wellesley and the stuff that really concerns us, I just want to ask you this, as a story: I interviewed a man who was Class of '21 at Princeton and talked to me about being one of very few Jewish people in his class, and how hard that was for him there. At these women's schools like Wellesley, was there a similar situation?

HF: Well first, let me say that at Horace Mann there was absolutely complete assimilation. This girl Katie that I mentioned was Baptist and my friends were both Jewish and Gentile. As a matter of fact, in my particular college class, there were eleven in my class who went to Wellesley, which was unusual. The class before all went to Vassar; we went to Wellesley. Yes, I'm sure they had a quota system, and there certainly were some people who were very snobbish; there were the sorority houses and so forth. But I would say that the friends that I made there were more or less equally divided. My cousin I mentioned who went there was a great figure. She was head of one of the houses and was Tree Day Mistress, which was sort of a great honor, and so on and so forth. And Wellesley, of course, in spite of having been founded by a minister, was very unusual in that there was no compulsory chapel, even for freshmen, whereas all the men's schools at the time had compulsory chapel. They had none. So it was...though of course it was, I suppose, Christian-oriented, it was a really very secular education. They did have a requirement of a year and a half of biblical history, which was one year of Old Testament--at that time, two semesters--and one-half year of New Testament; but it was completely from the historical point of view. Of course, there were many more compulsory courses in those days, fewer electives, and this requirement was, I think, a very good thing, because it was the one course that everybody had to take, in which you learned that everything you read in a book wasn't necessarily so. You learnt a bit of textual criticism and that kind of thing. And of course, recently the atmosphere has changed enormously. Now they have at Wellesley a Wellesley Hillel, a kosher kitchen, and so on and so forth. But I think that is part of something that began after World War II and the Holocaust, when a lot of very secular-minded Jews became suddenly aware of their heritage and the necessity of hanging onto it and coming back to it. Oh, Katie Wiehe--I'll continue about this; Katie, this friend of mine with whom I'd gone to the museum and so forth. Her mother was a very religious Baptist. Her father was a bon vivant and the head of a liquor company; and, when Prohibition came, he decided that it couldn't possibly last, so he was going to keep his distillery going absolutely on the side of the law. Getting into it was like getting into Fort Knox. They made wine for

medicinal and Communion purposes and so forth. Of course, Katie was very embarrassed. People would say, "What does your father do?" "My father's a lawyer." "What does your father do?" "He's in the insurance business," "My father's a doctor...." She didn't want to say, "My father's in the liquor business," because they'd have thought he was a bootlegger, so she just said he was a businessman. Well, at the end of Prohibition, he was off and running and became the head of Schenley.... But Katie's mother, as I say, was very religious, and in those days you used to send your laundry home in those kraft-paper cases, and Katie's mother was a wonderful cook, always sent Katie's laundry back with marvelous home-roasted almonds and wonderful cookies and brownies and things, interleaved with tracts of the most fundamentalist kind--you know, the kind of things that explained miracles, how the Red Sea really parted and so forth, which she hoped her daughter would read. Her daughter indeed read them; we all sat around reading them, roaring with laughter. It was funny.

SZ: You went off to Wellesley, with any particular interest in mind?

HF: I thought I was going to be a journalist. I was on the school paper at Horace Mann and at Wellesley I tried out and got onto the Press Board, which was what sent news from the college out to papers around the country. I had a horrible freshman year. First I'd liked school so much, and I was very disoriented by being in this large community.

SZ: Going away was okay with you?

HF: Yes. It wasn't homesickness in that sense. I just was used to being a relatively big fish in a small pond. As I say, I never properly learnt to work. Then we had all these damned requirements, and they were all cross-grained to me. Calculus and trigonometry, for example, and I promptly got onto probation in my first six weeks. The only reason I ever got to being a sophomore was because the freshman math

teacher of our section had a father who was slowly dying of some dread disease off in the Middle West, and she kept having to go out and see him and we kept having substitutes from other sections; and finally, our whole section got so completely confused....

SZ: That they passed everybody? [LAUGHTER]

HF: I had Latin, but I hated the teacher we had, though I had liked Latin--that was my language. I had English composition, which I liked. What else did we have? Anyway, all the electives were...oh yes, science, zoology. I never could see what you were supposed to see through a microscope, and if I could, I couldn't draw it; and the only thing that saved me there was that we had a six-week segment on evolution, and all the people who found all the other things very easy got puzzled by evolution, and that to me was absolutely easy. The teacher couldn't understand how anybody who was so dumb, being unable to draw an amoeba, could latch onto evolution. That's how I got through my science requirement. Then, to complicate things, in December I had an appendicitis attack. In those days, appendicitis was a very serious thing; you were in the hospital, like, about two weeks, then you reclined for weeks thereafter. Now they toss you out of bed the second day or something. So, in order to avoid having the operation during the academic year, the doctor put me on a very strict diet, and I had to go and ask every day what we were having for dinner, and if it was x, y or z, I had to eat out, which was not very sociable and I didn't like that at all. I had a couple of other attacks while I was there, and finally, in June, I had my appendix out. But my freshman year was, I would say, a disaster.

SZ: This was right in the middle of the Roaring Twenties, too, right?

HF: This was the academic year '25 to '26. But one interesting thing happened, and that

was, you had an upperclassman who was your mentor/big sister, and mine invited me one day to an art history lecture, which was being taught then by a young woman who was just a substitute that year.... I went twice, and once it was on Renaissance sculpture and I remember seeing a Donatello for the first time in my life; next it was on the Barbizon School, and of course the Metropolitan had actually umpteen Corots. But I was really fascinated by this. And, as I say, Katie and I had always gone to the museum, just to look at things. But, at Wellesley, not just to major, but all the art history courses required two hours during the week of lecture and one hour for practical studio work, not with the idea of making you an artist but because they believed you'd learn about the mediums and train your eye with quick sketching and all of that. And, since I couldn't draw a straight line with a ruler, I didn't take the beginning course, and there was one course that was called Senior Art, it was a famous survey course that everybody took. It was taught by this dynamic teacher, Myrtila Avery, and I was going to take that. Then I was majoring in....

SZ: You were going to take that when you were a senior.

HF: When a senior, because I couldn't manage the studio stuff. I was going to major in either history or literature, I didn't know which, and I was going to be a journalist. And I got this job on the Press Board, sending off things to the Boston Globe, the Brooklyn Eagle and the Cleveland Plain Dealer or whatever.... Meanwhile, my friend Katie, with whom I'd gone on these Sunday forays, had the room across the corridor from me in Tower Court, the largest dormitory there, and she had discovered in high school at the corner of 120th and Amsterdam, where there was a famous place called Friedgen's, which was not only good for sundaes and things--I think it had a kind of a drugstore --but they also had a lot of magazines, including some of the little and avant-garde magazines, because they were right near Columbia--so she discovered the old Dial magazine. The Dial magazine had, not the big kind of

reproductions, but small reproductions of Archipenko and Brancusi and Picasso,

Matisse, what-have-you. So we tore some of these out of the magazine and I had them tacked up on the wall in my room. It rivalled the Maxfield Parrish which I had inherited from my older cousin who had gone to Dartmouth. And in the sophomore year, when things began to pick up a little because I could take a few courses I liked, like English literature, at the end of the we corridor lived on there was a faculty suite--occupied by this famous teacher Myrtilla Avery, who paid absolutely no attention to these two anonymous sophomores, neither of whom were taking courses in the art department--Katie was majoring in Italian. And in college you never had your doors closed, and one day walking down the corridor she looked in and was rather surprised to find, I forget, a Picasso or whatever, tacked up on the wall. So she came in and she said, "Do you like that kind of stuff?" and I said, "Well, yes, really," and also showed her the stuff in Katie's room. So she invited us down to her room, and then she said, "Well, if you really do like this, you should audit Mr. Barr's course on modern art," which had started in the second semester--and this was March, already into the second semester. This was Alfred's first year there, and he had come to Wellesley because it was the only place that would let him teach a course in really modern art; most places thought modern art started with the Baroque.

SZ: What made the difference at Wellesley--was it this professor? Why did Wellesley welcome it more than any other place?

HF: I don't know. Wellesley was a very conservative place in some ways and very advanced in others; as I said, this business of their not having compulsory chapel. Anyway, there was this bright young man with high recommendations from both Princeton and Harvard, and he was having to teach regular courses in Medieval art and in Renaissance art, but he made a condition of coming that he would have a

chance to teach a seminar in modern art. So, of course, it was very experimental, and only for juniors and seniors majoring in the department. Here were Katie and I, who never had Art 101. We didn't know Raphael from Michelangelo, we didn't know anything. Anyway, Miss Avery said, "You must audit Mr. Barr's course in modern art." In order to do that, the protocol was you must go to the head of the department who'd sign a slip, which you took to the academic dean, who okayed the slip, and eventually you got back to the instructor of the course. I still have this slip. Oh yes, the head of the department was shocked that her colleague should recommend that these two neophyte sophomores who hadn't had any art whatsoever could audit this, but she wasn't going to let her colleague down. So the slip reads, "Miss Kathryn Wiehe and Miss Helen Franc have permission to audit Mr. Barr's Art 305 for so long a time as it shall not interfere with the regular work of the class. (A back seat should be taken.)" So we took this along to the academic dean, who had a great sense of humor. She looked at this without saying a thing, and she signed it, but when she gave it back to us, she looked up with kind of a twinkle in her eye and said, "Don't forget about those back seats now." We took it to Alfred Barr, who was absolutely enchanted to find that these two kids, who were tabula rasas as far as art was concerned, but for some reason or other dug modern art. Well, "back seats should be taken" was ridiculous, because it was a seminar and everybody sat around a round table--I think there were about ten or twelve people in it, all juniors or seniors. And of course, he immediately began assigning us things like everybody else, and of course, I was absolutely enchanted. Oh, and you know, we went on trips to Boston to see private collections, and we looked at the Richardson Romanesque railroad stations along the line. And of course, the seminar, as you know from what you've read, was a microcosm of what The Museum of Modern Art became. We had everything...we learned about the Bauhaus, we went and collected at the five-and-ten objects of good design, we went to see the Necco factory, which was the most modern building in the area at the time, we learned about film, photography, everything. As I say, I was absolutely enchanted. In both literature and in history, I had been heavily geared toward the Middle Ages, the romantic, Idylls of the King, if

you will, Middle Ages. As I say, however, I was always also into current events. I was one of two people in all of this large dormitory that took any newspaper at all, and the most astonishing things could be happening in the outside world and you'd mention them at the dinner table and be met with a blank look. And of course the atmosphere at college in those days was very different. We were all children of privilege, we were after getting out were either going to get married or immediately get a job of great interest of some kind, and the world was our oyster, and you didn't have to know what was happening in the outside world, it didn't affect you really.

SZ: During that course, did you have much contact with him personally?

HF: Of course! I mean, it was a seminar. Then, furthermore, I think he was living in Cambridge and commuting to...I don't think he had a room at Wellesley, I'm not sure. But very often he would come to dinner in the dormitory, and he would sit at the table of Miss Avery. We would sometimes be invited to sit at this table, so we had a lot of conversations.

SZ: Describe him a little bit for me, as you knew him then.

HF: He was...rather shy; he had to be drawn out into conversation. Well, when I switched my major, I had to take in my junior year what I would have taken in my freshman year.... So I had with him a course in Medieval art in my senior year. His formally taught courses were not as interesting as the seminar, because in the seminar he had assigned papers to everybody and people would report on them, and then it was the Socratic method, also, he would show a lot of things. Between my sophomore year and my senior year was the year that he took off and went to Germany and to Russia. And I have a great postcard that he sent me from Germany with a picture from Metropolis on it, and a joke written in German on the back. The academic course I took with him, then, was my senior year. I would not say that he was as dynamic a teacher of the formal course, as he was in this seminar, where he was

interested and got people to discussing. He had what was a very disconcerting habit of putting on a slide, and after he put on a slide, instead of starting immediately to talk, he would just sit there, looking at it and making the students look at it, before he began. The particular class I was in I sat in the front row, and there were some rather dull people in the class. I remember once, he put on a slide of that Romanesque Madonna in the Morgan Collection at the Metropolitan--a very straight, stylized figure. One girl said, "Mr. Barr, do you really think that that adequately expresses the great sentiment of mother love?" [LAUGHING]

SZ: Did he have a sense of humor?

HF: Oh yes. But we did have this kind of more personal input because of his sitting at the table and talking. Of course, he was one of very few men on the faculty, and a very young one at that.

SZ: So that increases....

HF: Everybody was falling into swoons. I think one reason he liked me is that I did not have this great crush on him....

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

HF: His greatest friend on campus was in the music department, Randall Thompson, the composer, who had a very beautiful wife. I remember when we would have concerts in the auditorium, in Alumnae Hall, and she would come and sit in a box, and she had beautiful dark-red hair and she'd come in a form-fitting black velvet décolleté dress. It was quite something to see. Of course, in the academic classes, Alfred Barr gave formal papers and so on and so forth; but for the seminar, he decided not to

have a test, and so he had Jere Abbott come and play the piano for us. I well remember that he played the Petrushka Suite, which I had never heard; he played Boeuf sur le toit, and something that I didn't know--it was the first time I had heard either of those, or any of the three of them. I heard Petrushka often thereafter, so I didn't necessarily always associate it, but I never could hear the Boeuf sur le toit without remembering this occasion. Years afterwards, Jere Abbott came to one of the Barrs' New Year's parties, and I said, "Jere, do you remember coming and playing," and he said, "Yes, I do." I said, "I remember two of the three things you played; what was the third thing?" And he said, "It was a Schoenberg," so he remembered this too. But, as I say, all these people were swooning in the aisles, and I was not and Katie wasn't, so I think he liked us for that reason. He had a sense of fun more than a sense of humor, I would say. He was not on campus too much; I think he was commuting to Cambridge at least one of those years. For his course on Renaissance art, he had us go to any one of the three museums in the area, besides our own museum--the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the Worcester Art Museum--and make an imaginary catalogue for an imaginary show of, I think, fifteen things that you'd selected to cover the history of art to a certain date and write a catalogue entry for each of these, and explain why you'd selected them and what they represented. So that was, you know, not a very conventional way of doing things. I always told him, however, that it was a wonder that I ever did decide to go on with modern art, because the paper he assigned to me for the seminar was on Marie Laurencin, whom I hated [LAUGHING].

SZ: But you did decide.

HF: Oh, indeed I did. Well, what happened was, I switched my major, which meant I had to....

SZ: What did you do with all that studio stuff, Helen?

HF: I went in the summer between my sophomore and junior year and I went to the Art Students League.

SZ: Here on 57th Street.

HF: Yes, during the summer. It was the famous course with George Bridgman, and I was absolutely no good. I remember drawing from casts and so forth, and I came home one day and my father always wanted to know how I was doing, and I said, "Well, I got the most favorable criticism today from Mr. Bridgman so far." So he brightened up and he said, "What was that?" and I said, "Mr. Bridgman looked at my drawing and he said, 'Fifty years ago I made all those same mistakes!'" [LAUGHTER] So after I switched my major I had to take a lot of art in those last two years. I survived the studio work because Agnes Abbot, who taught it, was so encouraging. I ended up taking the honors course, which meant that you wrote a special thesis and so on.

SZ: You were working hard by this time.

HF: I was indeed working hard, very, very hard. Wellesley had open stacks in the art library, and I would just go and look at all of those books and periodicals, almost aimlessly. I worked very, very hard. Also, Miss Avery said, "If you're going to be taking Medieval art, you have to have some Greek." So I went to Columbia summer school and took a course in Greek. That must have been between my sophomore and junior year, because in my junior year I took my New Testament requirement in Greek. But, because I had this heavy Medieval base already in history and in literature, my honors subject also was in Medieval art--actually, Early Christian.

SZ: Did you know about the [Harvard] Society for Contemporary Art?

HF: I don't think so, except that Alfred put on this show; we had the big Dial color reproductions then, and he did put on an exhibition, and he gave a series of fifteen

lectures, more or less. [A new book just out in 1992, Patron Saints: Five Rebels Who Opened America to a New Art by Nicholas Fox Weber, implies that the members of the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art were instrumental in shaping the programs of MoMA at its inception, whereas actually, the germ of that program was already manifest in Alfred Barr's seminar of 1927 (and 1929) at Wellesley, thus predating the society's founding in December 1928.--H.F.]

SZ: But you didn't go, you never went in to see....

HF: No, no. But we did go to a couple of private collections in Boston. And between my junior and my senior year my parents and I went out to visit my sister, who was then living in Colorado Springs, and we stopped over in Chicago to visit friends of my mother's and an aunt of mine who was living there. And I saw the Helen Birch Bartlett Collection at the Art Institute and almost swooned with excitement. As I say, it was before the Havemeyer things had come to the Metropolitan. We had very few modern things. You know, walking in and seeing [Seurat's] La Grande Jatte, your first Rousseau and things like that, I almost died of excitement. And on the way out, on the train from New York, since I was going to be majoring in art history, I had to have German, and I hadn't had any German. And I had a German dictionary and a small little book on German ivories, and I remember just painfully reading my way, cracking my way through. The big book on Early Christian mosaics was in German; there'd be a big color reproduction on one side and the description on the other. So the German I learned was pretty limited; when I went to Germany, I knew how to say, "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel," or "Abraham Entertaining the Angels." It was hardly small talk. [LAUGHTER] Anyway, I graduated with honors. Alfred sat on the examining team. And, my academic record is very funny. My freshman things are all D's and C's and one B, I think. My sophomore year is one A, I think, in English literature, and there're B's and C's. From then on, I get straight A's. I really learned to study and to work, and that it was fun to use my mind. Meanwhile, I was heavily into current events and things. To my father's great despair, I belonged to something

called the Liberal Club and the League for Industrial Democracy. The Times--or maybe it was Current History magazine--had a competition for students on current events. A friend and I took this, and she got first prize and I got second prize, which I think was twenty-five dollars or something. So, things that were current fitted in with all of this.

SZ: You graduated in '29. Shortly thereafter, there was the crash, there was the founding of The Museum of Modern Art, and you came to New York.

HF: I came to New York when I graduated. I got a fellowship in the graduate art history department New York University, which was not at that time the Institute of Fine Arts yet. It had no home. Part of our courses were down at Washington Square, part of them were in the basement of the Metropolitan, part of them were in the basement of the New York Public Library, and part were in the basement or the mezzanine of the Frick. And again, I was heavily into Medieval art. The art history graduate school was very small, and I think maybe there may have been twenty, twenty-five students at the most, in all degrees of graduate work. Alfred Barr had gotten a senior fellowship there. The money came from the Carnegie Foundation, I think. There is a folder which I still have, or maybe I turned it over to Rona [Roob, Museum Archivist], in which the smaller grants were announced, and then as senior fellows, Alfred and somebody else. So when I was leaving college, I said to Alfred, "Well, we're to be fellow students." Well, of course, that summer he got the call to MoMA, and of course I felt that was terribly, terribly exciting. We were living at that time on 58th Street between Sixth and Seventh avenues.

SZ: You came back and lived with your parents?

HF: Yes, and my father was still alive then. The museum opened in the Heckscher Building.... I was invited to the opening, and when they had the celebration a few years ago [on the occasion of the Museum's fiftieth anniversary] and Clive [Phillpot]

arranged a display of some of the documents, my friends came roaring: "Wait till you see, wait till you see." On the guest book, on the first page where people signed, are Mrs. [Abby Aldrich] Rockefeller, Eliza Bliss Parkinson, Helen Franc, on the opening day! The Museum was open in the evenings, so very often I just popped around the corner. I well remember exactly what it looked like. One of the people in the graduate school was Margaret Scolari, who was teaching Italian at Vassar and commuting down to New York. And she and her friend Gertrude Ackerman Rothschild, paid absolutely no attention to the rest of us. They were real cronies. And sometime or other after she got to know Alfred, he probably said to her, "Do you know Helen Franc?" and she probably said, "Oh, she's a terrible pill" or whatever, and he said, "No, she's really very nice." So she began cultivating me (in spite of what Alice Marquis said in her awful book, it was not because my father was an immigration lawyer, which he was not; he was a corporation lawyer), but because she was avid to know everything I could tell her about Alfred at Wellesley. One day, after we became friendly, she said she was having trouble, because she had gotten this offer to teach at Smith, but whatever the immigration requirement was, she had to have the proper kind of visa to teach. So I said, come on, come to dinner and talk to my father, and maybe he can give you some advice. So she came and had dinner. My father was absolutely enchanted with her. First, she was very handsome. She had these bright blue eyes, this dark hair. She had a British accent, because her mother was Irish and she'd always spoken English with her mother and Italian with her father. And combined with this British accent, she had the most up-to-the-minute slang that punctuated her conversation. It was a swell combination. So my father said he'd try and see what he could do and put her in touch with somebody. Within about two weeks I got a note from her saying, "Thank your father very much, and tell him not to bother any further about my visa, because I am going abroad and am going to marry Alfred Barr." All the students were bouleversés. The combination would never have entered our heads; they seemed poles and poles apart. And in truth, off they went to Paris, where they were married.

SZ: So it was a complete surprise to you.

HF: Absolutely! She'd been asking about these things, but we all were interested. I knew she was interested in modern art and so forth. I think nobody was aware of her relationship with Alfred. I remember Miss Avery, with whom Alfred was always in touch and was very fond of Alfred, told about getting the letter from Alfred announcing his engagement, which said, "I love her Italo-Irish sweetness, her folly is my joy." So, now what?

SZ: Well, now you have to continue for me your story. You were in New York....

HF: I was in New York. I was getting my master's degree, working very hard, with concentration on Medieval art. From the time that Alfred and Daisy came back to New York, I was a family friend because I knew both of them. They were living over at the East River, on Sutton Place. I had dinner there every once in a while....

SZ: Do you remember that apartment?

HF: Oh, yes, especially the black wall in the bedroom. It had furniture, some of which looks like what you now get at Conran's, bare-bones modern; they did have some of the good designer chairs, but it was very sparsely furnished. And this black wall-- Alfred had trouble with his eyes, and it was to shut out the glare. And I remember a restaurant on First Avenue, a French restaurant, that we ate at quite often. Let me see.... In the summer of--I have to count on my fingers--the summer of '31 I applied for, and got, one of the summer fellowships, which were the great thing in those days.... In those days, art history was a relatively new discipline, with few people in it; and I would say that, proportionately, there were more fellowships and scholarships to be had than there are now. And one thing that many, many people got were these summer fellowships, for which the money came from the Carnegie Corporation and was administered by the Institute for International Education and it was for six weeks'

summer study at the Institut d'Art et Archéologie in Paris.

SZ: Had you ever been before?

HF: Abroad? Yes, I was abroad in the summer of '29. A great friend of my family's who was a cousin of my parents' best friend--the kind of people I was brought up to call aunt and uncle--he was their cousin, and he was very fond of children. We always got the most marvelous Christmas gifts from him. He always, a couple of times a year, took us to the opera; I remember first having a great dinner and then going to the opera. In the spring of my senior year, on one of these occasions where my family was invited to dinner at the Harmonie Club, and his niece, who was my sister's age, really, rather than mine, had just gotten engaged to a young Viennese. And her parents had, astonishingly enough, never been abroad; they were well-to-do but had never been abroad, whereas my mother had been on a famous six-months trip before she was married, and my father had been abroad after he came out of Columbia. We had English cousins and he went over to settle some family matter, and stayed for six months. He was there during Queen Victoria's funeral, and one of the letters he wrote back to my mother I still have describing this. But anyway, Cousin Hugo said that Elizabeth was being married and they were all--her parents and he--going abroad to visit her new in-laws in Vienna, and "Wouldn't you like to come?" I just thought this was a great joke and didn't take it seriously. I went back to college, thought no more about it. All of a sudden I hear from my mother that Cousin Hugo has called her up and said, "Did Helen tell you about the invitation?" She said, "What invitation?" And he meant it! I couldn't believe it was for real.

SZ: That was your first one.

HF: But it was for real. And of course, you can imagine the excitement with which I went, too, to England and to Paris, to Switzerland, where his family was living, and to Vienna. Not, to my sorrow, to Italy, but anyway, I saw an awful lot of art for the first

time, real things. All the Impressionists and Post-Impressionist things in the Louvre, were way, way up in a kind of attic--the Caillebotte Collection and so forth--you had to really go out of the way to find them. But anyway, I got this fellowship for the summer, and that was the summer of '31.

SZ: Times were getting hard then.

HF: Very hard.

SZ: What was it like in Paris, that way?

HF: The fellowship was four hundred dollars, from which you paid for your round-trip passage (\$140) on the French Line, in what was in those days called Student Third, which had just been recently converted from steerage. You paid for your tuition and you paid for living at the Cité Universitaire and ate your breakfast and dinner there and your lunch out. The franc was equal to four cents, and nobody had any money, and it was like a game. It was the only time in my life that, you know, it was like keeping your golf score down. Everybody was scrounging every penny, and the reason we were particularly scrounging it was, the classes were during the week, so that on the weekends you could go on...

SZ: ...little forays.

HF: So you squeezed every sou. So, for example, the carnet of bus tickets was twenty-four strips for six francs, so that one strip would be the equivalent of a penny. The buses had first-class and second-class, and even the parsimonious French, if the second-class were filled, would go to the first. Not us. We would stand. One of the students discovered--it was zoned, you see--and one student discovered that if you got down one stop ahead of where the institute was, you saved one strip. So we all conscientiously got off and saved this one strip. We had lunch *prix fixe* at four francs

twenty-five, for which you got a soup or a little dab of paté, a main course and either a slab of cheese or an ice cream or a chocolate mousse, and pain à discretion, which we all called "pain à indiscretion," because we all filled up enormously on the bread. And if you really wanted to splurge, you'd go once a week for a meal at six francs fifty. We broke up into groups, and we were out at--do you know where the Cité Universitaire is?--at that time it was the absolute outer border of Paris. We'd go in the evening after dark to have coffee, and we would all sit--a group of four or six friends or so--poring over the indicateurs de chemin de fer, which at that time were divided into, you know, one for the rail going south, one for east, one for the west, one for the north. One thing I learnt thoroughly was how to read European timetables, I became extremely adept at it. And, of course, it would be a great waste just to go straight allée-retour, so we were always making these round-trips. There was a lot that you can see within a radius of a weekend, like Chartres and so forth. We'd go and we would sleep three or four in a room, and we'd buy food at charcuteries, and we saw a lot. We haunted the museums and would go to monuments in the afternoons. So that was that summer. And in the summer of '32 I got a renewal of this, and I also got...oh, meanwhile, my family was very, very broke.

SZ: Your family was broke.

HF: Oh, sure. My father was a corporation lawyer, and I was picking up all kinds of part-time jobs, typing--the one intelligent, practical thing I ever did, really, was ask for a typewriter for my graduation from high school. I got a Corona, and had the sense to teach myself touch typing, but I should have gone to secretarial school, because I was very impatient. I learned to type, I type very fast, but still very inaccurately. But I had all sorts of jobs, part-time jobs. One of them was typing parts for a radio show put on by an Italian pharmaceutical company, a soap opera, and I had to type out, because I knew Italian, I typed out these parts for them. Another job I got, I don't

know how, was doing some research for Lee Simonson, who was writing a paper on art forgeries. All kinds of things.

SZ: But you managed to stay in school.

HF: There was enormous pressure. I had a fellowship toward tuition, but enormous pressure. You know: "Art history, she's never going to make any money on this anyway, it was pure self-indulgence, she should go to secretarial school, get a secretarial job." So I was doing all these part-time jobs. One day, Dr. Walter W.S. Cook, who was the head of the New York University graduate art department--I'd missed a class for some reason, and I borrowed his notes to type out--he heard me typing away very fast, and he said, "Oh, I didn't know you knew how to type that fast." So, Dr. Richard Offner, with whom I had had some courses, had a secretary who had just been carted off to the hospital with pneumonia, and so Cook recommended me to be Offner's part-time assistant and secretary, which I became. So I worked part-time on that, I was still taking graduate work, and Offner recommended me for a year's fellowship by something called the Italy-America Society, which up to then had only given fellowships for Italian literature, language, or whatever. I was the first art history person they had ever had. I didn't know any Italian except to read, and I read it because...you know, the way I read Spanish, by knowing French and Latin. And so they gave me this fellowship--it was called the Eleanora Duse Fellowship--for a year's study in Florence with the proviso that I learn some Italian in the meantime. I was working and taking courses, and the only evening course in Italian was up at City College, and it was a third-year course in Dante. Well, the professor was really an angel--I knew it was kind at the time, but until I knew what academic schedules were like, I didn't realize how very kind it was. Because he was a member of the committee of the Italy-American Society, so he said, if I would take this first-year grammar book and do the exercises, he would correct as many exercises as I could do between classes. Meanwhile, I was supposedly getting my ear attuned by listening to Dante, and I remember walking

into the class the first time and the windows were open. The first thing he said--do you know Italian?

SZ: No.

HF: The first thing he said in Italian was "Please shut the window, draughts of air are dangerous." So I always joke about this being a very useful conversational gambit, because in those days, with no air conditioning on trains abroad, the windows were always open, and the French and the Italians always wanted the windows closed, and the Germans and the English and the Americans wanted them open, and you could have a lovely conversation, carrying on this argument by saying, "Sono pericolosi i correnti d'aria" and the others saying, "No, non sono pericolosi i correnti d'aria!" Anyway, off I went. And I had gone down, on my own, at the end of the first summer of the fellowship in Paris, just for two weeks, to Florence. So, I got this renewed fellowship in Paris, and I was there in the summer of '32, and Alfred was still in New York, and Daisy, whom I call Daisy (she didn't become Marga until later; well, you can tell the layers of her friends, because she was Marga with her friends who first knew her after her marriage, Daisy with the ones who knew her before) was living in an apartment on the Quai Voltaire that belonged to Maurice Grosser and somebody else, and Alfred wasn't coming over until the fall, and we were planning a trip together after my summer school ended, and we would correspond largely by the petits bleus. We originally had planned to go to Spain, and the events preceding the Spanish Civil War were just beginning to heat up, so they said to us, "Well, if you think you can go another time, this may not be the best time to go." So we went eastward, we went to Switzerland...well, first we went to Aachen and Colmar, saw the Isenheim Altar. And then we went to Switzerland, and then we went to Germany and we came back down, and I ended up in North Italy, at Lake Garda, and Daisy went on down to her mother's apartment in Rome.

SZ: So you were very close.

HF: Yes, I was a family friend. I remember when they had the famous time that you would have heard about, when they had the Whistler loaned here [Portrait of the Artist's Mother, by J.A.M. Whistler] and there was a great "Whistlermania." Of course, Alfred had a fit because they made a postage stamp with part of it cut off. But anyway, "Whistler's Mother" was all over the place. There was even an ice-cream cake baked with "Whistler's Mother" on it. I gave it to the Barrs for an anniversary present and Alfred nearly died of the shock. I saw a lot of them. And I guess it was....

SZ: Was she a good traveling companion?

HF: Oh, she was heavenly. She spoke all the languages. She was a good traveling companion except in one way: Because she was European, she never would deign to ask directions, whereas I was one of those people who on every second corner would ask so as not to be getting lost. We came from Paris to our first stop, which was Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle). And the train got us there about 9:00 at night, and all the students in those days traveled with a thing called the Hand-Me-Down...have you ever heard about it? When they first made this conversion of steerage to what was called student third, the first company that did it was the Holland America line, and the first group of students who traveled this way took some notes and they mimeographed these and they passed them on, and they were their own personal recommendations for where to stay and what to see and where to eat and so forth, with little comments on them and symbols about "inexpensive," or one symbol was "disastrous but worth it." This grew up into little paperback handbooks that were revised every year, and everybody, all students, traveled with these as their Bible. They were invaluable, and then you added to them. So, in those days, also, you didn't need advance reservations, you just arrived. So we got into Aachen about 9:00 at night and we told the taxi driver to take us to the first of these recommended hotels and wait while we got out to register. They were full, but they recommended

another one, which was an affiliate of theirs, and the man at the desk came out and gave the directions to the taxi driver. So we arrived and we were tired, and we had ordered up some chocolate and sandwiches in the bedroom, went to bed, slept soundly. Next morning, off we go to see the sights of the town, the cathedral. When we wanted to go back, neither of us could remember the name of the hotel where we were staying. [LAUGHTER] So, we followed the streetcar tracks and got back. And another time, we were in Germany and we were staying at a place, the equivalent of a "Y," called Christliche Hospiz (Christian Hospice).

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

HF: I guess it was in Cologne. And it was August, and brutally hot, just terribly hot. And, impoverished as we were (I was slightly more impoverished than Daisy, but she was accommodating herself to my budget), and after a couple of meals at the Christliche Hospiz, we couldn't take it, either of us---brownish-gray meat, what my nieces used to call "mystery" meat [LAUGHTER], heavily swaddled in brown, glutinous gravy, and potatoes. And we couldn't take it in this August heat. And we discovered that there was a rather nice outdoor sort of place where they had music and sandwiches, you could get sandwiches for not very much, and cold cuts or whatever. So we went there, and this hospice was rather near the railroad station, and as we were walking back about eleven o'clock at night, walking along and talking animatedly, all of a sudden, Daisy says to me, "Don't say anything, don't talk, keep walking straight ahead." And I would have wanted to say, "Why, why?" "Keep walking ahead, don't talk, don't talk." [LAUGHTER] So when we got back, it turned out that she had realized that this was what the Germans call a strich; it was the main street going down to the railroad station and it was the prostitutes' promenade. And for two unescorted young women to be out on the street at ten-thirty or so, eleven at night, we would easily be mistaken. But she was a wonderful traveling companion. She

knew a lot, she was enthusiastic and great fun. And she spoke languages. I remember one place in Freiburg-im-Breisgau--and I spoke very rudimentary German, with the grammar falling all over the place--and there was one very earnest young student who was anxious to get into conversation with us and ask about our philosophy of life and so forth. I wasn't equal to that.

SZ: I think the one last question I want to ask you today is, during this period--this trip you just described was in the summer of '32....

HF: Yes.

SZ: The Museum had been open for three years, and you came, I assume, frequently, and also, being a family friend of the Barrs', actually must have had a sense of how things were progressing.

HF: Well, also, when we got the Bliss Collection.

SZ: After Miss Bliss died in '31, in March.

HF: Well, they had the collection on this provisional basis. And so Alfred had me working on doing some research on the drawings.... There were eventually two catalogues, an early one and a later one. But the gift was provisional on getting the money for the building. I worked a little on the catalogue, on the top floor of the townhouse, often erroneously called a brownstone--looked very much like one of those buildings across 54th Street, in that kind of style--on the top floor, in the same office as what was the library, which had about 400 books, there was Iris Barry, who was not yet into the films. [PAUSE] Well, of course, in the fall of '32 Alfred came over; they lived with Daisy's mother, who had an apartment in Rome, and I was in Florence on my fellowship.... This was the year Alfred was on a year's leave from the Museum. Christmastime, Daisy called me up and said, "Come down and spend Christmas with

us." So I went down to Rome and spent Christmas with them. They had built a spiral staircase, Alfred had, to sort of a bunk upstairs. And living with them was a young Austrian woman working there, Erica something-or-other. Marga's mother was very distinguished, very tall, erect, a delightful woman. And so I lived in a pensione, but I ate a great many meals with them and went on Christmas Eve to a midnight mass at Santa Maria Maggiore, and so on and so forth. And then they went on up north after that, and I went back to Florence.

SZ: Had you had a sense that he was not well?

HF: He was always very tired. And high-strung....

SZ: Did you see that when you were in Europe with him, that he was having....

HF: He was very tired, he was just very tired. He slept a great deal. Daisy and I would go off on trips. We went for an audience with the Pope, and we had to get dressed in those fantastic clothes. We met Miss Avery there, and she almost died of laughter. So Alfred didn't go around much sight-seeing with us. He was very tired, very tired. But he always had very punctilious manners, extremely courteous. He was always charming with my mother, and so on and so forth. So off they went, and I stayed and had that year there.

SZ: Let's stop for today. We did a great job.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: HELEN FRANCO (HF)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

LOCATION: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK CITY

DATE: APRIL 22, 1991

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SZ: We really didn't talk a lot about some of the things that you did in the '30s and how they had an impact on the Museum. So I'm going to let you do a little free-association here, and I'll follow along as best I can.

HF: Well, first I want to go back a little and say what the atmosphere was like in the '30s, like, say, '33 on. The Institute of Fine Art, of course, was much smaller in those days, and the relation of the students to the faculty was much closer. Even before '33, when Prohibition ended, a batch of us would go out for lunch with [Erwin] Panofsky and go to a speakeasy. Speakeasies were where you had the best and cheapest food, because the food cost practically nothing, and you drank this sort of "Dago Red," terrible chianti. It [the Institute] was a very convivial atmosphere. Now, of course, it's huge. In general, after '33, when the New Deal began, though there was still the Depression and you saw people selling apples on the street--but there wasn't homelessness, you didn't see people lying around the street because the housing situation was not the same. And there was a kind of more cheerful and hopeful attitude, because things were happening and there was a great deal of excitement and a great deal of sharing, if anybody was lucky enough to have a job of any kind, you kind of invited everybody in to eat with you. It was a very different sort of atmosphere from any subsequent depression. I came back in the fall of '33, after this

year abroad in Florence, and was working still as Offner's part-time assistant and doing these odd jobs. And within a month after I got back, my father had a stroke and could never work again, and life was very difficult; he had a live-in nurse, and it was more frantic, being that there were all sorts of these part-time jobs to eke out things.

SZ: You were still living at home.

HF: I was still living at home. In the spring of '34 I got the job at the Morgan Library as a purely temporary thing, because--again, the great Dr. Cook recommended me--because a year or so before they had had a big exhibition--they didn't have the exhibition space that they now have--of illuminated manuscripts at the New York Public Library. In retrospect, after the exhibition, they were doing a catalogue. Dorothy Miner, whom I'd known--she was two years ahead of me at Horace Mann School, and she went to Barnard and took some graduate courses at Columbia when I did--had been called in to do some editing on it. And then the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore opened up, and Belle Greene, with Francis Henry Taylor, was instrumental in staffing the Walters, which they did largely with young people. Dorothy was called down, and then Dr. Cook recommended that I go in to finish up the editing of this catalogue, which was supposed to be a purely temporary job. The same thing happened when I came to The Museum of Modern Art: I was hired on a part-time basis. There I stayed for some eight years, here I stayed eighteen. I worked first as a sort of special assistant...oh yes, my father died at the end of May, just when they decided to take me on. I think I made the great salary of fifty dollars a week, which was quite fair in those days. I was sort of a special assistant to Belle Greene. I did all sorts of things, like showing visitors around, and then I did some work cataloguing the illuminated manuscripts. I worked on the annual reports and the press releases. I got to curate one exhibition, The Animal Kingdom, on which I had a great time. I was pleased because, during the Depression, whenever the Daily News didn't have anything better to do, they wrote an article lambasting what they invariably called "Mr. Morgan's swanky book museum...."

SZ: I was going to ask you what the reputation of the Morgan was then, but....

HF: Well, you see, you had to get cards to use the library, which you still do, because it's original material. You also had to have cards to see the exhibitions and the rooms in the original building, which you no longer have to do. But, it was extremely open to scholars and so forth. And on one great occasion, Belle Greene, who was quite a character--someone should write a book about her!--went out and served coffee to people who were picketing the museum. Well, I was pleased because my show, which was called The Animal Kingdom, got the first favorable mention of the library that ever appeared in the Daily News. But the atmosphere there was very strange. I think there were about nine professional people on the staff, of which there were three pairs of people who didn't speak to each other. That didn't mean six people, because some of the pairs overlapped. When I say they didn't speak, they didn't even pass the time of day. It was a very strange atmosphere. So Belle Greene at one point, sometime after I'd done that exhibition, removed me from the manuscripts because the person who was in charge of manuscripts was very jealous of me--she was many years my senior--and put me in charge of drawings, from which Philip Hofer had recently departed as curator. And I really didn't know anything about drawings, but I was just beginning on that when the war came.... And I hadn't gone into any of this at all?

SZ: No.

HF: Institutions in New York went into kind of a hysteria, and all decided that the East Coast was about to be bombed. And of course the West Coast was supposed to be bombed, and that's why they interned all the poor Japanese. So there was a consortium of the various museums and institutions about where they should

sequester their treasures. They kept consulting frequently, and at one stage they had heard that the Germans and Austrians were burying all their art treasures in the salt mines, and New York has an ample supply of salt mines upstate. So on one occasion a cavalcade of elegant limousines went trooping out, and the only person who was against this whole idea was the great William Ivins, who was in charge of prints and drawings at the Metropolitan. He thought it was all nonsense. Anyway, they went to inspect the salt mines in upstate New York and were somewhat disgruntled to discover that it was under about three feet of water. A very morose crew came driving back to New York, all morose except Billy Ivins, who sat in the back seat with a Cheshire cat grin on his face. So the next thing was, they settled on Whitemarsh, which was an estate--I can't remember the name of the family it belonged to--in the near suburbs of Philadelphia, without the slightest consideration of the fact that Philadelphia was an equally active, if not more active, port than New York, and just as accessible. But this, as I say, was collective insanity. So all of the best of the manuscripts and other original things that they had were being packed off and being sent off to Whitemarsh, except for the drawings.

SZ: You're talking about at the Morgan.

HF: At the Morgan, yes. Well, collections from the other museums also went into Whitemarsh, but I'm talking about our collection.... They decided it was not a good idea to pack up the drawings and not look at them again, so Betty Morgan, the curator of the Rosenwald Library, which was then in Mr. Rosenwald's place in suburban Philadelphia, very kindly volunteered that she would periodically inspect them. All the drawings had to be separately wrapped, and there was great consultation between the library and the Fogg Art Museum, and...cellophane was a very new material in those days, and nobody knew quite what its properties were; so the Fogg recommended some particular kind of plastic, and each and every single drawing had to be layered first with a sheet of rice paper and then cellophane. Of course, I had to do the inventory as I went through to make sure nothing was

missing. Sometimes there was a panic because something was missing and it turned out just to be misfiled in the wrong box. Anyway, in the middle of this rather boring task, a most alarming thing happened: I came upon a little dead bug of some kind. So I went tearing down with this thing to Belle Greene, panic ensued; there was a telephone call to the American Museum of Natural History, where Junius Morgan was whatever he was, president or something, and this little object was put in a cotton-lined Tiffany box and taken up by Rolls-Royce to the American Museum of Natural History for analysis. And the news that came back was very bad. It turned out to be a carpet bug, which is very bad for paper. So again, frantic communications with the Fogg, what kind of fumigation would kill any larvae and not do damage to the drawings, which ranged from pencil and silverpoint, charcoal, pastel, sepia, all kinds of ink. So they finally came back with something, the fumigation proceeded, and I went on packing up the things. Well, here I was, a rather energetic young creature in my twenties, and not of a mind to sit out the war being the curator of a nonexistent collection. So I tried desperately to get a job in Washington. I didn't have the least idea how to go about it, and I was innocent enough to believe that the way you did it was to go through Civil Service. And also, it's not very easy to get a job going down on weekends and seeing whoever you're going to see and then popping back up. So I kept going back and forth. Then I was working as a volunteer at...I did two volunteer things. One was for the Civilian Defense Volunteer Office, which placed volunteers in all sorts of jobs.

SZ: And you were a volunteer at this volunteer office.

HF: Yes, I was an interviewer of various people, who couldn't understand why wartime service meant sometimes taking a job in a day-care center or something. The other one was that I was very upset because the Red Cross had this policy, they wouldn't let any Italian-born people do anything like rolling bandages, they were all suspect, they might be Mussolini's agents. And these people would come to me with tears in their eyes and say, "They take my son for the Army but they won't let me roll

bandages." And meanwhile, I also discovered that there was a great deal going on about first aid and so forth, and that the first aid manual existed in no other language but English, which seemed to me absurd. And at that time of course, the foreign population in New York was overwhelmingly Italian; it was long before we got the Hispanics coming in. Of course there were always a few Chinese but.... So I decided that this manual should be translated into Italian and I got the Red Cross reluctantly to agree, but they had nothing to do with it: "Over to you, you do it." So I went around and found a few people, doctors and so forth, who would translate one chapter at a time, and just started that, when I magically got a job, and it was with what was then called the Ferry Command. Juan Trippe, who was the head of Pan Am, I guess, had just succeeded in persuading the Army that airplanes could be useful for other things besides ferrying other airplanes, which is what they were doing. And they got the idea that they could also ferry matériel. So they began to expand enormously, because what was building up at that time was the North Africa campaign, so they were recruiting. I began at a much lower salary than at the Morgan. I got a job at a very low level at what was called the Ferry Command; between the time I was recruited and the time I reported to work, it had changed the name to the Air Transport Command. I was in a section doing decoding of cables that came in, quite a contrast to the elegant marble halls of the Morgan Library. It could hardly be imagined. This was located in a clapboard building that had been built for World War I. It was still functioning, about a quarter of a mile or less down the road from the airport.

SZ: Was this typical during the Second World War for people to put aside their professional interests?

HF: Yes, absolutely. Of course, a lot of the people on the staff of The Museum [of Modern Art] or the trustees of the Museum were either in the service or...oh yes, all sorts of people. It was unlike the Vietnam War; it was called the "good" war. Everybody was absolutely strongly for it, in spite of the isolationist atmosphere that

preceded it in certain parts of the country. The bombing of Pearl Harbor put an end to that. Everybody was doing things very energetically. Anyway, I was in this temporary building with no air conditioning, a three-story building. In my particular job we worked shifts, eight-hour shifts, around the clock. You worked four weeks from eight till four, then four to midnight, then midnight till eight. I adjusted to that fairly well. You were buzzed in and out--I mean, high security--you were buzzed in and out of the room and all this. Of course, housing was terribly tight, and so a lot of people were opening up private homes. Through Wellesley, one alumna offered me a room in her house. Well, it couldn't have been more remote from where I was. It was in Rock Creek Park, actually, just within the Maryland border. I had to transfer to two buses to get downtown, and then you got a bus outside the old post office, that building that's now been transformed, and over into Virginia, near the National Airport. It took easily an hour and a half. That meant that if I were on the eight o'clock shift I had to start from home at about six in the morning, and if I were on the shift that ended at twelve, I would get home at two o'clock in the morning. The section of Rock Creek Park that I had to walk through to get to this house was rather dangerous. One night I was rather terrified because I was doing this at about two o'clock in the morning and I could hear a car drive up beyond me and slow down. I thought, What do I do, what do I do? So I lit a cigarette and I thought if anybody comes near me I'll try and burn them, at least. So along comes a patrol car, and they said, "What are you doing out at this hour of night?" So I explained that I was coming from work and I lived there, so they drove me home. And they couldn't say don't do it again, because I had to do it again. And, ultimately, I got a small apartment even further away in South East Washington. Meanwhile, I was working on this cryptography thing, and I'd also been very good at puzzles. My sister turned out to be the crossword puzzle champion of the world, or, as my father used to say, "Lacking contenders, of the universe." The crossword puzzle craze was brand-new in the 1920s. There used to be one in the Sunday paper, and my sister and my mother and I would sit and all do the puzzle together, and nobody was paying attention to the speed or whatever. Whoever was sitting in the middle would write it in. Simon &

Schuster, which was brand-new--very young people at the time, Max Schuster and Bob Simon--got the idea of publishing a crossword-puzzle book. To promote this, they had a competition, which took place down in Wanamaker Auditorium, and my sister won it. She defended her title the next year; she surrendered her title the third year because she was about seven months' pregnant and for the final competition you had to climb up on a ladder and write on a blackboard. But she had a great time. She was very pretty and was always being interviewed by people and so forth. The paper would make her do these puzzles for bogey time, and that puzzle would always say "Ruth Franc von Paul, crossword puzzle champion of the world, solved this puzzle in three minutes and forty-five seconds." People would invariably write in and say it's impossible and so forth, and they'd have to stage a demonstration, or the Junior League would for a charity benefit. She had a great time. Anyway, we were all puzzle-minded. Meanwhile, the crossword-puzzle books went like hotcakes and were the underpinning for all of Simon & Schuster's financing. Well, at my job in Washington, it got so that when messages came in and were garbled, people would come to me and I would disentangle them. One day, in the corridors of this building, I met a young art historian who had been with one of the galleries--I can't remember whether it was Knoedler's or Wildenstein or [Jacques] Seligmann--who was then known as Bob Levy (he later changed his name to Leylan). So he said, "What are you doing?" and I told him. "Oh," he said, "you don't belong here, you belong in intelligence." So he had me interview for an intelligence unit of Air Transport Command. This was the route section.

SZ: Was it interesting?

HF: As I said, the Air Transport Command was surging all over the world suddenly, with routes in the Pacific, the North Atlantic, South Atlantic, all over. The equipment was growing like hotcakes, and the only way in which they could keep track of what was going on was by debriefing the pilots when they came back. An airstrip that was eight hundred yards long was suddenly twelve hundred yards long and so forth; this

information was all being collected. And when there had been one hangar there were four hangars, and so on.... I was put in charge of the files. The major who was in charge of this was a department store executive, Leon Mandel of Mandel Department Stores in Chicago. He was a cocky little man who was bucking to be lieutenant colonel. The only way to manage this material in the pre-computer days would obviously have been on file cards. No. Major Mandel had these big presentations made, sheets that went into one of those extra-long-carriage typewriters, and by the time this stuff got typed in it was already obsolete. Also, you got the impression that every plane was madly photographing as they went, and you got these route books with these wonderful aerial photographs taken of things, all separately done. It was fine for a promotional presentation, but it wasn't very practical for what was needed. The happiest moment of my career in that department came one day when a general came to look at this, and there was Mandel deploying all this material, and the general was not saying anything, going "Yes, I see, I see." Finally, Mandel couldn't stand it any longer and said, "Well, you do admit, don't you, general, that this material has some use." So, pushed to the wall, the general said, "Some use, yes. The only question in my mind is how much." We sent questionnaires out to be filled in in the field, and one of the questions was, are there any people in the neighborhood for the labor force, on whom we can rely for some help loading and unloading. Another question was, is there any local food supply on which you can rely to supplement the Army rations. Suddenly from somewhere north of Labrador or somewhere, some outpost came back in answer, "There is an Eskimo family nearby who sometimes gives a hand in unloading. Last month we shot a seal, which gave us fresh meat to eat for about two weeks." Working in the same department was a lovely young woman, Mrs. Jeanne Greeley, daughter of an army officer and wife of a lieutenant (I think) who was missing or had been taken prisoner in the Pacific theater, and she was always desperately trying to get news of him. I lost touch with her completely, but some thirty or so years later, I met her at MoMA-- she had remarried after her husband's death and was the wife of our trustee Walter Thayer! Anyway, I didn't feel terribly happy in that department either. Actually, Angie

Biddle Duke was then working for a very young lieutenant down there, Oliver LaFarge, the writer (he later wrote a history of the operation and had some criticism paralleling mine), so I transferred, in the same building, up to Strategic Air Intelligence, and they were engaged in preparing folders for the joint use of the RAF and our forces. It was a very ingenious format, devised, I think, by LIFE, in which you had sheets that opened out this way and then this way, and there would be a general map of the area and then closer approach map. The text consisted of twenty-five-words-or-less descriptions of what were regarded as possible targets for strategic air bombing. These were factories, bridges, railroad yards, and so on and so forth. Of course, in tactical bombing you tear up anything that's going to delay the enemy for even five minutes, but in strategic bombing it was long-range things. Well, I thought at the time that the only reason we'd win this war was if the German air force intelligence was as bad as ours. There were people working on these folders who would come to me and say, "I can't find such-and-such a thing on the map." And I would say, "What are the coordinates?" and they'd say, "What are coordinates?" They'd never learned to read a map. The ignorance of geography in general was fantastic. I had been transferred there theoretically because of knowing Italian, but by the time the transfer went through they didn't need me in Italy, they needed me in France. So my area was the Toulon and Marseilles area and the harbors down there. One day I got a call into a colonel's office, and in the days of no computers they relied on things called McBee cards--have you ever heard of those? They were file cards that had holes punched in them at given intervals that represented certain things, and if you wanted to find out something a rod went through and certain cards on which this information was would be dropped. So somehow or other....

SZ: Sort of like a very primitive computer.

HF: Exactly, it was pre-computer. Somehow by this system they had discovered, they managed to retrieve the information that this lowly civil servant was an art historian and knew Italian and had done research. So I was called in under deep secrecy and

put on a special assignment. The special assignment was: Rome was then supposed to be an open city; the problem was, if we were to bomb Rome, what are the twenty monuments that should be avoided? Gulp, gulp. This has to be done in forty-eight hours. I swallowed hard and said, "Well, give me a Baedeker...." "This is absolutely hush-hush, you're not to say anything to any of the people you're working with." So I said, "Okay, give me a Baedeker and I'll start in on this." But, you first have to have a map of the city of Rome and pinpoint these things and explain, again in twenty-five words or less, why this should not be hit. So I said, "okay, I'll start on this, but over in OSS [Office of Strategic Services] is sitting somebody who knows Rome like the palm of his hand, so get him transferred over here to work on this with me." That was Richard Krautheimer, whom I'd known since he...I guess I met him in Italy, but I knew him when he came to the institute. So the red tape was miraculously cut and Richard came over and we set to work on this task; you have to realize that the things that should be spared were selected not only for their archaeological and art-historical importance but you couldn't get any of the seven basilicas of Rome. That took out seven immediately. So we agonized over all of this and we made the map and we made our explanation of why you shouldn't bomb such-and-such. And in due course we were taken over by car to the Pentagon and ushered into General Arnold's office, where some aide came and looked at this and we explained and he thanked us very much, and said, "Now go back to your respective agencies and forget that this had ever happened." Of course in all of Rome there was only one possible target, and that was the railroad yards, which were very important. (Another thing being that in this business of working on intelligence, I sometimes wondered whether we were fighting the Luftwaffe or the RAF, because there were such fights over nomenclature. Railroad yards were what the British called marshalling yards.) Anyway, the only possible target was the railroad yards. The railroad station was the Termini San Lorenzo; it sits right bang adjacent to one of the basilicas, the basilica of San Lorenzo. Meanwhile, this fight between the British and the Americans was partly not only about nomenclature, but because the British were used to doing saturation bombings, and the Americans had just discovered the Norden bomb sight, and they

were for doing precision bombing. It took about five months of wrangling between them before they came to the rather commonsensical decision that they should do around-the-clock bombing; the Americans would do daytime precision bombing and the British would do saturation bombing at night. Anyway, there was no possible way in which even with precision bombing you could hit the railroad yards in Rome and not hit the basilica of San Lorenzo. So about six weeks after this was turned over I pick up the paper one morning and Rome has been bombed. So I call up Richard and say maybe we could have a drink together. So we had a drink together and sent a joint letter off to a committee that was working up here, it was sitting in the Frick Library; this was a private agency engaged in outlining what were the monuments that were to be protected as they were liberated by the allied forces, and we sent up a memo saying that's all very well, but meanwhile, you should be setting up information about protection of things in advance of this. They were very annoyed with this and we couldn't explain why we were saying this, except to mention the bombing of Rome. Anyway, in the course of the bombing of Rome, naturally enough, San Lorenzo got hit, the basilica. In the bombing there was uncovered a hitherto unknown early Christian crypt, and after the war, who went back and did the proper excavation and exploration of this but Richard Krautheimer. I always said it was the most ham-handed archaeological dig that ever took place. [LAUGHTER]

SZ: I was going to ask you, through your war years there, did you maintain contact with the Barrs? It just occurred to me that the timing....

HF: By correspondence, yes, but this was just the time when Alfred was fired, which was a terrible shock. And, you see, travel...I didn't often come up to New York.

SZ: That was not an easy thing to do?

HF: You were not supposed to. In the first place, you were working on Saturdays, and you were not supposed to do travel, except for special reasons. You know, I used to

leave sometimes when my mother was very sick. I'd come up and take care of her when she had a heart attack, but you didn't travel back and forth very easily. I remember I just had lunch with Daisy and she shook her head and said, "They don't know what they're doing," which was right. And I knew that Alfred was getting all these offers of university jobs and so forth, but he insisted on staying in this rather peculiar place. Something I want to go back to, about the war years, that all connect to it.

SZ: Having to do with what?

HF: Tory [Barr]. Is this more detail than you want?

SZ: No, it's fine. It's very interesting to me.

HF: At one point, when I went back into my regular research in this unit...of course, any military person had superiority over any civilian, no matter how wide the difference in their knowledge or capability....

END TAPE 3, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 2

HF: ...and having rediscovered that I knew Italian, they set me up on another special project.... To go back to the bombing of Rome, obviously, what we provided six weeks before could only have been used for arriving at a command decision, because as the papers later explained, they had been trying out this operation on the sands of Egypt for months and months and months. Anyway, they rediscovered that I knew Italian and I was called in on another special, not-quite-so-secret assignment,

which was to ascertain whether suspension bridges were suitable targets for strategic bombing. As I say, of course, in tactical [bombing] anything that delays the enemy for five minutes is worth it, but not for strategic. So the only basis that they had for making such a decision was to know what happened in the First World War, in what I always call "Hemingway's War," in For Whom the Bell Tolls, up there in Northeast Italy, when they had bombed the bridges over the Trent...well, they bombed a lot else, too, but the war was going on there. And they wanted to discover how long it had taken to repair these bridges, so they sent me up to the Library of Congress to sit in a carrel reading the official Italian railroad journals. I protested vigorously, because my vocabulary does not encompass in any language this engineering kind of stuff...I had no idea of what all these technical terms were. They said, "That's all right, we'll send up an engineer and you ferret this out as best you can and he'll try to put it into the proper language." Well, I thought it was ridiculous, given the number of Italian-Americans in the United States Army, that they could not have pulled out somebody who would have known what he was doing....

[LAUGHTER] Anyway, I sat up there for two weeks doing my best with this, came back and the upshot was that they decided no, these were not suitable targets because they either got repaired very fast or they were able to put pontoon bridges in very fast, as we now know from the war in the Persian Gulf, that they can get around the bombing of bridges very fast. Anyway, the lieutenant in my unit came up and said, "I understand that you have lived in Italy," and I said, "Yes, I have." He said, "Tell me, is Italy at all an attractive country?" I said, "You mean physically attractive?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Well, it's certainly one of the more beautiful countries I've lived in." "Well," he said, "you know, I only found out last week"--presumably by reading an intelligence document--"that Italy is very mountainous country," and I said, "You have heard of the Alps and the Apennines, haven't you?" "Oh, yes," he said, "but I always thought it was sort of rolling country, like southern California, where I come from." You can see in general why my opinion of intelligence was not very high. And of course then the internecine squabbles between one unit and another were beyond belief. I later read a book by a man named Nigel Balchin,

English, called The Small Back Room, in which--it was absolutely analogous in Britain, and if you have read any of [John Le] Carré, you know that a great deal of the energy of the intelligence goes to fighting among themselves and one-upmanship. Well, shortly thereafter, I tried for and was successful in getting a job with OFFRO, which was the Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation, then within the State Department under Herbert Lehman set up to plan for postwar relief operations. I went for an interview and got a job in a small research unit, in spite of the fact that the man who recruited me was very shocked to discover that, although I'd had a great deal of history and I knew several languages, I'd never had a course of economics. This shocked him greatly. However, I was set to work, and this was a little unit of six youngish woman under the man who supervised the research, but the man who was in charge of the whole thing was David Weintraub, and we were known as "Weintraub's Garden of Gorgeous Girls." They were very bright and delightful young people, and I had a much better time with them than I did back in the intelligence [unit]. I was set to work...my first job was on Albania, on which virtually nothing was known and which of course was under Italian domination. Again, my opinion of intelligence operations didn't improve very much because one of the few documents we had to go on was something written up, I guess, maybe by the Office of War Information [OWI], and I think it had been put together by a graduate of one of the WPA writers' projects. Anyway, there were a couple of sentences in it that I will long remember and have come to mind lately when reading about Albania. One was "The population of Albania is divided among independent mountaineers, fever-ridden lowlanders, and civil servants." The other was, "There is only one rail line in Albania, which runs from the port of Durazzo to the capital, Tirana, and it is a single-gauge railroad running for approximately," and then, let's say, it was forty-six kilometers--which was carried out in miles to the fifth decimal point [LAUGHING]. Anyway, I worked on various things there, and then a very exciting moment came when with the end of the war OFFRO was being changed into the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration [UNRRA], and the meeting among all the countries involved, at which this took place, was in Atlantic City at the Claridge Hotel, and a

number of people in our unit got sent down to do various things. I went down, having taken a French examination at the State Department, ostensibly as a translator of French into English. I had a little baby passport, about this big--green stamp, looks like a passport.... Well, when we got there--this was November, and rather nice weather down there in Atlantic City--it was discovered that there was not any great need for translators of French into English, but before being sent back, I got put into the documents section. Again, work was going on all night, because the ability of any organization to generate paper is hard to believe [LAUGHING], and those were in the days before they had automatic collating things, so everybody would be recruited to go around a table in a conference room about twice as long as this, marching around the table collating, collating, collating. But it was again a very exciting moment, because people were so hopeful in these days, and we were (except for the International Monetary Fund, which got set up at Breton Woods in New Hampshire), the first of the international organizations before the UN itself was actually even set up, so that was kind of exciting. And then, let's see...in UNRRA I worked first on one of the few things that was working even before the war was over, which was the displaced persons camps. The displaced persons were principally...well, a lot of people from Eastern Europe would trickle through, and some trekked off to India, actually; and there were some in what was Palestine, but a large number were in Egypt, and they were largely women, children and old or disabled people removed from either the Greek islands, which the Greeks couldn't supply with food because the Mediterranean was heavily patrolled by submarines and they were taken off from the islands and brought to Egypt; and the Yugoslavs from the western coast of Yugoslavia who were cut off by the mountain ranges from the fertile part of Yugoslavia and also could not be fed. Of course, Yugoslavia was very much involved in resistance and so forth, so they evacuated these very young and old people. The UNRRA staff who worked with the Greeks were always very envious of the people who worked with the Yugoslavs, because these poor Greek provincial people had no idea how to organize themselves; they required spoon-feeding with absolutely everything; whereas the Yugoslavs immediately got themselves organized and did a

great deal of the distribution and the policing and the god-knows-what themselves. The contrast was striking. This was turned over to us, because the moment the UNRRA agreement was signed, they said, "You don't have to wait for the end of the war, this is in operation, it's exactly what you were set up to do," and previously, it had been the British Army that had been taking care of all these people and drawing food and clothing and whatever out of their own rations, so they were delighted to turn this operation over to us. I worked for a wonderful woman called Carolyn Flexner, who was a niece of the great Abraham Flexner and a cousin, I guess, of the historian James Flexner. She was a marvelous woman, and I was her assistant, and we worked in a tiny little office. She had a desk, her secretary had a desk and I had a desk. Again, bureaucracy is something that must be experienced to be believed. In this office, which was about the size of from this space to here, Carolyn's desk was against the window and her secretary's was at right angles to hers over there, mine was by the door. One day the administrative assistant for the whole unit came along and said, "Your office is set up wrong. You should be where Dora (her secretary) is and she should be where you are," and I said, "Why?" "Well, that's nearer the window, and you outrank her." I said, "Look, she is Carolyn's secretary; she can swivel around in her chair when Carolyn wants to give dictation and not move, and we'll keep it this way, and thank you very much." And another time, when we...that was in another office; it was in--you know Washington? You know, just below Dupont Circle on Connecticut Avenue is that pie-shaped building, which is now an apartment house or hotel or office, I forget which. Anyway, it was in that building. And later, when I worked for Karl Borders, he had one of the end offices in this pie-shaped section, and he had his desk arranged the way he wanted, and the same administrative assistant came in and told him it was at an angle, it shouldn't be at an angle. Going back to the displaced persons, one of the things I was set to doing was to come up with a budget for what it might cost to feed these people, and nobody had any idea because, as I say, they'd all just been drawing it out of British army supplies. I don't think I'd ever done a budget in my life. I went to work and I don't know what kind of figures I used, but I eventually came up with the figure of

something like a dollar a day per refugee, and that stood for years thereafter, because nobody had anything better to go on. That really was very exciting, because we were really in operation.

SZ: The war was over?

HF: No, that's what I'm saying: We were the one thing that was in operation before the war ended, because the refugee camps were already set up. When the UN agreement was signed, that obviously was part of our mandate. No, the war was not yet over. Let me see. From there, I got offered a job, at almost twice the salary, to go to the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service [FBIS]. This was a unit that monitored all the radio transmissions and digested them and sent a daily thing around to all the agencies that needed this information. I was in charge of a small unit that had to clarify what came through; in the first place, it was very often garbled in transmission or had a lot of static and the people who were monitoring it would put down phonetically whatever they could best do. Our job was to disentangle this, get the correct spelling and interpretation, identify geographically those places, and if it were people who were named, try to say who they were. There was a big card file set up for this, and the card file had bits of information that were supposedly useful; however, you would find in it the name of somebody who won a beauty contest in Podunk Corners in such-and-such a year. One thing I had to do was weed this junk out of the files and try to put some order in it. I also found that they didn't have much of what they needed, so the first thing I did when I got in charge of this unit was to try to wheedle some relevant maps out of the cartographic department that had charge of all this. Everybody else was competing for maps, but what I wanted was a map of Italy. We were already in Sicily and it didn't take much foresight to know that pretty soon we were going to be in mainland Italy attacking what Churchill called the soft underbelly of the Axis. We didn't have maps. Everybody else was competing for maps, but, finally, I succeeded in getting maps. Also, I discovered there was a postal directory of Italy, which had every tiny little village listed. So the maps arrived, I think,

two days before we went onto the mainland, and my stock went up among the people that were doing the monitoring, they thought I was clairvoyant. I didn't think it took too much foresight. Another thing about this internecine thing: We were on one floor of the building...no, I guess this was further back, this was back when I was in strategic analysis--back then. On the floor above our unit was photo intelligence, and the intelligence reports which we got were very largely coming from, they were all coming from the underground, but they would be by Polish underground or French resistance, so forth, they only knew what part of the elephant they had hold of, and also, they weren't too good on distances, so they didn't necessarily know what a whole factory they were working in was doing, they only knew their part. You would get very conflicting reports. One report would say their factory was two hundred yards from the recognition point of a bridge, another would say eight hundred yards, very conflicting. So I used to go up to photo intelligence and I'd say I have these two reports, can you measure the distance for us, and they'd measure it for us; or they'd be very happy because they had a factory and they had no idea what it was. The only ones you could always tell were aluminum factories because they had very slanting roofs because they have to have a lot of water going over them. They wouldn't know what the building was and they'd be very happy to discover that it was making such-and-such parts and so forth. I was the only person in that unit who ever went up and talked to them, put the verbal information together with the photo intelligence. I said this was the point of having an art historian looking, to put the visual and the literature together. Intelligence was very strange. Anyway, to go back, the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service....

SZ: You really had a lot of experiences during the war.

HF: I did. Very different. It had nothing to do with what I always called my real life. So we'd get these reports every once in a while, and meanwhile, Richard Krautheimer was still working over in OWI and I'd get somebody's name and I'd not be able to find a card in my file, and I'd call up and say, "Richard, who is General Hasenpfeffer,"

and he'd say, "Helen! You don't know who General Hasenpfeffer is?" and I'd say meekly, "No, Richard, that's why I'm calling you," and he would immediately tell me all he knew.

SZ: Where were you when the war ended? Do you remember?

HF: Where was I when the war ended? That was later. Not there. There was in my unit at FBIS, as I later discovered--I was rather innocent about it--if not Communist, at least a leftward-leaning cell, which particularly was concerned with the Far East. They were very pro-China.

SZ: Government employees?

HF: In my unit. You see, I worked on identifying these transcripts that came down to me from our monitors. The three or four people who were working as analysts were supposedly reading the papers and feeding the stuff from them into these files or reading other reports. As I later discovered, they were deliberately sabotaging the whole thing. Among other things, they had endless union meetings and they insisted that you always had the right to go to union meetings--the meetings would last about three hours in the middle of the day. They were among the people who were putting this absolute junk (like about the Podunk Corners Beauty Queen) into the files, as I later discovered. I would be very angry at them, because the building we were working in was a temporary building--I don't know if it was an apartment or office building, but it was not a government building. In government buildings you usually had either a cafeteria or, if it was along the avenue, there was one right there. This had nothing of the sort. Of course, one of the things that drove me up the wall in Washington was the extreme Jim Crowism; that's another chapter I can go into separately. Anyway, all the employees either had to bring lunch or eat out, and there was not even a lounge where they could eat in; if you brought stuff in, you had to sit in the stairwell. No restaurant within half a mile would serve blacks. The YWCA was

integrated and would, in their cafeteria; the YMCA would not. All the black people in this place had to go quarter of a mile away to a White Tower, and I would come back and say to these union people, Why aren't you doing something about this? They never did anything useful that I could understand. They should have taken up a cause like this, but they did not. Suddenly it was discovered, then these people got fired, but by that time I had just resigned. I just couldn't take it. Well, resigning was a very serious thing to do during the war if you were in a civil service job, because it took a long time to get purged, so to speak, so you could get another job. In the interim I worked briefly for, at Christmastime, for one of the department stores selling stationery, and then I worked for the Department of Child Labor inspecting for violations, went around inspecting restaurants, hotels and so forth--didn't have much to do with my "real life." Eventually, I got recruited back by the same person who had hired me at OFFRO [Bill Welk], and he was now working...I've lost track of where I am, got things out of order, because I went....

SZ: What you have here is that when you went back to UNRRA, that was really just before the war in Europe was over, May of '45, as the executive assistant to the chief of the Bureau of Supply.

HF: Right. What actually happened--I'm trying to think whether it was in that order or not, because I got recruited by the same person three times.

SZ: While you're thinking of that, let me go back, because we had started talking about Barr and you said that I should come back to you on....

HF: On Tory?

SZ: Yes, and then I wanted to do a little more on what you knew about what was going on here through the Barrs.

HF: Very little...very little. As I said. I only had this one lunch with Daisy that whole time, and I had no idea.

SZ: But you said then through correspondence.

HF: Well, they didn't write very much. They [the Barrs] were very reticent about the whole thing, it was such a trauma. One thing I should have said was, before I went to Washington, was I worked on the Italian Masters catalogue [in 1939]. The Italian Government had sent over this collection of masterworks, which were showing in San Francisco, at the Golden Gate exhibition, and then they were supposed to go back. Alfred knocked himself out trying to get somebody who would take them here in New York, and either they couldn't because it was too short notice or whatever, and so he said all right, The Museum of Modern Art would take them, and did. I was then working at the Morgan, but Alfred had me doing research on these things. It was fascinating to work with him, because, if you look at that catalogue, it was for the general public and he had a way of putting things very simply; all these works were things that appear in every textbook you can imagine--he managed to say something quite different about them. And for the installation, which included sculpture, he also got Clarence Kennedy, who was a great expert up at Smith on Italian sculpture, and had him do the sculpture installation and work on the lighting.... It was fantastic, and a great big success. With his typical flair for public relations, he had this questionnaire, he had the public vote on what was the favorite work of art in the show, and everybody assumed it was going to be a rather pretty thing like the Botticelli [Birth of Venus] or so forth and were astounded when it turned out to be Titian's portrait of the pope [Portrait of Pope Paul III]. That was rather fun to work on. The other thing I was doing extracurricularly at that time was I was the associate editor of The Art Bulletin. Shall I go on to Tory apropos of this, because it has to do with this time somewhat?

SZ: Yes, do that, and then I have a few other questions for this time, yes, so go on.

HF: I was still at the Morgan Library, and one day I had lunch with Daisy and she was then in about her fifth month of pregnancy and told me this. She was absolutely, with her very logical mind, she was absolutely fascinated with the whole process of how an embryo came to be a child. She read up incredibly about this. She was fascinated with everything that happened about this. About this time sometime, also (you could check the date), I guess it was maybe when they were about to have Tory or when they moved up to 49 East 96th Street from Beekman Place and they were away and I worked with their maid moving them into that apartment (49 East 96th Street). It was funny, because my sister once lived in that apartment; she was no longer living there but I knew the apartment house. The baby was born and they picked Victoria because, as it was explained, it was the triumph of nature over reason. [LAUGHTER] Anyway, with the same thoroughness, Daisy read everything on child-rearing that she could, and she got a lot of information from people like Miggy Meiss, who was Millard Meiss's wife, who had children and was a child psychiatrist. But an awful lot of people they knew, I think, didn't have small children. I remember that when I went to see them in 96th Street, Alfred had rigged up a little swing in the doorway between the living room and the entrance hall, and I can see him swinging Tory. So all this business about the shameful neglect and indifference is absolutely not true. Of course, meanwhile, he had his obligations, they did have to go abroad. They had this place up in Vermont and his parents were alive, his brother... [was] alive and living up there; in fact, I don't think Tory had too harsh a time spending the summers up there. Then, when it began to develop that she had problems with reading--and Alfred couldn't understand this at all--at that time dyslexia was absolutely unheard of, nobody knew there was such a thing. Through Miggie Meiss, I guess, they had her tested and she turned out to be right-eyed and left-handed or the other way around, and they were able to get some sort of remedial teaching for this. Tory was always visually rather than verbally minded. I must say that her father was extremely fond of

her in spite of all, and her mother was, too. Later on there was some coolness between them, but this business of neglect is for the birds. One summer when I was back in New York I was invited up to Greensboro in Vermont, and I remember being up there and playing with Tory in the lake and so forth, and Alfred in his little shack where he did his writing.

SZ: Before you left for Washington, in your contact with them, did you know about what they were doing with some of the refugee artists?

HF: Oh, definitely, but...yes, yes, very much so. There was a program on television last week, did you see it? It was part of that week dedicated to the Holocaust, and there is a special program that had to do with the émigrés to this country, and there was a whole segment with Varian Fry--he was the person down in Marseilles who was getting all these people out, with Ingrid Warburg of the International Rescue Committee. Yes, we knew about that, but some of it, I think, overlapped the exact date at which these people came.

SZ: In those years, you described to me last time, you saw the Barrs intermittently and on, you said, a family friend basis, with the exception that you did the catalogue, the Italian catalogue [Italian Masters].

HF: Yes, and I think Alfred at one time had me do the entries for the Collier encyclopedia on whatever year that was. There were odds and ends of things. But, you know, there were odd bits of amusing things that happened, more particularly in relation to the Surrealist show, when they did that.

SZ: Such as?

HF: You know, they suddenly got all this material that had to be described by the registrar, fur-lined teacups and what-have-you. It always is amazing to me that they

did those two fantastic shows in the same year [1936], Cubism and Abstract Art and Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism. It's hard to believe they could have done that, but they did.

SZ: You saw them both?

HF: Oh, I saw everything! Everything, every single show they had, I'm sure, when I was in New York. Going on, just to pursue with Tory, of course....

END TAPE 3, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 1

HF: Later, you know, there was considerable, not rivalry, but a sort of wistfulness, I think. Tory went to Brearley, and so did René d'Harnoncourt's daughter, Anne, who was very much the scholarly type. Tory wasn't, but she went there. When Tory decided that she wanted to become an artist, her family were absolutely horrified. They couldn't have wanted anything less [LAUGHING]. First, because they thought she'd never make a living at it, and second, you know, they thought that she'd be under a handicap rather than an advantage by being her father's daughter. But, as I say, they were really...I saw them abroad, was abroad one year when they were there. I saw them, oh, going back, yes, to the time I was in Europe in 1936, I told you about that trip, but Alfred again was still here and Daisy was abroad. That was the second half of my split fellowship, and the year before when I was going to Florence and Belle Greene said, "You've never been to see [Bernard] Berenson in I Tatti." And I said, "Well, you know, I'm an Offner student," and Berenson and Offner had had this falling out, "so if you write me a letter of introduction, I want him to be sure to know that I'm an Offner student." However, I sent this letter of introduction up and I was

duly invited up, and I went on the tram that in those days went out to Settignano where I Tatti was and went up the alley of trees, arrived on the doorstep; there was a pull doorbell. To my horror, the damn thing stuck, and I was on the doorstep and peal after peal after peal was resounding through. The butler came rushing....

[LAUGHING] I could have sunk through the floor. However, they were very nice to me and I had lunch and so on. And the following year, Daisy was coming down from Paris, I guess, wherever, and was going through Florence and she stayed with me at this famous Pensione Bandini. But she had asked me to call up, to make an appointment for her to go see Berenson. So I did call up and Nikki Mariano, Berenson's assistant, who was very nice, called back and invited us both to lunch, and I later discovered that Daisy was very annoyed because I was invited too! She and Berenson struck it off immediately. They went for a long walk and they set up this long correspondence, and she saw him many, many times thereafter. That same summer--no, I guess it must have been the summer before--I remember going with Daisy and Richard Offner to the tennis matches in Paris at the Stade Roland Garos, where there was this wonderful guy called the Bounding Basque, Garos Borotra, and the very handsome German Gottfried von Kramm. Another out-of-place thing has to do with the Jim Crowism in Washington and how it drove me up the wall. Did I say anything about this? Well, it was unbelievably awful. I told you about the blacks not eating in a restaurant, but, for example, on that bus that I had to take to my first job there, when you crossed the Virginia line, all the blacks were supposed to go to the back of the bus. Eventually, the government stopped this, because they said the airport and our building Federal property, and the Federal government had done away with segregation and there were a lot of blacks in its offices. But you'd be in the cafeteria and if a black person came with a tray and wanted to sit down, everybody'd move away. Be on the bus, crowded bus, there'd be one seat next to a black person, no white person would take the seat. And you had it pushed in your face all the time. I remember for some reason one time I took a cab back from where I was working in to town, and the cab driver said, "Do you work in that building over there?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I understand that they let niggers use the same toilets as the white

people. If I were a white woman I wouldn't want to use the same toilet as a nigger." I said, "You know the color that their skin is?" He said, "Yes." I said, "You know, it doesn't rub off one bit." The situation was ludicrous on this whole integration thing, because it was interpreted so differently. At the National Theater, which was Washington's only theater, there could be blacks in the performance but they could only sit up in the balcony. [At] the DAR auditorium, as everybody knows from the famous Marion Anderson incident, blacks were not allowed to perform. Actors Equity finally shut down the National Theater, which was the only legitimate theater, because they wouldn't go along with this. And that left one very good auditorium--I guess the Arena [Stage] was still working, but [only] one really good auditorium, which was American University's. There was great excitement because Ingrid Bergman was coming to act in St. Joan, and tickets were at a high, high, high premium. And they announced an integration policy in the audience. I went to the ACLU, and they teamed up people; I had two tickets, and I was teamed up with a very nice young black woman. And on the night of the performance, we go to the theater, present the tickets to the usher, and he looks and said, "You can't go in, the tickets are no good." So I go through an act very innocently and I look at the tickets, I said, "This is for a seat for" whatever the date it was, "what do you mean?" "Well, you can go in and she can't." I said, "We're together, we have two seats." "Don't argue with me, go to the box office." So I go to the box office and stand in line at the box office, and say, "Why aren't these tickets good?" "We'll give you your money back. You can't go in." I stood there with people forming a line behind me until I made him put in writing that they wouldn't honor these tickets because one of us was black. I had never belonged to the [American] Association of University Women [AAUW]--it just happened that I never had joined in. Their clubhouse was off of...Jackson Square, I guess it is, and the local chapter shared headquarters with the national division. And at some time somebody, and I don't think that she was being deliberately confrontational, put up for membership the very distinguished Mary McCloud Bethune, who was turned down by the Washington chapter because she was a person of color. And the national chapter said, "The only requirements of

membership in the AAUW is graduation from an accredited college or university."

"Oh no," said the chapter, "that's the minimum requirement. Any chapter has the right to make any other arrangements." This went on for one year and a half before the national chapter said, "If you have this regulation, you cannot occupy this building," and expelled them from that building.

SZ: Well, Washington was really the South.

HF: The thing is, I had talks with people about this, and it's a very interesting story, and it parallels, in some way, the history of anti-Semitism, which is, it developed in the twentieth century, not in the nineteenth. In the nineteenth century, in the post-Reconstruction period, there was a fairly sizable middle class population in Washington. They attended the theaters, they lived in rather nice houses and so on and so forth. It changed with the second Mrs. Wilson, the notorious Edith Wilson, who was a Southerner, and she was the one who promoted Jim Crowism in Washington, which had not existed up to that time.

SZ: That's interesting. I didn't know that.

HF: But I spent the entire time there in a temper tantrum, and so I was delighted when I got to Philadelphia, and how things changed.

SZ: You went to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

HF: Yes.

SZ: Who was the director then?

HF: Fiske Kimball. But I'm still in Washington, am I not? I haven't done the....

SZ: I don't know. You were still in Washington, but, let's see.... [TAPE INTERRUPTION] I think we're going to have to stop for today, and then we'll start from there.

END TAPE 4, SIDE 1

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: HELEN FRANCO (HF)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

**LOCATION: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: MAY 6, 1991

BEGIN TAPE 5, SIDE 1

SZ: Helen, we were following your many and varied careers in Washington during the war, then the end of the war and then towards the end of your sojourn in Washington.

HF: I think I talked about being at the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service.

SZ: Yes, you did talk about that.

HF: And about resigning from there. When you resigned from a civil service job, you were in limbo for a while in Washington. You weren't supposed to do that. So in the meanwhile I had a brief spell working as a clerk in a department store over Christmas, and then I was a child labor inspector for a very brief spell. Then I was recruited back to UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency] by Bill Welk, the person who had originally hired me for OFFRO, who was now at a different job at UNRRA, and the day I arrived to report for work there was a flurry of telephone calls, and it turned out that there was a rather characteristic reshuffling of Washington, which was always reorganizing. The whole section that I was to work [in] had been moved or reshuffled, but Mr. Welk, who was the head of it, said, you have to sign her in and find her something else to do, which they theoretically

wouldn't have had to do, but they did. So I was again in a kind of limbo. Then I got to be the executive assistant to Karl Borders, the chief of the Bureau of Supply, which was really fascinating because that had the job of planning all the things that would go into the various countries after the war ended. There were divisions; there was industrial, and agricultural rehabilitation, and shipping, and all these various things. That was a really fascinating job; I learned a lot administratively there, too. One week's conference in which the heads of the people came in and discussed what they wanted and so on, and the Soviet Union had, besides their representative, Byelorussia and the Ukraine, and the Russian representative would come in and talk to my boss, Karl Borders. The next day, the other two were up there, and Karl called them the Gold Dust Twins. Anyway, UNRRA was a self-liquidating thing, because the moment the war ended, they were out of business. But they gave great bonuses [to those] who stayed until their particular position was declared redundant, so I stayed on till the summer, June or something like that. I also had accumulated lots of unused leave and so forth. So I had the largest hunk of cash I've ever had in my life at any one time, I think, and I was dying to go abroad--I hadn't been since '36 and this was '47. So I flew on a Sabena plane to Brussels, and we thought it was wonderful, because it took only twenty-four hours. We stopped twice to refuel, at Gander and at Shannon, and twenty-four hours after leaving New York we got to Brussels. And I thought it was marvelous, but of course I'd been used to taking six or seven days to cross the Atlantic.

SZ: On a boat, yes. Did it have those little sleeping compartments?

HF: No.

SZ: Just had to sit up.

HF: Oh, sure. It was a jet-prop. So I was really fascinated because, having dealt with all the supplies and the hardships, when you landed in Brussels it was a shock,

because the port of Antwerp had been heavily used by the Allies, and Brussels was in a glut of food. You went down to Paris and Paris was still in very bad shape, largely because the whole question was one of transportation, because when the Germans cleared out they had taken all the rolling stock east, and so the French couldn't get things in to the city. You'd see these people walking around with no stockings and those blue marks on their legs from the lack of fat. Everything shut down at eight o'clock, very slow transportation, the lights were all off, ration coupons for everything. Bread was baked every other day, and they had what they called cornbread, but it wasn't like our cornbread and it got absolutely as hard as a rock. I went up to visit a friend, Norma, one of the people who had been a housemate when I was in Washington, who was with a private relief agent up at the port of Lorient, which had been badly bombed.... This had been a big German submarine base...it was absolutely flattened, nothing left, temporary structures. Again, it was logistics. It would take forever to unload the ships; it should have taken a day, [but] it would take three days.... Then my friend had some leave coming and we went off to Brittany, which was very near, and Brittany was glutted with cream and eggs.... And we went to all the places, the Gauguin places: Pont Aven and so forth. Then I went down by myself through Burgundy and Provence, and, again, they had loads of food; you'd hardly have known that there'd been a war. I was fascinated when I got down south to see Marseilles, which is the area that I'd been responsible for in Strategic [Air] Intelligence. Went to Italy. When I got to Rome, I was really interested in following up what UNRRA had been doing. I knew the chief of mission there, Sam Keeny, and went to the displaced person camp, which was where Cinecittá was, the big cinema city outside Rome. To see these people living, not even in tents, mostly cardboard shacks. Because I spoke Italian, the chief let me ride down on a jeep to where they were going to be delivering supplies towards Monte Cassino, which of course had been badly bombed. It was very exciting to me, having sat in Washington just pushing papers around, because every truck we passed was an UNRRA truck. Since all the aqueducts, all the water system, had been bombed, all the...people would put out what we called jerry and merry cans, the gasoline containers used by the

Germans (the jerry cans) and those by the Americans (the merry cans), by the road, and the UNRRA trucks went by and filled them, which was all the water they had for bathing, cooking, everything else. The Italians, typically, when they got these little houses built for them, they had a little patch of ground in front of them and they had planted them with flowers and some of this precious water was used for the plants. We went all the way down as far as Monte Cassino, because we were very interested.... Sometime during that trip I got a letter from Robert Goldwater, who was then the head of the Magazine of Art, to ask if I would be its managing editor. At this time I couldn't make up my mind whether I wanted to go back to being an art historian or wanted to stay in the international arena. I really had gotten fascinated with the whole international thing. If I had been home, I could have discussed it, but just having to make up my mind like that, overseas, I couldn't do it, so I turned it down. So I went back and got recruited again by the same man, Bill Welk, into, oddly enough, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. I had no economics, but the system was then that they worked on teams for a given project. So there'd be, for instance, a canal development project; there'd be an engineer and a financial person and so on and so forth. What I could do was basic research for the demographics and the languages and the history and the geography and all that kind of background stuff. So that worked fairly well, until, with a typical Washington reorganization [LAUGHTER], it was completely reshuffled.

SZ: It must have been an exciting time.

HF: It was weird! I had a number of jobs; I cannot even remember what my résumé looks like. I became the research person for India, about which I knew nothing. All my background was European; I spoke the languages. For India, all the material was in English. They were coming up to a big census and I was working on that. This was really ridiculous. I whittled away at this, and nobody seemed to think this was odd or have any complaints about what I was doing. At that time, it was very hard for American citizens to get into any of the international organizations. I'd wake up in the

morning, look myself in the mirror and say, "You, Helen Franc, are the research desk for India for a supposedly reputable branch of the United Nations!" Just when these doubts were coming into my mind, along came my old professor from the Institute of Fine Arts, Walter Cook. He said, "Now, Helen, this is ridiculous. When you were doing things during the war, it was very patriotic, I could see that. But it's time you came back where you belong." I could not but agree with him. So I wrote three letters. One was to Fiske Kimball, whom I'd met years before when I worked for Dr. Offner. One was to John Coolidge, who was then the head of the Fogg. I can't remember who the third was, but, amazingly, I struck gold, because Fiske Kimball asked me to become associate in education at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which was a new job. So I moved up to Philadelphia and I had this glorious title of associate in education. However....

SZ: You're going to tell me it was reorganized [LAUGHING].

HF: No. The man who was the head of it was Emmanuel Benson. (Incidentally, his wife was someone I mentioned earlier as the friend of Daisy Scolari before she got to know me, Gertrude Ackerman Rothschild.) I don't think he wanted an assistant in the first place, and he would have liked to choose his own, so I had a couple of strikes against me to begin with. But I had, early on, some misgivings, because they had a new office for me, and I said, "Could I have some bookshelves in the office and bring my art books up?" And he said, "Well, okay, Helen, but the more you work in museum education, the more you will find how little you have to refer to sources." And he said, "The real purpose of museum education is...everyone who goes out of one of your talks should feel that an artist is someone in a constant state of travail." So I said, "Well, Emmanuel, I don't think I could presume to say how an artist feels. I am not an artist, and the only thing I think I can do is to tell these people what a more knowledgeable viewer can see when looking at art." But we were off on the wrong track, and he was really terrible in many ways. But I rather liked certain things I did. I had to take groups around, and you would get a memo telling you--they had a very

big education department--that there were fifth graders coming in from such-and-such a school and wanted a talk on the Middle Ages, or a junior high school and they wanted to see the Pennsylvania Dutch collection. The Philadelphia Museum is a very good one for this kind of thing--because of having all those period rooms--so it's very good for this. But this was all the notice you'd get, so in the first five minutes you'd have to size up whether this was, say, the fifth graders who had had a whole unit on the Middle Ages, and the visit to the museum was the absolute frosting on the cake, and they were just bursting to tell you everything they knew. Or you'd get a class'amico where the teacher wouldn't go along with the group, sat down resting her feet, because, thank God, somebody else was going to take over for forty-five minutes. If they were junior high school, they could barely lift up one foot and put it after the other one, and you knew, absolutely, since the teacher hadn't been there, that there was no preparation and there would certainly be no follow-up. So, we did the best we could under these circumstances. Also, they had a program of different days, devoted each year to a different thing, and this year there was an Italian one. Again, I was slightly at odds with Emmanuel on this, because it had music and slides and so on and so forth, and I got, through somebody at LIFE I knew at the time, some beautiful photographs of the Siena Palio, with people in costume and the banners and everything. And Emmanuel looked that over and he said, "Oh, no, all the kids would just giggle when they saw those ridiculous costumes." You were supposed to think that everybody in the fifteenth century walked around in....

SZ: In suits.

HF: [LAUGHING] Whatever. And also, on the music thing, he just wanted "Funiculi, Funicula," with an accordion. But I had arranged some music with records for when they're coming in and out, and I got some madrigals and some beautiful stuff like that. Also, after having things down in the auditorium, the kids were led through the galleries, and they literally walked through those rooms, and you were supposed to point and say that's this, that's this, but without ever breaking pace. It was a numbers

game, because it would show up how many kids had been exposed to it. I was not wholly happy on this.

SZ: You knew this wasn't going to be your last stop.

HF: No. But some things I liked very much, and it's a marvelous museum and I loved working with the collection. Well, one climax was when I got told that I was to meet with a women's club called the Modern Club, and I asked about them and it turned out that they had had people from the museum go down to talk to them at their clubhouse, but this was the very first time they were going to have a program at the museum, and they wanted something on modern art. So, the day before, Emmanuel called me in and asked me what I planned to do, and I said, "Well, I thought I'd give them about twenty minutes with some slides and things downstairs and then take them up to the galleries and show them things." And even before they had the Arensberg collection they had the [Albert Eugene] Gallatin and they had beautiful Cézannes, that great Bathers. "Oh," Emmanuel said, "no, you can't do that." He said, "If you have been successful in your presentation, you will maybe have succeeded in breaking down some of their prejudices about modern art, but if you take them up to the galleries, it will only reactivate their antagonism."

SZ: You wonder how he felt about it.

HF: I said, "Well, Emmanuel, I don't think it would be a very good talk if they couldn't stand confrontation with the actual works of art." He absolutely forbade me to take these people upstairs, so the whole lecture in the museum was given downstairs in the basement, as if.... You know, I couldn't believe it. Well, anyway, I got an offer from somebody I had known from the Institute of Fine Arts. There was a job opening up at Utica, at the Munson-Williams-Proctor [Institute]. So I made a trip up there and I was thinking about this, and didn't know if I really had enough experience to be the whole education department there, but I was thinking about it. And, on a given day

there was to be a trustees meeting at the Philadelphia Museum [of Art], and not the head of the Munson-Williams-Proctor but somebody at Hamilton College nearby who was very closely related to Utica and whom I'd met when I was up there, and who was on the board of trustees, came. About half an hour before the meeting, along came Robert Goldwater, who was also a trustee, and it seems that the person who'd taken the job of managing editor at the Magazine of Art was leaving and he was offering me this job again. So I got engulfed, and he was going to bring this up with Fiske Kimball, and I said, "Please make it clear that I wasn't doing a double deal, that I just heard about this from you this second." So, apparently, it was very funny, because this came up at the meeting, these two competing offers, and Fiske Kimball said, "I really didn't think I'd be presiding over the auctioning off of one of our employees." Anyway, I decided, of course, on the Magazine of Art, which got me back to New York, and I'd known Robert Goldwater since he first came to the Institute. So before I left, I spoke with Fiske Kimball, and he said, "I gather you weren't too happy with Benson," and I said no. It turned out, too, he asked, "Did Emmanuel show you the letter that came from the Modern Club after your talk?" And apparently they'd written to him and they'd written to the director and thanked him and said how much they liked this talk.

SZ: They just were sorry they hadn't seen the pictures.

HF: No, they didn't say that [LAUGHTER]. They were very complimentary about my talk. Emmanuel had never shown me the letter. But I enjoyed Philadelphia in many good ways. The museum was wonderful. It's a very friendly town. I had the feeling after six months that I had met at least half the people I would have if I'd stayed there much longer. A person I knew very well who had been general counsel at UNRRA, Fred Chait, and with whom I had a lot to deal with in UNRRA, had come up and worked with [Walter] Annenberg at Triangle Publications, and he was in charge of all Annenberg's nonpublishing activities, philanthropies and art things and so forth. So I saw a lot of him. I was there at the time of the great Truman victory, which was very

funny.

SZ: A surprise to many.

HF: [LAUGHING] Well, including the Democrats, because there was this wholly impromptu parade that the Democrats threw together, and I remember walking down, I guess it was Locust Street, in front of the Union League Club at about eleven o'clock at night, and all these glum-faced people in their best bibs and tuckers, waiting for their limousines to deliver them home, and we let out whoops and hollers as we went by. It was really something.

SZ: You were glad to come back to New York though?

HF: Yes, I was delighted to come back to New York, but I liked Philadelphia very much, especially after Washington. I had resented this whole Jim Crowism, and Washington was also, in those days, almost a cultural desert compared to what it now is. The theaters had closed, the great things were the Budapest Quartet playing at the Library of Congress and certain things at the Duncan Phillips [The Phillips Collection], but it was really a company town and a rather dull one. Of course, it's kind of developed since. I was delighted to get back to New York.

SZ: You had been away from New York for, what, ten years at least.

HF: No, not ten years. I left in '42 and came back in...August of '49. And I loved working at the Magazine of Art, it was great fun. And there again I resumed contact with Alfred, who was on the editorial advisory board for the magazine, and a lot of people I knew, like Jack Baur, Lloyd Goodrich and all these different people. I loved it because the magazine dealt with all sorts of periods, and one reason I've always

liked being an editor is you don't live on your fat, you always learn something each time you have a job, you're constantly learning, and I really liked it very, very much. Robert [Goldwater] got a Fulbright for one full year and was abroad, and Jim Soby, then, became the editor for that year. I loved working with him, he was an absolute wonderful guy, as you probably know.

SZ: Just tell me a little bit more.

HF: He was marvelous. And the poor Magazine of Art was.... Also, it was interesting, because this was...the Abstract Expressionists were just coming into their height, and Robert was very interested; we had a number of articles on them. Some people, including Alfred, I regret to say, thought we were overdoing that.... [I] don't think he thought it of highest quality, but for some reason or other--I'd been out of touch, you know, there was nothing to see of current modern art in Washington, and certainly not in Philadelphia, but for some reason I dug Abstract Expressionism from the word go. I found it very interesting and exciting.

SZ: How did it relate, for you, to the times?

HF: It was just that I liked the color, the freedom. I found the big scale very interesting. I don't know, I just found it very interesting. The poor Magazine of Art was owned by the American Federation of Arts [AFA], and it was always having financial problems, always having trouble meeting the payroll and always being embarrassed with our suppliers because the AFA was late paying its bills. I was always having to call up and...there was an adorable man, who just died; he was Sam Field, and he was head of the Publishers Printing Company, and he extended us an endless amount of credit. And the people who did the plates were wonderful, but it was really embarrassing. We barely were making our payroll. The then president of the American Federation of Arts was Otto Spaeth, who at one meeting said the reason he didn't like the Magazine of Art was it didn't publish the kind of art he was

interested in collecting! A narrow point of view. Edith Halpert of the Downtown Gallery was also connected with it, and at one famous meeting I remember her saying to Hudson Walter from Minneapolis she didn't think we ought to have articles on architecture, because there were architectural magazines, and asked, "Don't you agree with me?" And he looked at her and he had this sort of drawl and he said, "Edith, you know, the only thing you have against architecture is you can't buy it and you can't sell it." [LAUGHTER] Anyway, we struggled and we struggled and we struggled, and somebody who was wonderful in helping to raise money, did a yeoman's job. Lloyd Goodrich went to bat for us. But Roy Neuberger, who was the treasurer, I guess, of AFA, tried very, very hard, but the trustees decided not to have a deficit--the deficit was \$5,000 a year--so they shut down, suspended this magazine, which had been going since the early nineteen hundreds, for a measly \$5,000. I had the job of liquidating its assets, which largely were a few books, very few books, not worth very much, but what they did have were file cases and file cases and file cases of photographs of all kinds, going back to god knows when. It was decided that they should be auctioned, and darling Bernard Karpel, our [the Museum's] librarian, came over and helped to set up how we should do this. For days and days and days we were going through these things and counting so many people relating to such-and-such a general topic, and how many artists were doing what things. Then we sent out the lists to various institutions, because we did want to sell it as a whole, not break it up into little chunks. It was bought by the University of Minnesota for a sizable sum, which the AFA was very pleased [about]. I should go back to say one thing: In the middle of doing editing, Alfred's book on Matisse [Matisse: His Art and His Public] was coming out, and one day he called me up and he said the editors felt that this book should have an index, and Olive Bragazzi--have you come upon that name before?--would do it, and would I come and explain how you do an index. So I went up and sat in the apartment with Olive and Alfred, and Alfred said, "I don't want very much of an index. I want a very short index because I really think the reader should do some work." And I said, "Alfred, absolutely not." Because we had published, by the way, one part of a chapter or section of the book

on "Matisse and the Crisis of 1907," or words to that effect, in the magazine. I said, "Alfred, this is a great book and it has to have a detailed index." And he said, "There's nobody to do it." I said, "I'll do it." So I did the index in my spare time, a very, very detailed one, and Alfred was really very pleased with it when it came. So, when the book came out, one day...first, I get a package, and in it was a copy of the specially bound edition with gilt edges and numbered, and it was supposed to have been signed by Matisse, but he was then very ill, so it wasn't, but later in the summer Alfred had Matisse write a postcard for me, which I have in the book. My copy was number four, and I said, "How do I rate number four?," when you think of all the people who should get them. Well, anyway, that was thrilling, but he said, "That's not all." So a while later, along came Bill Lieberman, whom I also first met at the Magazine of Art, and he came bearing a package, and this was the Matisse Poèmes de Charles d'Orléans, a beautiful, beautiful thing, plus a kind of frame that's made so you can open it up and put separate plates in and hang it either vertically or horizontally. So I got more than paid for that. Plus, Frances Pernas of the Department of Publications asked me to do the jacket blurb for the book, which I did get paid for. So I have a very close connection with the Matisse book. Bill Lieberman I got to know because he'd been supposed to write an article, but he was way behind his deadline.

SZ: When you were working at the magazine.

HF: Yes. And I knew I was becoming very acrimonious, and one day he came very apologetically to the Magazine of Art, which was in the French Institute building on 60th Street....

SZ: Between Madison and Park.

HF: Yes. And the doorbell rings and along comes Bill with a beautiful single chrysanthemum as a peace offering. So I got to know Bill, I got to know him very

well, and we had a good time together. Let's see, a whole lot of things happened at the magazine. Oh yes, one of the things was that one of the trustees was Sidney Berkowitz, and he was very much interested in art films, and he wanted us to a) do reviews of art films and b) publish a little listing of art films. And I found myself reviewing a lot of the art films, which was great fun. I reviewed a number of them and got to run a session on art films at a College Art Association symposium. Anyway, I became an expert on the art film [LAUGHING]. Among the people I got to know was Thomas Bouchard, an artist, photographer, and his daughter Diane. Bouchard had known many of the leading modern artists in Paris, and when Fernand Léger came to the U.S. as an artist-in-exile during the war, he lived in the same apartment as Bouchard on the south side of Bryant Park. And he made a film with Bouchard more or less to educate Diane, with music by Edgar Varèse, and I had it screened at MoMA and they bought it for the Film Library. The Bouchards often invited me to their evening parties, where I met Varèse and his wife...; Marcel Duchamp; Kurt Seligmann; the Spanish guitarist Escidero; and other fascinating people.

SZ: Did you also write for the magazine, just regular articles?

HF: No, no. Those were the only things I did, but I reviewed a number of art films for them. Another thing that happened during this period was--this was the McCarthy era, you realize, and we had several things on that, one on a controversy about sculpture, but the big thing that happened was the whole controversy about the film The Miracle, which the Catholics regarded as sacrilegious and wanted banned or boycotted. This was Alfred at his most Machiavellian best. The magazine always had an editorial about something or other; usually, it was written by the editor-in-chief, but sometimes there were guests. Alfred wanted the magazine to take a stand on this business about The Miracle, so he succeeded in finagling Otto Spaeth, who was the head of the American Federation of Arts and also a devout Catholic, to write this editorial. I remember Alfred called me at home, we had these lengthy discussions and so on, and he'd say very crossly, "Well, I haven't got time for all of this," and I'd

say meekly, "Alfred, you called me." That was really something. Let's see what else I remember.

SZ: His position was what?

HF: Whose?

SZ: Alfred's.

HF: Completely anti-censorship, of course. This was an issue of censorship.

SZ: But you had no problem with your board in running that kind of an editorial?
[LAUGHTER]

HF: No. The American Federation of Arts had an old tradition in defense of artistic freedom. They were involved in the original Brancusi controversy, you remember, when it was a question whether one of the Birds in Flight, one that belonged to [Edward] Steichen, could come into the country as a work of art, or whether it was dutiable. Works of art were not supposed to [be] dutiable.

SZ: Whether it was a work of art.

HF: Whether it was a work of art, yes, which was defined at that time by the dictionary as the representation of a living person or animal. The AFA succeeded in getting recognition for the Brancusi as a work of art even though it was not representational. Early on, the American Federation of Arts had been involved with getting the act for free entry of works of art through Customs. So they had a long tradition of anti-censorship....

END TAPE 5, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 5, SIDE 2

HF: ...I loved it [working at the Magazine of Art]. I got to know well Lloyd Goodrich, whom I'd known slightly before; he was head of the editorial board for a time. Jim Soby was there, too, and was acting editor the year Robert Goldwater was abroad on a Fulbright. I had a great time there, I loved that job, and I was heart-broken when they did away with it. [PAUSE] All sorts of people I got to know in person or by correspondence. I found it intellectually very stimulating; I really loved it. Years afterwards, Roy Neuberger would say how much he regretted its having gone under. It was a ridiculous thing for the AFA to do.

SZ: To let them do that.

HF: Yes, for \$5,000, which was peanuts even in those days. We got all sorts of letters about how people regretted it. The thing was that the magazine had articles about all periods, including architecture; it did not review exhibitions, so we had a hard time getting advertising from the galleries. That was one of the problems. It had awfully good people writing for it, because it had a high standing. We had articles by Lewis Mumford, for example. Robert was very good at getting articles; he had a good, solid reputation and a wide range of knowledge. Jim Soby was very good at getting things. It really was a quality job, meant for the layman with an interest. We always used to joke about that phrase "scholarly but interesting." Actually, I'm now working with Bernice Rose, editing her [Joseph] Beuys essay, and something came up about the sun as a symbol and about Beuys's relation to Expressionism, and I said, "You know, Bernice, we had an article in the Magazine of Art on sun worship and anxiety." So she looked it up, and she was thrilled about it, it was very pertinent. So she used it. What is it, forty years back?, and I remembered it. I really loved that job, in spite of the trauma of seeing it go under.

SZ: I was going to ask you to just tell me a little bit more about Jim Soby from that period, what he was like. You said he was marvelous to work with.

HF: Oh yes. Well, I've talked about this with Rona [Roob] a great deal. He had a wonderfully equable disposition. He said that when he was young, he had a bad temper and he overcame it. He was the most warm and gentle sort of person. He had a fantastic sense of humor, and his letters and his memoranda are just a joy. You read them and they're just incredible. He was Alfred's closest friend and champion. He was extraordinarily generous, both in money and of his time and in his attitude towards people. At the time, he had a regular column that he wrote for The Saturday Review of Literature. He was a good friend of Norman Cousins. It was, I think--you should check the dates--but I think it was when the Museum was doing their big Italian show of modern Italian art. He also, of course, was the great expert on [Giorgio] de Chirico, and he was just absolutely a dream to work with. I just looked forward to his coming in. He lived up in Connecticut and he'd come in one day a week, and I always looked forward madly to his coming; we always had lunch and discussed things. There was a period in there when some of the people, including Alfred, thought that the magazine was tilting too much towards Abstract Expressionism, and during the year that Robert was gone, there was a kind of move that maybe he should be replaced, and the hopeful candidate--this is probably something that should be confidential--

SZ: It'll be here and then we'll decide what to do with it.

HF: That's right. [The candidate] was Henry Hope, who was leaving Indiana and wanted to come to New York. He was a trustee of the AFA. He was very much wanting this job, and so one day there was a lunch arranged with Alfred, Jim and me, asking me whether...they didn't mention Hope, they just said did I think I could run the magazine with a number of advisory helpers. I have often found that the best thing to do in such a situation is to play being very dumb [LAUGHING]. I used this technique at a

later time in the Museum. I pretended I didn't know what was going on; I just said I considered the magazine had a very good editor and didn't think I could take on this job. But I don't think Robert ever knew this; he would have been very much hurt. Henry Hope did not have, I think, Robert's wide range of interests. Anyway, nothing happened. The magazine was shut down, so it became moot anyway. At the time, also...it seemed to everyone that Jim and Nellie Soby were a singularly devoted couple, instead of which, it turned out, they were on the verge of a divorce. They moved up the headquarters of the American Federation of Arts from Washington, where it had been from the beginning, to New York, during one of those years. It was going to be a big operation; transferring the whole thing was really quite difficult to manage. I guess, also, I had in the beginning of the summer, about May or something like that, a mastectomy, so I was somewhat recuperating, and I didn't go abroad. I rented a couple of rooms...well, it was a room, a shower and a little kitchenette in the basement of a house in, not New Canaan, but very near there, in New Milford. I commuted up there some weekends and then I spent a couple of weeks of vacation there. The thing was just one big, squarish room about from there to there. Jim came over a couple of times and we did some work there. He reintroduced me to Peter Blume and his wife, Eby, who lived nearby and whom I'd known when I was when in Florence in 1932-33, because they were in Florence the same year I was, and then in Rome. We had a big argument about Fra Angelico [LAUGHTER], because Peter thought Fra Angelico's frescoes in the Vatican were the best thing he did, and I said I didn't think they compared with the frescoes in San Marco, so Peter said that since he was an artist and I wasn't, I had no right to disagree with him, so he never spoke to me again, until we were brought together [in Connecticut]. So they were very nice. One time, I got to go to Sandy Calder's to see a performance of the Circus, with Sandy doing it. That was really exciting. Another time, we went to visit Lewis Mumford. There were a lot of people around in that area, I had quite a good time. Anyway, the weekend before I was to leave, I asked Jim and Nellie Soby and Peter Blume and his wife for dinner, and then Nellie called me and said could they bring their son, Peter, too. So all of us were crowded in, and I had my

cat, who had been an indoor cat up to then; he suddenly was discovering all the joys of outside. So they came. I remember we were seated after dinner in this small one-room space, and Nellie was to my left and Jim was to my right, and Jim and Peter were having this discussion about [Saul] Steinberg. In the middle of this thing, Nellie decided to break the news to me that their marriage was over. It was a rather odd moment, rather stunning. This was a great shock; however, it seemed that around Fairfield County this was quite well known. There was a big complication, really a messy divorce, a fight for custody of Melissa's [Melissa Wadley Childs] youngest child and so on. So, they were divorced, and Jim and Melissa eloped, and the custody fight was over their five-year-old boy. It was very messy. Anyway, the magazine folded and what to do, what to do? Jim tried to get me a job at the Museum, with no luck. Then, Bill Lieberman was instrumental in getting me a job at Harry Abrams, which was another weird one. I had a much better salary than I was making at the magazine, which wasn't saying much, but still, and a title like associate editor, or whatever it was. And again, the man who was editor, who was Milton Fox, didn't want an art historian there really, and Harry Abrams did want an art historian there.

SZ: Harry Abrams at that time was very much the same kind of publisher as now?

HF: Well, of course not as expansive; it's expanded. He had been with the Book of the Month Club, and he left the Book of the Month Club to set up his own thing just for art books. He inaugurated, besides a series of pocket books--and color reproduction was just sort of coming into its own, and he inaugurated big books like The Collection of the Prado or something such, with lots of color plates and people writing commentaries. He started these little pocket books on different artists. I arrived there....

SZ: What was the argument against having an art historian in that position?

HF: In a way, it was like Benson, down in, you know, Philadelphia. I didn't know anything about color. I knew a lot about magazine production, I didn't know about book production. I was interested in learning about color. But there was a wonderful irrationality about the whole thing. The books were essentially produced by Thames and Hudson over in London, and also, Fritz whatever-his-name-was, Neugass, in Holland also had a lot to do with them, so the stuff went back and forth for production. Milton had me most of the time sorting out color plates and never doing editing on any of the books, so needless to say, in spite of my title, I was the highest-paid file clerk in the city. He would send back color corrections and I well remember once when he sent back a plate saying, "This red should be the color of blood on snow by moonlight." [LAUGHTER] I didn't know a thing about color, but I was sure there must be some other way of doing corrections. So I went to the library and found, of course, a book on color wheels and so on and so forth, and he kept saying, "But those are very inaccurate." [LAUGHING] Anyway, I introduced that. I also showed him certain things about paste-up that he didn't know. He was assiduously keeping me from doing any editing. When I came in there, Sam Hunter, whom I knew because he had written an article--I believe he wrote two articles for us--while I was at the Magazine of Art, was an associate editor, and I thought, Oh, how nice, I'll know somebody when I get there. In spite of this, when I got there, Sam snubbed me absolutely, and I learned it was because he was being fired and I was taking his place, but I didn't know this. And the one who was the editor was somebody who was a great editor but he really didn't know much about art: It was Justin Kaplan, who was a darling. I liked him very much, but he was not an art person. I wasn't allowed to have a pen or pencil in my hand until one day, I think, Harry Wehle of the Metropolitan Museum, came in and he knew me very well and assumed I was editing his book on the Prado, and I had to explain to him, no, I wasn't. But then I also spoke to Meyer Schapiro, whom I'd known since I was a student. He was a good friend of Harry Abrams's, and I told him my problems and he spoke to Harry, so Harry then let Milton know that I should be allowed to make like an editor on certain things. These little books, the pocket books, were done with a certain number of reproductions in

color and little comments on each one. One day, Harry got impatient with Milton, because the slowness of the one on Piero della Francesca, and he announced that he was going to lay that one out. So he came down on Monday morning with his proposed layout for the pictures of the Cycle of the True Cross at Arezzo, the Finding of the True Cross, and it was clear that he'd just done it by eye and not by content at all. So I wrote a memo (and Irene Gordon, who succeeded me there as editor, always quoted this), in which I explained as tactfully as I could that his layout was very interesting but that the problem was that the Cycle of the True Cross was a narrative that told a story, and therefore I felt that some attention should be paid to this in the sequence of illustrations. Another thing that happened was that--I mean, I really didn't know much about production, only I had more common sense than Milton had--when they were doing a book, particularly the one on the Prado, and the system of doing the book was just to write for...they had their color people, very good color people working on the color plates, but for the black-and-white they just wrote to the respective museums and asked them to send their prints. As everyone knows, the Prado is notorious, or was notorious, for its bad lighting. You used to have to decide whether you'd go to certain galleries in the morning and certain ones in the afternoon, depending on where the sun was not, the paintings were almost invisible. And in their system of doing black-and-white photographs, they would set up lights on either side of the painting and there would be this broad band of light across it. So I said, no, I thought these were very poor quality and I would go up to the Frick and find some better ones. I went up to the Frick and I found photos by Alinari and Anderson and Giraudon and so on and so forth and persuaded Harry to order a set of what I thought were the best. They'd never seen such beautiful black-and-white photographs before. Well, these photographs were duly sent over to London, or abroad, and the proofs came back; the only problem was, they didn't send the original photographs back with the proofs. So I said, "You know, Milton, we really should have the photographs back. How can I correct proofs without seeing them?" He said, "Oh, that's all right, I'll just send them a cable and tell them to make everything more contrast-y." [LAUGHING] So, as you can see, I was not madly

happy there.

SZ: How did you get here?

HF: In the middle of this, it turned out that--I don't know whether he told me himself--but I heard that Sam Hunter had been asked to do a Bulletin for the Museum on the Circulating Exhibitions program but wasn't interested. So I said, well, I really would rather like to do this. So I came and saw Porter McCray and I did this by moonlighting. I would come in and work at night with great albums that the department had and all the records and so forth, and did this Bulletin. There were also some problems there because there were some statistics, and I had some trouble persuading people that things had to add up. This is one of the things I'd learned while I was down in Washington doing charts and so on. Anyway, I loved doing this, and this was, supposedly, a completely one-shot job.

SZ: You loved the work? You loved being here? What was it?

HF: Well, I adored The Museum of Modern Art from the word go, and this was on the Circulating Exhibitions program, which I was very much interested in, so it was fascinating. They ran both the Circulating Exhibitions program, plus the International Program, which had only recently....

SZ: That was just starting.

HF: Yes. Well, this was what Jim had tried to get me a job [doing] when they were first starting. It was funded by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund as a completely separate budget, and Porter was running both of these things. So the upshot of this was, Porter liked what I did on the CE [Circulating Exhibitions] Bulletin and he got me on the staff, with the title of--I don't remember what.

SZ: Here it says Editorial Associate, Department of Circulating Exhibitions, International Program.

HF: Yes, I guess that was my title. I mean, it was a job that hadn't existed before. And of course I was in seventh heaven then.

SZ: What was Porter McCray like then?

HF: Porter was adorable. Well, I was in seventh heaven, being back, being at the Museum, which I'd known forever, and of course I knew Alfred, I knew a lot of people already on the staff. I think Andrew Ritchie had just come. I had known him from way back, when he worked at the Frick and he was the book review editor for the Art Bulletin when I worked on that, and he had just come down from the Albright Gallery at Buffalo and was head of [the Department of] Painting and Sculpture. I knew Dorothy Miller, Bill Lieberman. I was just absolutely delighted to be here. I felt I'd come home after all these years, where I belonged. And Porter was very bright. But the problem was that since the International Program was a somewhat autonomous thing--I may say, before I get into that, that the Museum was in not a good psychological state at the time.

SZ: Why was that?

HF: There were more internecine jealousies and strife--and of course there had been earlier on, which was what led to Alfred's ousting, the pushing and pulling--but it was in a very bad way at that time. The heads of the curatorial departments resented Alfred being in charge of things, and they very much resented this sort of autonomy that Porter had in organizing the big international shows. There were a lot of things working against him, which was very....

SZ: They resented that even that early? When the program was just beginning there was that sense?

HF: Well, as it began, you see, we had these big exhibitions and they had money for them from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Museum's International Council budget and so forth, and money was always hard to get. And then, one of the first things that happened the very first year I was on staff was the exhibition that was asked for by Douglas Dillon, the American ambassador in France, because there was a lot of anti-American feeling in France at the time and he wanted a big cultural manifestation, and what developed out of this was the exhibition...De David à Toulouse-Lautrec, of paintings from American collections; there was a committee made up of museum directors, curators and private collectors. Jim Soby was the head of the selection committee, and the International Program, so to speak, provided the secretariat that this required, and I was responsible for the editing of the catalogue. The entries were provided by the respective institutions, and then we had to edit them and provide much more bibliography than they had. I also did the press releases for them. There was another person who resented [the International Program], Liz Shaw, publicity director, because Circulating Exhibitions and the International Program had their separate press releases and so forth going. She didn't like that all.

SZ: And how did she make that clear?

HF: [LAUGHING] In every way, and also by feeding this general dissatisfaction, which was against Porter, it was against Alfred, it was also against René [d'Harnoncourt]. As I say, the atmosphere at that time was rather poisonous. Also, my idea for this catalogue was that it should emulate the scholarly ones that the French did on their big shows--this was to be at l'Orangerie--and with a complete critical bibliography and so forth. Alfred was very much against that; he thought that was pedantic and a

big waste of time and so forth. But I thought of the prestige; it mattered with these persnickety French. We should give them a catalogue that rivaled the ones they'd been doing. Well, it was very exciting for me to work on that show, as you can imagine. So the catalogue entries had to go over and be translated abroad. It turned out to be a fabulous show. There were people standing in line outside the Orangerie for blocks. There were personnel problems within our department at the time because we had a lot of oddball characters...one really nutty guy who then turned out to have been stealing things and he got fired. Porter was really upset when this happened. So we all worked on that show. Anyway, we got great cooperation from the lenders, we got really spectacular things. I was interested in seeing how this was done, and Jim's strategy was to ask first for one of the biggest and most important things, which was from Duncan Phillips, Renoir's great Breakfast of the Boating Party, which unfortunately.... And Duncan Phillips was an absolute darling. He said yes, and he lent several other wonderful things. I remember once he had to go back to Washington and he left the meeting and he said, "I'm sorry, I have to get the train. I only wish I could have been more help to the committee." Everybody had to laugh! So you get one big thing like that and other people fall into line. So the things were of extraordinarily high quality and came from all around. It was very exciting to work on, although the time was extremely short, as usual, and the French were having a fit because of our needing the text for the catalogue so it could be translated. But it was wonderful, as I say. It was a wonderful success and fantastic releases, and afterwards I did a whole thing on the press releases and results of this.

SZ: Did that success do anything to alleviate some of the...?

HF: Not at all! It only enhanced the standing of the International Program and its independence.... We also got the responsibility for doing the American selection for the Biennale in Venice and for doing the first Bienal down in Sao Paulo, and the whole International Program was only just starting. Then, incoming, we had Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India [1955], which was a beautiful show....

END TAPE 5, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 6, SIDE 1

HF: Then we sent over to India a version of the Children's Art Carnival. Victor d'Amico was the head of it, and the whole physical apparatus--the tent for it was being sent over and all the apparatus that was needed. Jackie Kennedy was to make the presentation of it, and I was in charge of doing a great, big presentation book for her, with photographs and texts she turned over for the people in India to look at. There were great shows going on. I had fun on that, and on the first catalogue that we did for the Biennale which had Ben Shahn in [it]. The text was going to have to be translated into Italian as a bilingual thing, and one of the problems, always, with translating titles is that the English language can be very ambiguous, with various meanings for the same word. When you have an illustrated text, you can usually tell which meaning is the right one; when you have just a title, it's very hard to know exactly what is meant and get the right one. I remember discussing certain ones with Ben Shahn; also, Calder was in that show. I loved working on these things, obviously.

SZ: Yes, it kind of tied in with the interests you'd developed during the war years....

HF: Well, everything. We were very busy. There was a lot going on. Waldo Rasmussen was in the department; he came the same month I did to the Museum.

SZ: Maybe I'll ask you to tell me a little bit more--because you're very good at these kinds of descriptions--about Porter, what his working style is like, what the atmosphere was.

HF: One problem was Porter has an architectural degree. He never practiced architecture, but he had an architectural degree and Arthur Drexler didn't, so there were problems there [LAUGHING]. I remember we had one show in which Porter had Ada Louise Huxtable work on the show. Ada Louise had been in the [Department of] Architecture and Design and Arthur had fired her. Not a very bright move. [LAUGHTER]

SZ: Under the circumstances, no.

HF: Porter was wonderful about recognizing people with talent. Of course, if you're going to have a show like the Biennale, he couldn't make up his mind just by himself that these were the four artists we were going to have; that had to be done in consultation. But once that was decided, it was his baby. He's a workaholic, and a perfectionist. I am a perfectionist in my way, which is one reason we got along very well. He has this enormous circle of friends of all kinds in every country in the world, from India to Russia, who adore him and keep up with him. His interests are fantastic. You go to his apartment and books are spilling over all the coffee tables and bookshelves, they're on the floor and they're on everything from the prehistoric caves to the latest thing, just an absolutely wide range of interests. Very stimulating, and a very nice sense of fun and humor. I loved working with him, and I think he liked having me work with him, too. We as a department...with this thing we had a separate registrar besides the Museum's registrar; of course, everything ultimately coming in and going out had to go through the main one. One of the people who worked with him very well and loved him was Dorothy Dudley, our great registrar.

SZ: So in fact it really was rather an independent operation.

HF: That was the problem, you see. It was separately funded, so that Porter could make

his own budget, and of course there are always struggles over budgets and so forth. This independence was very much resented. But as I say, the whole Museum was in a very bad state at the time. Certainly, there are conflicts still, but nothing as it was then.

SZ: Okay, let's stop for today.

HF: Yes.

END TAPE 6, SIDE 1

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: HELEN FRANCO (HF)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

**LOCATION: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: MAY 20, 1991

BEGIN TAPE 7, SIDE 1

SZ: Before we continue, you wanted to pick up on just a couple of things you said last time. Certainly you wanted to elaborate on something to do with Porter McCray. So why don't we go ahead with that before I start my questions for today.

HF: Well, I think one thing that should be noted about him was that he had a very deeply and sincerely felt religious orientation. During the war he was with the Friends Service Committee that ran ambulances in India. He had a deeply founded, very upright moral sense of integrity, plus a great deal of kindness to all sorts of people, really going out of his way if people were in trouble or anything.

SZ: Could you give me an example in how you saw this here?

HF: Day-to-day sorts of things. He was very concerned about people. His sister was having a lot of trouble and finally left her husband in Virginia, and she and her daughter came and shared Porter's quarters, in a very small apartment, with a growing teenager; maybe she was just eleven or twelve, but not an easy thing for a bachelor uncle to put up with. That lasted for almost a year. That's all I just wanted to add. Where were we last time?

SZ: One thing that you had mentioned that I said I would like you to elaborate on [is] the Biennale, and since you were there just about from the beginning of the Museum's association with that whole thing, whether you could just talk a little bit about that.

HF: The first one I worked on...they had just gotten the American pavilion, which was in terrible shape.

SZ: You mean the Museum bought it?

HF: Yes. It had to be put into working order, and they hired a very nice woman--I don't know how they got onto her, but her name was Gloria Hodsoll and she spoke perfect English, but she was Venetian-born, and she kind of sat in the pavilion all the time taking care of things and answering people's questions. I guess the first one that we did had Ben Shahn, Calder--I'm not sure, you'd have to look it up--and a small little catalogue of our own, which had to be done bilingually. The hardest thing about it was making sure that the translator understood the titles, because many English words have many meanings, and if you're in context you can usually find out what's going on, but if you just have two words isolated, you really don't know. One example, for example, would be Calder's sculpture Black Widow, and we had to explain that what it was referring to was a kind of spider, not some femme fatale. I went over later that summer on my own, with no connection with the Museum. I mean, on my vacation, and it was very exciting for me to see it. I'd been in Venice before, and the pavilion looked great, made quite a stir, because the installations in a lot of the pavilions were very much more crowded--the main Biennale, of course, is always a big mess of things.... I'm not sure which year it was, whether it was the same year or the next year that they did the Bienal in Sao Paulo. René d'Harnoncourt's stories about dealing with the Brazilians are fascinating, because apparently they are quite mad in many ways. He was very funny about it. It was very important for the International Program to do both of those things, and they continued doing them for a number of years. Certainly a more adventurous choice

than the State Department would have made in the still querulous '50s.

SZ: Was there pressure from the State Department, in any event, on artists who were shown?

HF: Pressure on us?

SZ: Yes.

HF: No, no.

SZ: I thought I read somewhere that there were some problems with Ben Shahn works going through the...it's nothing that you remember?

HF: No. He was a very nice man.

SZ: In what way?

HF: I don't know. I worked with him on the question of the titles and so forth. Just very charming. So, where were we?

SZ: Chronologically, you have talked about working with Porter in Circulating Exhibitions and the International Program, and you sort of alluded to but did not go into in any real detail what happened between Porter and Arthur Drexler, because that had a whole....

HF: Well, as I said, it was a time of considerable internecine rivalry. I guess it was aggravated by the fact that after Alfred was shunted from his position as director, the Museum was run by committee, which never does any institution any good. Then, when Alfred was reinstated as head of all the curatorial departments, a lot of them,

the younger ones, objected, wanted more autonomy. It was sort of a push-me-pull-you time. But the International Program was very active. We did comparatively few incoming exhibitions; one was the great Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India, which was a beautiful show. And one interesting one was--I think I've mentioned sending the Children's Art Carnival on; that was a big project.

SZ: But actually, you didn't talk a lot about The New American Painting show.

HF: That was a wild year, 1958, and really my undoing, because I was working on the next show that was then underway, like the De David à Toulouse-Lautrec. It was French Drawings from American Collections and was going first to the Boymans van Beuningen in Rotterdam and then to the Orangerie in Paris. The Museum provided the secretariat and did the catalogue and all of that, but it was once again an inter-museum thing, and we had a very short time to do it in and a lot of research to be done. There was really shockingly bad information provided by the lending institutions in those days, so we had to do a lot on our own. It was one of the times when there were a lot of people in one very small, narrow office, and the famous fire took place. I can have a whole separate thing on that.

SZ: Well, you can do it right now, if you want. It was on my list of things for today.

HF: They had just hired Susan Senior as assistant to Porter; I think she'd come to work the day before. Of course the building physically was very different, but it was when they were redoing the air conditioning and they had a lot of outside contractors working on it. I guess it was the third floor, with the permanent collection emptied out, except for a few large paintings that they thought were too big and which they inured--they left them in place and put up panels outside to protect them, and those were some of the ones that suffered damage. And they had two exhibitions going: the great Seurat Paintings and Drawings on, I guess, the second floor, and, in the garden and the first-floor galleries adjacent, a [Juan Gris] show that Jim Soby had

directed. The Seurat was kind of jinxed from the beginning, because the Art Institute of Chicago had been persuaded to lend the great Grande Jatte and it was to travel without its glass...and on some kind of flatbed thing on the railway and coming down not on the unusual side of the Hudson, because it was thought it was less bumpy. Then the whole gallery was shrouded in white; all the men wore special white gloves and covers over their boots [so as] not to raise any dust. A new glass had to be made for it, and so the new glass was made and as they were carefully putting it into place, hit the top of the frame and split it down. Go back to square one.

SZ: Did you see this or you just heard about this?

HF: We all knew about it. People weren't allowed in the gallery. Anyway, it was about midday, lunchtime, and the Museum still had the children's classes and the art school in the adjacent building, and we heard the fire engines. So Porter laughed and he said, "Well, Susan, we're having a fire in your honor." It turned out that we should get out of there.

SZ: How did you know that? They rang a bell?

HF: They continued working, because usually, as what happens now when it goes off [accidentally] on the fourth floor, they'd say, "Pay it no mind." But they didn't. The building that the school was in was on the west side, a small, narrow building, there was an elevator there, and the only fire stairs. What happened was that the fire started in the basement just at the base of this stairwell, which acted like a beautiful chimney. All the smoke came pouring up; it was unbelievable. Some people got out on the west end, on the old elevator there, before we were told not to use the elevator.

SZ: There was a connection between the main building and that building to the west?

HF: It was just a converted townhouse; it was not part of the main building. The main thing was, it had the school. The Whitney [Museum of American Art] was at that time our neighbor to the north and east.

SZ: The northwest.

HF: North and west, yes. They began where the garden terrace now is. Anyway, a little group of us then were trapped on the sixth floor. It included Alfred and the two young men who had been hired temporarily to work with me on the catalogue, mostly typing, and Sara Mazo, who worked in Alfred's department--about six or seven of us. As the smoke got denser at this end, we went to the last office towards the east, which was a big office that I think belonged to the comptroller or something. If you tried to open the window, the smoke came pouring up the side of the window, and that wasn't a good idea. So we shut the door and tried to seal the cracks. They had just put in a new system to make the doors work better. Finally, it got smokier and smokier, and we decided we had to get out of there one way or another. There was a small clerestory window, a very small, high window, at the east end, and Alfred said, "I think if we could get out through that window it would let us out on the roofs of the two brownstones adjacent." So he tried unsuccessfully with something like a stapler to crash in the window, which didn't work. So one of these young men picked up a metal chair and smashed the window, and we put stuff over the broken glass and one after the other we crawled through. Where we were was in the gutter of the roof, so to speak, behind a cornice, like this, looking down to see all the fire engines and the crowds around. There were two adjacent brownstones--literally brownstones, not those things that frequently get called brownstones, these were honest-to-god brownstones--called the Prentice Houses, because they belonged to a sister [Mrs. E. Parmalee Prentice] of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and were used for retirees who had been servants or so forth; there were either small apartments or single rooms, I don't

know which. Anyway, the door in the metal railing leading into the main part of the roof was locked, and finally the janitor from the building popped his head up and was rather surprised to see this array of people. Immediately above us, to the west end, was the penthouse restaurant, and a number of people--it was really lunch hour--leaning over there, watching this. So Alfred demanded of the janitor that he open the gate and let us in. We went, one by one, traipsing down. It was a very surreal thing, because all of the occupants came out of the rooms and stood in their doors, watching us as we went down, and nobody said anything to anybody. The firemen told the people on the penthouse roof, "Stay there, you're absolutely safe," but a number of them were panicked and so some of them had to be helped down a ladder from the side and joined our merry little band. When we got down, we were outside of the barricades that the firemen had put up. Meanwhile, I had invited Jim Soby and his wife, Melissa, to lunch at the Italian Pavilion, and when the fire first started and the phones were still working--the first few minutes that we were in the office upstairs--I telephoned the restaurant and just said, "Please, when Mr. and Mrs. Soby come, tell them to go ahead and I'll be late. Take a drink or something, I'll be along." So there I was, outside the barricade, very much the worse for wear, having gone [through this] impromptu exit. I came in, saw the Sobys and went and washed up and said, "There was a fire at the Museum. That's what delayed me." But it really didn't seem to register. So we sat and had lunch and we came back, and when we came back, on the 54th Street side, and saw the fire things and things being moved out, Jim went off into orbit. Meanwhile, the things that were taken out of the exhibitions were moved into the basement of that brownstone next door, and the conservator Sheldon Keck came. The big problem was whether anything had been dampened or not. Some of the things had to be taken out of their frames, a couple of things. The Whitney turned over their whole first floor, and all the undamaged stuff was taken there; the big Grande Jatte was laid out on a big trestle thing. Before René had a chance--he was going to telephone all the owners and tell them, but immediately it was on the radio of course--before he could even get through to Chicago somebody telephoned Chicago's director, Dan Rich, and he and his conservator were on their

way. As the firemen let people into the gallery, our conservator, Jean Volkmer, went around. The big paintings there was not so much trouble with, but all the smaller ones had been wired with alarms, so she yanked these off of the wall and she pulled them off all their alarms went off. Also, the Grande Jatte was on the south wall, and the firemen were just about to break through that from the outside and along came Nelson Rockefeller, who was then the president of the Museum; he just happened to be wandering by and he stopped them, fortunately, because it [the painting] was right up against that wall. But all the windows on that side were smashed, to let the smoke out.

SZ: It must have been frightening.

HF: It was terrible.

SZ: How could you have, after going through that whole escape, take yourself to a restaurant for lunch?

HF: Well, I had to meet the Sobys [LAUGHTER], and they wouldn't let us through to do anything.... There was nothing to do. I couldn't leave the Sobys just sitting there; they were my guests. And there was nothing to do. Later there was a lot to do. When they let us up into our offices, of course, the place reeked with smoke, and you were walking in a couple of inches of water. If you left papers on the desk they had the smoke marks, oily. For weeks the place reeked of smoke, at least four weeks. All the telephones didn't work.... There'd been all of this construction going on, and I remember running into Nelson Rockefeller on that floor and he had on this fireman's helmet and boots and so forth, and I said, "You know, last week I said I'd never seen the Museum look worse, but I should have kept my mouth shut." [LAUGHTER] Then I stayed that night and helped with moving the stuff.... Dan Rich arrived with his conservator, having flown in. Everybody sat with bated breath, but not a hair of the beautiful Grande Jatte had been touched, fortunately. So we all worked very late, we

were sure that nothing had been damaged by flames, but every single painting had to be felt to see that water hadn't gotten under the glass of the frames. Along about ten o'clock we knocked off and went to a restaurant. I knew Dan Rich, because he'd been on the selection committee for both shows, so I said to him, "You know, Dan, those placid people strolling in Le Grande Jatte, they look so calm and innocent. You know what they're saying to each other? They're saying, 'You know, this is the last time we're ever going to be allowed to leave Chicago, so let's live it up a bit.'" But it was not funny. One man died, one of the outside people, presumably, because the in-house people knew where the exits were, and he didn't. He died of smoke inhalation; of course, that's what people do die of. Then, of course, it was decided that just having one fire exit was not a very good idea.

SZ: The Museum was closed for a while, too. [The fire occurred on April 15, 1958; the Museum reopened approximately two weeks later, on May 1.]

HF: It was hardly closed at all. What really happened was that all the owners agreed to re-lend pictures, and Seurat reopened. A great vote of confidence, and this enormous outpouring of concern for the Museum from all over the country. I was working on the blessed catalogue for the French drawings show and working a lot at night, and I remember coming back the next night after the fire and it was amazing. The whole building was lit up and these work people were going back and forth on all the floors. It was really a sight to behold. It was really a ghastly event.

SZ: I've noticed in the people I've been talking to it really sticks with them. I guess it's also a lesson in how important the institution is to them as well.

HF: And a very personal feeling about it. The Metropolitan is a great museum, but I think that the Museum had a very special place. People felt as if they owned it, in a curious way. I don't know if that's still true now.

SZ: And this whole concept of its being a real family situation?

HF: You mean for the staff?

SZ: Yes.

HF: I don't know. What I mean is it was the attitude of the public that was so proprietary. Of course, they had the art classes for the children and had excellent people who went to school there. I think Arthur Drexler had gone to the classes there. So people were brought up with it. Alfred had done such a fantastic job of reaching the public.

SZ: The following came up in the context of the question I asked you about The New American Painting show, that that was your undoing. I was very curious to know to what you were referring.

HF: What my undoing was. The curators in that department decided that they should do that show then and there, and it was a large and fantastic show, and I just thought it was too much while we were working on this other thing. I'm not sure it wasn't also a year when we did the American representative at the Biennale in Venice.

SZ: It was an even year.

HF: Yes. So I got a lot of hostility from Waldo and so forth, because I really tried to get him not to do the show. But they did. The workload and the tension with these various people in a room not quite as large as this, and I think we had about eight people working in it, and I'd been saddled with an assistant that Alfred decided would be a better selection. He was a recovered alcoholic or something, and Alfred decided he should have a chance. Well, he wasn't recovered enough. He was very difficult

and did not like working for a woman. Did I tell you this already?

SZ: No.

HF: He had one day-to-day habit that was madly irritating. Before they had Xerox machines, you remember, there was a special kind of copy machine that they had with a very peculiar kind of paper; you turned the lights on and it made the copies. Anyway, we had one of those machines and Ernie would come along and want to be copying a letter and he immediately turned all the lights off in the room so he could turn on the machine without saying anything to anybody, or else getting a bunch of letters and saving them till the end of the day. So everybody had to just stop while Ernie Xeroxed things. As I say, he resented, I think, working for a woman--or maybe it was just me. Anyway, we had one lender [Mrs. Isidore Straus] who was an elderly woman, and when the drawing was lent, her son said, "Please, my mother is a great collector, but she doesn't want to be bothered, and any communication must be with me and my office." So we had duplicate sets of file cards on which we were keeping track of the loans, and I said to Ernie, "Put in red capitals on the top of this one with this instruction: Mrs. Whosy-Whatsit is not to be contacted at all. All communication is to be with her son. Put it on both sets of cards." Came in one day, the place is in a turmoil. Dorothy Dudley, the registrar, decided to get started and call in some of the loans and picked up a batch of cards. It was bad luck with her: One of them was this card, on which Ernie had just decided, "Oh, Helen is such a fussbudget, I won't bother to do it." And the son had called back, absolutely furious because they'd called his mother. I said, "Ernie, why won't you learn that when I give some instruction, it's not just off the top of my head, there's a reason for it. And if we lose that loan, you're fired." I don't know what kind of magic I did, but I was very, very tactful. We got the loan. He wasn't fired.

SZ: Did you go to Europe to see the opening of the show in Rotterdam?

HF: Couldn't get to that. The catalogue, several people were doing research on it, including Xavier Fourcade. I remember we had one temporary typist who came in one day and I apologized to her for the fact that she was working in the middle of this turmoil. One of my colleagues was scandalized, because she said, "Oh, that's all right, Miss Franc, it was a good penance!" I had these two temporary typists working with me, and we literally worked till twelve o'clock at night, night after night after night. I guess I got pretty short-tempered during this time.

SZ: Which means?

HF: You know, I'm sure I was not the most agreeable person, so a lot of people ganged up on me, including Susan Senior, who had come in as a sort of deputy for Porter, because Porter was away a lot on these trips. Susan was engaged in putting me down. She said things like, "You know that big report you did for the grant proposal?"--I guess it was the Ford Foundation--"René and Porter thought it was great, but I didn't think it was all that hot." She undermined me consistently. Porter was away, working, and finally the show opened, with great big success. I got to know very well the French translator, Hélène Baltrusaitis, in the Cultural Service of the American Embassy in Paris. She had a terrible time, because this stuff was coming through very late.

END TAPE 7, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 7, SIDE 2

HF: ...and it was an enormous success.... There were to be all sorts of doings for the great opening. The whole selection committee had been fascinating to work with; I loved doing that. Besides working on the catalogue, I had to draft all the letters of request to collectors for loans, and then the letters thanking them, for signature by Paul Sachs up in Cambridge, and he was most complimentary and hardly changed a

word when he sent them back to us for final typing and sending out. I also especially enjoyed working with Agnes Mongan. I was going over to Paris, theoretically to help Porter with our end of the events that were taking place, the openings and publicity and all that. So, what Susan and René didn't tell me was that, instead of being in Paris, where I expected to meet him, Porter went off to a hospital in Rome to have some kind of treatment, which he underwent for several months. I went first to Rotterdam, where the show opened, and saw it there. I didn't have anything to do with the opening there, but I was there when it was on, and very thrilled to see it. Loved Rotterdam. Went down to Paris, and I'd taken with me a lot of material from the De David à Toulouse-Lautrec, show to remember how we had operated in sending out the invitations and some lists, because I thought I was going to see Porter. They didn't tell me that Porter wouldn't be in Paris when I got there. Susan inveigled René to send her over. She followed after me in Rotterdam, which kind of surprised them, because they thought she was just a fifth wheel as far as they were concerned. Reminds me, I want to back up on something. When she discovered I had these papers, she was absolutely furious and acted as if I were sabotaging the whole thing. I said, "Susan, I expected to meet Porter and work with him, and neither you nor René had told me that you were coming over, and naturally I brought these things with me." She went, "There'll be some changes made." She succeeded in getting me fired. I didn't know this. I had a fine time with my opposite numbers there on the French side, and then I went on a much-deserved vacation down to the South of France and Italy. I came back to London, and when I got to London, Porter told me René wanted me to resign. There'd been so much fuss and so forth. Well, I was stunned, because the last thing I'd gotten was the day the show opened, René had written me a very laudatory note. So I was absolutely stunned. I came back and dug my heels in and decided I damn well wasn't going to resign, they'd have to fire me. Let's see, this was '58, and I was fifty at the time. It wouldn't be easy to get a job, and if you resign you don't get any of the benefits. But anyway, I felt a great injustice had been done after the superhuman efforts I'd put in. I simply wasn't going to resign. I came back, had this session with René. I said, "You can fire me, but I'm not going to

resign." Went through all this business about the difficulties. Actually, Susan had been meeting with Liz Shaw on this little consortium. I think, partly, that they were getting at Porter through me, and I think Susie was aiming to be the head of the department, which she was not equipped to be. Anyway, they didn't know what to do with me [LAUGHING]. My salary, of course, was paid separately, by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

SZ: Because you were part of the International Program.

HF: Yes, so they had to get permission from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to fire me, which they did do. Anyway, meanwhile, of course, Porter was still in London, he'd just told me this, and he wasn't even around when I came back. So they decided to remove me from the International Program and the office there but to give me various assorted things to do for six months, and then would figure out what would happen after that. So I was on very good terms with a number of people in the painting and sculpture department, with Bernard Karpel in the library, and Pearl Moeller, with all sorts of people. It was really some of the curatorial people that I had problems with, especially this business within my own office. Years later, Waldo apologized to me, because he then had had so many problems himself with Susie. He said, "I didn't realize what you went through." Anyway, I for a while had a small little carrel in the library that Bernard fixed up for me. Then I had a little space--I don't know what it had been--a sort of alcove right opposite painting and sculpture. People were still...this was months after the fire, and they still were fussing when they'd try to fix up temporary telephone wires and stuff, and they still had to make all the connections, but because there were no original plans of where the electrical jacks and all of this were, and the building, again, had changed so many times, new partitions put up and so forth; nobody knew where the existing connections were, and they had to do it with kind of a divining rod. You'd come back from lunch and you'd find somebody on his hands and knees, crawling on the floor and trying to do something, and there were these miles and miles of these pink and green electrical

wires all over the place. And then I got...let's see, what did I get assigned to do? I started doing a checklist of the drawings, which didn't exist, but I got called off of that and did various oddments for René, and then at the end of six months they released me from purgatory. I did not get back into the International Program--which Susan eventually left, fortunately--nor into publications, where I would have made some sense. I was a special editorial assistant for René, because they were just starting a big fundraising drive. Before I go into that, I want to back up. The big show [50 Ans d'art aux Etats Unis] that they had had early on, in 1955, when I was in the International Program, was a cross-section of the Museum's collections, every curatorial department. It was requested by Douglas Dillon, who was then the ambassador, because relations between France and the United States were not very good and he thought it would be a good P.R. stunt. So this very big exhibition of paintings, drawings and prints and sculpture and architecture and photographs and films--everything--went over. It was, I think, in the Grand Palais in Paris. I didn't see it. I did publicity and so forth for that, and worked on the catalogue. It traveled to a large number of places. It was very interesting, when it was in Vienna, I think, people came up from Yugoslavia and asked to have it there. That was put into the tour at the last moment, and it was the first exhibition we'd had behind...of course, Yugoslavia wasn't exactly Iron Curtain, it never was, but the first Communist country where we'd ever had a show. Anyway, I was dying to see this show. There was no way they were going to send me. It was my first full summer at the Museum, and my mother died in June. So I came to René and I said I really would love to see this show, so if I pay my own way and go when it is in Spain, in Barcelona, maybe there are things I could do to help Porter out, which I would gladly do on my own. Well, they were very against it, because it was their policy that you should use your vacation for vacation, but finally, reluctantly, consented. I went over by boat, the southern route, and arrived and worked my way up to Barcelona. It was the first time I'd been in Spain. The exhibition was in two separate places. The paintings were in a regular exhibition museum, the Virreina--I think it was maybe devoted to decorative arts, normally, off of the Ramblas--and the architecture and design [sections] were in

a special other pavilion which Porter was installing. It was a very interesting moment politically, because Catalonia in general and Barcelona in particular had been severely penalized by Franco for being on the wrong side in the civil war. He practically shut down the port of Barcelona, which was self-defeating, since it was their best port. He forbade the Rioja wine to be sold, except locally. But just at that time, he [Franco] had to have an operation for prostate cancer. The best surgeon was a Catalan, and he wanted him to come down and operate on him. The doctor said, "No, sir. If you're going to be my patient, you have to come to my hospital." So just at this time, Franco and his retinue arrived in Barcelona, which became temporarily the capital, and the Catalans rather enjoyed this. The show created fantastic excitement, because they had not seen any modern stuff at all. I worked on publicity things, invitations, typing labels and so forth. When I left, I'd said to Porter, "Do you think I should take my Olivetti with me?" And he said, "Oh, no, Barcelona is a big commercial city; you can rent any kind of typewriter there." So I rented this office typewriter, only to discover that the so-called standard keyboard indeed has the letters all where they should be, but all the punctuation marks are different. So where I would want a comma there'd be the upside-down question mark. And there's no apostrophe in Spanish, so to type the name "d'Harnoncourt," which had to appear a number of times, I'd have to type a small "d" and move the thing up one space and type a comma up there and go back and make a capital "H." I worked a lot on that, and taking things to the main post office at midnight.... But one of the things I like about Barcelona is it's a city that never goes to bed, so you can go wandering up and down at any hour of the night. Anyway, the artists were just very excited about it [the exhibition], and all the events were great fun and they took us around to various places in Catalonia. I went off to Madrid, where I'd never been before--I'd never even been to Spain before, though I'd written my M.A. thesis on a Spanish Romanesque church in Catalonia, which I finally got to see. I had trouble getting back to the United States, because when I left--and I had gone by boat, either the Constitution or the United States, I forget which--and they said, "You'll have no trouble getting a passage back, because the season will be over." I didn't care where I went back

from, but I started trying, and it turned out to be the shoulder of the season, so everybody was trying to get tickets just at that time. I finally had to fly back, and since I was on my own account and not on the Museum's, it was rather difficult. The day I was to leave, there was a terrific downpour. I'd checked out of my hotel and I'd gone to the city airline terminal. In Spain, I don't know if they still do, but then it was none of this business of stand-by for a couple of hours; if they cancel a flight, it's cancelled for twenty-four hours. I had just the amount of money I figured I needed to pay my airport tax. So they announced this cancellation, and I went up and said in my halting Spanish that I'd checked out of my hotel. If you're booked from a continuing flight, of course, they're supposed to put you up; but mine wasn't a continuing flight, because I had come down on my own to Madrid, not knowing I was going to have to go by air and not by boat. So I wasn't entitled to stop over, but I went up and said in my faltering Spanish very plaintively, "No tengo dinero." He said, "Verdad?" and I answered "Verdad." So he very kindly called up the hotel I'd just checked out of and re-booked the room and gave me a voucher for meals."

SZ: So it worked out.

HF: So I had twenty-four hours of serendipitous stay, which I spent most of in the National Library, looking at illuminated manuscripts. It was wonderful.

SZ: I think next time we should start with your becoming special assistant to René. We have to be out of the room by eleven-thirty, but I thought maybe we could just end, because it's a question that ties up with something else you said before, we could end the way we started, talking about Porter. What happened with Porter? Russell Lynes says in Good Old Modern something about Liz Shaw and what you called the Young Turks.

HF: That's right. The Young Turks were actually a little bit later when I was already working with René.

SZ: With René.

HF: With René.

SZ: Because you were out first, but I think it was two years later that Porter really left.

HF: Yes. But Russell Lynes, you must remember, was very carefully programmed by Liz Shaw, and among the people he never interviewed was me, which was really rather silly, because I was one of the few people on staff who knew Alfred from way back and had been there at the creation. His book is very inaccurate; however, as I wrote in my review of the Marquis book, he still had a better feel for the institution than she did--not difficult!

SZ: But what was it? Was it just the fact that Porter had this fairly independent sphere?

HF: Yes, that was part of it, but as I say, it was a very disruptive time. Everybody hated everybody else in the Museum and there were alignments of who was against whom; it was anti-Alfred, with his authority; it was.... Also, when I got to work for Porter, well, with René particularly, I realized there was a rather naive view of the staff towards what the function of a director is. They always envisaged the director as being just the top of the staff pyramid, and without any realization of how much of the director's time and energies have to go into working with his trustees, on the one hand, and into working with the outside world, on the other. So they thought he wasn't paying enough attention to their little needs. Let's see...Andrew Ritchie left as head of painting and sculpture [in 1956]. I'm trying to remember when it was that we had two people heading [that department]; it wasn't quite then yet. Peter Selz and Bill Seitz. [Peter Selz and William C. Seitz jointly directed the department from 1958 to 1965]. Was that then?

SZ: It was then, yes.

HF: Which also is not a very good system.

SZ: I was going to ask about that, but I figure we better do it next time.

HF: Yes. The whole atmosphere was not very pleasant; in fact, Liz spent her time making trouble, I think.

END TAPE 7, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: HELEN FRANCO (HF)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

LOCATION: WEST 43RD STREET

DATE: MAY 28, 1991

BEGIN TAPE 8, SIDE 1

SZ: Helen, you were continuing your story...

HF: After I had a little cubbyhole in the library that Bernard Karpel kindly provided me, they found a little interior space opposite the painting and sculpture department, and there I got to know very well all the people in painting and sculpture, and some of them became my very, very good friends. First I was going to do a checklist of the Museum's drawings, and I started on that. Would you believe, it's never been done to this day; I understand now there's somebody working on it [LAUGHING].

SZ: It just gets harder and harder and longer and longer as the years go by.

HF: It's incredible that there's no way of knowing what the Museum has in the way of drawings. Then I got pulled out of limbo by René to work as his special assistant; they were starting the big expansion eastward, and so I was doing brochures and writing tested sentences that sell.... It was interesting because it brought in what all the departments' plans were and so forth, but most of all, working with René, which was an absolute delight. We did a lot of brochures and stuff like that. Also, I did some ghost writing for him. Francis Henry Taylor, then the director of the Metropolitan, had written a scathing article in the Times apropos of our Museum sending the big American show [50 Ans d'art aux Etats Unis] to Paris and shouldn't Paris, France, be

left in its glory and why did these brash Americans have to ram all this cultural stuff down their throat and so on and so forth. So I ghosted for René an article which appeared in the Sunday Times magazine section in answer to this, and that was rather fun. Let's see, was it during that time...I have to stop and think. I get confused on dates.... I guess it was during that time that I worked for the Twentieth International Congress of Art History doing their publicity. Just a second.... Nineteen sixty-one.

SZ: Yes. So it was.

HF: Yes. I'm trying to think when I got put in the publications department.... I don't have the date, actually. I guess it was '62...'62, yes. I did two things during this interval; one was I was lent by the Museum to be director of public information for the Twentieth International Congress of Art History, which took place up at Columbia in September 1961. These congresses take place biennially, I guess, and it was the first time that it had been in the United States. The head of the International Congress at that time was my very good friend Millard Meiss. First, he was in favor of a minimum of publicity, and I did a big selling job on him and said that what was important was that we get full reports on the people who were coming and the papers read and so on to the various organizations like Carnegie, Rockefeller and so on and so forth, irrespective of what got in the newspapers, because it was not going to be hot news. So there were these endless sessions that went on for a week, I guess, and a lot of the people who were there from abroad I already knew. It was very hectic because there were all these things to write up daily, and we did get a rather respectable amount of publicity for such a relatively arcane event, but I was particularly pleased because later, when Millard went to get a grant for underwriting the publication of the papers, which was done in four volumes, they said, Oh, yes, we know all about the congress, they had had this glut of information coming in. So it was justified....

SZ: Let me ask you one thing about René. You said that at the beginning, when they launched this thirtieth-anniversary drive to raise \$25 million, which I think was more than anybody ever dreamed....

HF: Of course, everybody always thought of the Museum as the Rockefellers' private thing, and why couldn't the Rockefellers pay for absolutely everything? Why did they have to be asking for money, which is the same problem that all the institutions are having now, including the Morgan Library, for example.

SZ: So that made it hard initially?

HF: Oh, surely it did. It required...the thing is, of course, that there was a building campaign, which obviously is expensive, and it had to be explained what a small proportion of the works of art that the Museum has are on view. There was a big push about the new International Study Center, the facilities that were going to be available for people to do research and easy facility to works in storage, which had not been possible before. There had to be the explanation that donors are happy to give works of art or perhaps money for exhibitions, but that nobody is very interested in paying for the gas and light and telephone bills. There was an angle about salaries and pensions and comparisons with how relatively low they are. So there were many facets to it. Besides the brochures, there was going to be this big exhibition, which was one that in a way backfired, because Alfred wanted to show how very crowded things were, so he did an installation like an old-fashioned one at the Louvre, practically, with things stacked in tiers on the walls and so on and so forth. Well, it backfired, because there were so many works of art on view that the public was absolutely enchanted to see all these things [LAUGHING].

SZ: What was that show, do you remember?

HF: I think it was called A Bid for Space. I also had the idea, I don't know if you've ever

seen the little brochure--have you seen all the different brochures and things--the folder that has the air view, that was my idea, to have a helicopter go up and take the thing. That was rather fun. I enjoyed it because I worked not only with René, which was a great joy, but with Dick Koch, who was the counsel, and Wilder Green, who was coordinator of this whole thing among the departments. One day, they showed me the plans for what was going to happen on the various floors. On the fifth floor was going to be the entrance to the study center and all the offices going the other way with the study center at right angles to it. I took a look at this plan and said, "You know, you're increasing the use of these floors, because the public is going to be using it as well as the staff, and I don't know how you men are faring, but I can tell you that the staff ladies room is already overcrowded and inadequate, and therefore, if the public is going to be using it too, it obviously needs expanding." So Wilder and René looked at each other and said, "We never thought of that." So I always said there should be a plaque up calling it the Helen Franc Memorial John [LAUGHTER]. Also, looking at this space with Wilder one day, there were two dispensing machines, one for tampons and one for sanitary napkins, and Wilder said, "Do we really have to have two of these?" I said, "Wilder, I'm not going to go into it. Take my word for it, yes, we do." [LAUGHTER] But also at that time, there was a lot going on at the Museum of Primitive Art. Often I'd go over there with René, and that was absolutely wonderful, seeing those exhibitions with him.

SZ: Because he knew so much about it.

HF: Oh, yes. It was his first love, actually. He was an absolute delight to work with.

SZ: Did he have a temper?

HF: No! He had the most equable disposition in the world. It was very difficult for him, because Alfred, you know, had this very high position and he still felt that he owned the Museum and blamed poor René for the fire, said it was an example of poor

administration, and similar things which were not very easy to take. But one of René's great deeds was that he had insisted when he came, when he was offered the directorship, that he would only take it if Alfred, who'd been in this kind of limbo, were reinstated.

SZ: Did he do that because there were all these strong factions among the staff, or did he do it because he felt he needed Barr?

HF: No. He did it because of his great respect for Alfred and his knowledge, and he felt that it was ridiculous that he should not have this job. Actually, I don't think he knew about those factions, because he had sort of side jobs of directing some special exhibitions; the factions in a way partly developed in rebellion against Alfred having this tight control over the curatorial departments.

SZ: Rather than as a support for him.

HF: I beg your pardon?

SZ: Rather than as direct support for him. You're saying that they developed as much in reaction against him....

HF: Yes. Everybody wanted his own turf. So it was very interesting, because I got to know a lot of little things confidentially from René, and one of the things that happened was that they then decided to have a small meeting of the department heads up at the [William A.M. Burden] place in Maine.... And this was a lengthy weekend in which they got flown up and wined and dined and were supposed to let down their hair and talk things out, and it turned out to be intensely acrimonious. Among the people who were most battered by the acrimony was Porter. It was really

a very difficult situation.... Certain adjustments were made, I guess, to placate the department heads, but....

SZ: What was the issue really?

HF: Infighting. Just turf. Well, what was the issue as far as Porter was concerned? That they resented that he had this relative autonomy because of the budget coming from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and they thought they should have more control over the content of the shows. This did not apply, I may say, to Dorothy Miller, for example, in the painting and sculpture department, but Arthur Drexler in architecture was particularly difficult. It was really just plain internecine warfare. The other thing, as I say, is that they felt that René was not giving enough attention to each and every one who wanted to get in to his office immediately and tell him their problems and so forth. As I say, they had a kind of one-dimensional view of the director's job, seeing him only as the head of the staff and not seeing how much of the time he had to spend with the trustees and other institutions. So it's true, that relatively little of the director's time, if things are going smoothly, is devoted to the staff and its problems. Of course, the trustees were not a homogeneous group; they had to be stroked.

SZ: What was René's reaction to this weekend?

HF: I guess he thought it was a good idea to have them blow off steam, but I guess he didn't realize how much steam there was to blow off. Among the other people I got to know very well then was Eliza Bliss Parkinson, now Eliza Cobb. It was an interesting time, because of the personal relationships. Of course, what I was working on was not the most fascinating stuff in the world, but it was kind of a challenge to do. I worked with Ivan Chermayeff, who was the person in charge of all the graphics.

SZ: Coming up with a new graphic identity for the Museum?

HF: Yes. That was when they also decided to have the vertical sign, which was quite a departure at the time. I think the worse thing they did in the reconstruction in the new plans was to close the north wall of the lobby, so you could no longer see through into the garden. That was a terrible idea that they finally got rid of this last time. The Museum, of course, was closed absolutely for about six months, quite a period, and holding onto one's membership in that time was a feat in itself. Then they were going to open with great eclat, which they finally did.

SZ: Let me just back up for a second, because last time you gave me a little bit of the picture, because of the whole thing which culminated in that meeting in Maine, you talked a little bit about Arthur and his place in the picture. But what about some of the other department heads, like Steichen....

HF: I don't think Steichen was there then, I think it was already Szarkowski.

SZ: No, Szarkowski came in '62, so Steichen was there until then. But obviously that means that he didn't have a, that you didn't feel a strong....

HF: No.... Liz Shaw was throwing her weight around, as usual, and was very much Arthur's advocate. She continued to be his advocate and at one time in the interim post-René, post-Bates [Bates Lowry], post-Hightower [John Hightower], was pushing Arthur for head of the Museum, at which Bill Rubin made a classic remark, which was, "A Jewish homosexual made director of The Museum of Modern Art?" [LAUGHING] But that was much later on. Porter was really very upset by all this and wanted to resign practically without notice. I talked to him quite a bit about his responsibility to stay. There was no obvious heir for his position, and fortunately, I think, sometime in there, Susan Senior also resigned, which I thought was an improvement. Then, after Porter resigned, Waldo [Rasmussen] was brought in. After all the fundraising and so forth ended...I'm just trying to get my dates straight...then I was put into publications.

SZ: Was that something you were wanting?

HF: Sure, it was the obvious place for me. Actually, they had no top-ranking editors on staff. Monroe had been running publications, and they were excellent on the production side, but they were very shy on editors. So I was put in there. Then Gray Williams came in. I can't remember when he came in, but he was head of the department when I came. [Gray Williams was director of publications ca. 1967-69.] Poor Gray went full tilt into the curatorial problems. The Museum always hates everybody new.

SZ: We've all experienced that. [LAUGHTER]

HF: And poor Gray had the idea that there should be a uniform styling for the Museum publications, so he wanted to write a style book. Well, this really got everybody wildly upset. You can imagine how incredibly upsetting it was when I tell you it was also during this time, I guess, before the Museum was opening, that they decided they they'd use the small "o" in MoMA, and there was enormous controversy about this, including memos that I wrote and said I thought it looked like a visual hiccup, and Jim Soby writing back and saying haven't you people got anything better to do. Well, you can imagine if this created such a fuss, the idea that there should be a uniform styling for publications, well, it was just endless. And I kept saying to Gray, "I don't think it matters as long as there is a certain uniformity within each publication. Why does architecture's have to be the same as painting and sculpture or photography?" But poor Gray got off on the wrong foot with the curators; they never forgave him, and he didn't last too long. In that time, Harriet [Harriet Schoenholz Bee] came on staff; I was one of the people who hired her, I'm happy to say. She was very young at the time. We had an office that was not very easy to work in. I'm trying to think who

the other person besides Harriet and myself.... I know there were at least three people in a rather small office. It was better than the one we had during the fire. Then I got caught on a project which turned out to be ultimately dead-ended: The Book-of-the-Month Club wanted to do a series on modern art with twelve separate subscription portfolios. Lane Faison of Williams College was to be the editor and I was to edit this little project. At that time I did get a slightly improved office. Well, it was a thankless job, because Lane is a wonderful teacher and has written some good books, but he was extraordinarily careless on facts, and it took me quite a time to do research and comb things out. Plus, the Book-of-the-Month Club wanted it to be a little more jazzy, I think. I think I worked on that for well over a year, to the exclusion of anything else. It was not terribly exciting, I may say, but finally.... Oh, and then there was a misunderstanding between us and the Book-of-the-Month Club, because I wanted to send things up to them to okay the content and so forth before turning in a finished manuscript, and they wanted it complete down to the last comma. Anyway, the end of the thing is, they broke the contract, they didn't want it. Lane was paid off and they hired John Russell, who then did Meanings of Modern Art. It was really rather separate from the publications department. They hired Pat White to work with him, and I was liberated from that. It was during that time, also, that Arthur, who practically hadn't spoken to me for a number of years, came and wanted me to look at the manuscript of the Robert Venturi Complexity and Contradiction. (I didn't tell you this, did I? I told somebody about it recently--Stuart Wrede.) So I said, "Well, I'm completely committed to this other job, but I will be glad to look at it and give you my opinion." It turned out that somebody who was then working as an editor with painting and sculpture, editing a particular book but was not in the publications department at the time, had read it and said it was unpublishable, and Arthur was in a terrible bind, because he had gotten this big grant from the Graham Foundation several years before and absolutely nothing had been done about it, and the Graham people were beginning to breathe down his neck a bit. He got this manuscript, which, I believe, Harvard had turned down, and at the time nobody had heard about Robert Venturi, he was young and a complete unknown. So I read it and said to him it certainly was not unpublishable, it had great ideas, but it

was unpublishable in its present form. I said there was nobody in the Museum now (especially since I was tied up) who could edit this, because it had all sorts of comparative material to Renaissance and Baroque architecture and so forth, very sloppily and imperfectly identified. I said it should go to somebody outside, an art historian, an architectural historian, to get all the facts straight and the illustrations and proper captions, and then it could come back to the Museum for editing. The memo on this apparently became historic, because Ellen Marsh used to refer to it for years afterward. They did it: They sent it up to Yale. Yale proceeded to take several years working on it and had several people working on it. Eventually, it came back to the Museum. Arthur really didn't like the whole idea of the book at all, and that's why it had that rather teensy-weensy format with those postage-stamp illustrations. It was turned over to Harriet to edit; it was one of her first jobs and she did a very good job on it. Of course, it turned out to be an absolutely landmark publication, cited by everybody ever since and republished. Let's see what else I worked on.

SZ: In those first years?

HF: In the first few years.

SZ: I have here Seitz on Mark Tobey; Peter Selz on Emil Nolde; Frank O'Hara on Robert Motherwell; Frank O'Hara again, on Reuben Nakian.

HF: On Nakian. That's what I must remember to ask this young man who's doing a book on Frank O'Hara, if he's seen Nakian. I don't know if Nakian still has all his marbles, he's pretty old; he had an exhibition last year. You certainly could talk to Motherwell.

SZ: What about Frank O'Hara?

HF: Oh, he was a doll. I first knew him when he was working at the front desk. Porter knew him. I don't think I told you about the first impossible person we had working on the De David à Toulouse-Lautrec show.

SZ: By the name of?

HF: Oh, God, what was her name? She was hired from outside. What was her name? I can't remember. It was very difficult, because there was this enormous amount of correspondence and there was no such thing as Xerox in those days, so these endless letters to lenders and museums and so forth had to be each one individually typed. Burden, who was the president of the Museum at the time, or chairman of the board, I forget which, always had to have copies of everything. This what's-her-name, I can't remember--how you suppress unpleasant things--she was German-born and she had very positive ideas, and one time she absolutely refused to do something. She said, "Mr. Burden can wait." I said, "Look, he's the president of the Museum. When Mr. Burden's office says he wants something, no matter...." Anyway, she made a big fuss and Porter made a fuss and he realized how difficult she was, so she got fired. Porter then reached down into the front desk and brought Frank O'Hara up, and he and Grace Davis were together on this. Frank was very equable in temperament and soothed everybody's ruffled feathers. Then, when Porter hired him for the department after this one-shot thing ended, he was made associate curator or whatever, he did a number of shows.

END TAPE 8, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 8, SIDE 2

HF: The remarkable thing about Frank was that he was at the time in a great burst of creative energy--I think that was the time when the "Lunch" poems were written or published--he was very close to the leading Abstract Expressionists painters and sculptors. He had this intense life with them and with people on Fire Island, or, rather, Long Island, I guess, at that time, and nevertheless, he was absolutely, completely well-organized and efficient at his job. It was remarkable. He was much

better working with and meeting his deadlines than many of the staff. It was always a miracle to me that he managed to do that. Maybe having been in the Navy helped, but he was remarkable in that way. I always enjoyed talking with him, and sometimes I worked with him; it was very easy. He had a particular kind of a jaunty walk, a bounce, and he had an abundant fund of good humor. He really was a very loving person. Of course, it was absolutely shattering when he was killed. Liz Streibert was his secretary, and she was really shattered, I know. René went out to see him on the island just before he died. We all went out to the funeral. It was not too long after Jackson Pollock's death and a lot of the same people went out to Springs. Working in the department at the same time, I guess, was Kynaston McShine, before he went up to the Jewish Museum, and Jimmy Schuyler, the poet. So now we've backtracked on that a bit.

SZ: Thank you. Of these publications that you worked on...I'm just looking to see.

HF: Well, the really big one, I guess, was The Machine [As Seen] at the End of the Mechanical Age [1968]. Pontus Hultén of Moderna Museet in Stockholm had been spotted by René and was rather thinking that he might be considered for his own successor, as René was coming up for mandatory retirement. The Machine grew out of an idea René had, which was a show tentatively given the title Around the Automobile, and it was to be an interdepartmental show. I think René had the idea it might be a good idea if the staff were to work on an interdepartmental show [LAUGHING]. Of course, there were a number of meetings about this show in which every department head had his completely different ideas about what it should be. Nothing ever became of that show, really. I guess the nearest there ever was, was when Emilio Ambasz later did his Taxi show. Anyway, Hultén came and completely changed the whole idea. I think René had wanted him to do a show on mobile things in art and so forth, but Pontus wanted to do this show on the machine at the end of the mechanical age. So he came, and he also produced the outline or something of an introduction, which that same editor who turned up the nose at Venturi said was

unpublishable. So René hauled me off and put me full-time to work on this catalogue. It was complicated by the fact that Pontus was only in New York a very short time, and he was still the head of Moderna Museet in Stockholm, and the book was going to be produced in Sweden, not in Stockholm, but in Malmö. I got hauled out of the office I was in and given a slightly more calm office and some people from painting and sculpture to help me with the research. The trouble was, painting and sculpture was very casual about this, so they'd give me one person as assistant and then they'd say, "Oh, we forgot to tell you, she's going off for a six-week vacation." So I had three different people working with me successively at that time--it was wild--plus one I had from outside, Ann Hecht. It required a lot of research, because there were not only twentieth-century things but things going all the way back in history. Pontus was great on ideas but not very great on accuracy, aside from, of course, having to have the English idioms ironed out. Eventually, I got sent over to Sweden to work, unfortunately, not in Stockholm, but in Malmö, which is the dullest town one can imagine. The book was being produced by a firm...it would be the equivalent of BBD&O--it was really an advertising firm--in a modern office building in downtown Malmö. Of course, I knew no Swedish whatsoever, although Harry, the head of the firm, spoke excellent English, the designer did not; we sometimes communicated in my bad German and his bad English. I lived in the lap of luxury in a very excellent hotel opposite the station. The first hotel that they put me in had neglected to say that they would be doing reconstruction, and they were doing reconstruction night and day and it was endlessly noisy. So I was moved to this other, elegant one, and I worked the way I had worked on the drawing show. I was working every night; I'd go out to dinner and come back to work in this office. I remember the first time the night watchman discovered me working in this office; he was astounded, and I couldn't explain what I was doing there. We finally got that straightened out.

SZ: How long were you there in Sweden?

HF: Oh, God, I was there from, I think, May till September. Pontus would come down

once a week and stay for two days. We'd work on the editing and we'd work on production; I was working both as an editor and with the production, design and so on. Also, I completely revised his introduction to make it somewhat meatier. It's in two sections now, somewhat more historical and then more contemporary. I did an awful lot of research and writing on that. I had to be tactful about getting Pontus to accept this rather extensive revision. It was one of the most traumatic times of my life. The staff in the Malmö office was very pleasant to me, but we had nothing in common; it was very lonely, and Pontus was only down every so often. It was the famous summer of '68, and I would try to get the papers to find out what was happening in Czechoslovakia and what was happening with all the riots and things back home during the Chicago Democratic convention. Although I was right opposite the station, the papers came rather erratically. The London Times would come sometimes the same day, sometimes the next day, sometimes not at all, and the Paris Herald, the same thing. I discovered that the best thing for following what was happening in Czechoslovakia in the Prague Spring was Le Monde, which was wonderful, but for finding out what was happening at home I had to rely on the Paris Herald. In the middle of that, René was killed, and Bates Lowry, who had just taken over as director.

SZ: You were there all by yourself.

HF: Exactly. The Museum was in shock, but they had each other, I was by myself; even Pontus wasn't down at the time. It was awful. They were very nice to me, fed me brandy and so forth, and a couple of the kids the next day took me out to a Chinese restaurant. Let me tell you, the Chinese restaurants in Sweden are very different from Chinese restaurants in New York, let alone China. But, it was really devastating, and lonely. It was very difficult. I came back in September and got in a great argument with Bates because he didn't want an index to this thing, and I kept telling

him it would not delay the book, which it didn't. The person in charge of moving the bookshop and so forth was having the catalogues come by slow freight, so I said you have to have at least one batch come in by air for the opening, which they eventually did. Bates was very pleased with what I'd done and said the introduction bore no relation to the one they'd turned down. The show opened with great éclat, but I was upset at the opening dinner, because [TAPE INTERRUPTION]....

SZ: Just to finish....

HF: Oh, at the dinner a great fuss was that a speech was made saying that this great exhibition was an example of this wonderful new director that they had and the direction he would take, completely ignoring the fact that the whole thing had been started by...René, long before Bates appeared. Then, Pontus was terribly flustered by the whole thing, so he thanked all sorts of people, but he forgot to thank me [LAUGHING]. So I was a little sad at this dinner.... [PAUSE]

SZ: One thing on the Machine show.

HF: Yes, the great problem of that metal cover, and that caused more problems than anything else in the show. It was a great tour de force to do it, it was a wonderful idea, but there were a lot of problems with getting it dye-stamped and the color and so forth, but I think it's a wonderful cover. It was based on a photo, actually, that Alicia Legg had taken.

END TAPE 8, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: HELEN FRANCO (HF)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

LOCATION: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK CITY

DATE: JUNE 7, 1991

BEGIN TAPE 9, SIDE 1

SZ: You said you wanted to backtrack on a couple of things you said last time, before we continue on.

HF: Well, also I wanted to say that among the things when I was working with René, one was, they were setting up the study center, and there was a big thing going with an application grant called "The Museum as an Educational Institution." Writing up the proposal was very much part of my job. The other interesting thing was that Nelson Rockefeller, who was then the governor, was interested in setting up a New York State arts council, which hadn't existed, and René was among the people that he asked for advice. So I did a lot of research on that, discovering that I think the only existing state arts council was in Minnesota, and how it worked, and helping René to formulate recommendations. So that was interesting. Backtracking on Bates Lowry, I knew Bates, who was an architectural historian, vaguely knew him from meetings of the SAH and the College Art Association, but I didn't really know him until the time of the Italian floods. Then I volunteered to work on publicity for CRIA, the committee to...whatever it was called [Committee for the Rescue of Italian Art]. He was one of the two chairmen, along with Millard Meiss. That entailed press releases as to what we were doing, and especially, they had a big benefit exhibition, and doing publicity for that. Then I did an article for Art News, of which a large hunk was translation out

of an Italian newspaper about the rescue of the people who got trapped in the basement of the Uffizi, and so forth. The head of the Uffizi at that time was Luisa Beccherucci, who had been one of the people that I knew as a student way back when I was in Florence. I got on very well with Bates, and so when he was being considered for the director, René asked me what I thought about him and it was all very positive, and he became the director.

SZ: Was it your impression it was largely René's choice?

HF: No, but he would have been very influential. I forget who, whether it was [William] Paley or one of those top-brass people, had the bad idea of approaching Ivan Chermayeff to be the director [LAUGHING], and Chermayeff, of course, was absolutely scandalized at the mere idea, but it showed how out of touch some of our top brass was. Anyway, Bates became the director and the Museum had decided, because living in New York is so expensive, to take an apartment for the director, which would be among the perks. Bates had a wife, Isabel, who was in her own right a professional, a mathematician, and two teenage daughters going to private school. Well, I've never known anybody go through as extraordinary a change as Bates did. I forget where he comes from originally; not New York, outside somewhere, and being director of the Museum completely went to his head. He thought he had to live up to the grandeur of this Park Avenue or equivalent apartment, and he was grandiose in the extreme. Nothing could be in more contrast to René's very modest style, and Alfred's. Then he brought in his own assistant, who was really very nice and capable, Carol Brownell, and Irene Gordon, who'd previously been an editor and worked with him and a great many people. He was rather aloof from the rest of the staff, and it was really awful. It was extraordinary; as I say, I never knew anybody change his personality that way. As you know, his tenure didn't last very long. But the whole atmosphere...well, I could continue on into the Hightower regime.

SZ: Why don't you do that, since we're there.

HF: Hightower nobody knew anything about. He was quite the opposite from Bates. He was a much more genial person, but really incapable of taking the reins of what by then was a badly demoralized staff from top to bottom.

SZ: Why had that developed?

HF: This is what I say, I had already told you about the divisions among the curatorial staff.

SZ: Right, but there was also a lot of change going on in the political arena.

HF: Oh yes, of course, but that was quite separate. What I said about backtracking before getting off on this: The atmosphere was just god-awful in the late '60s and early '70s. The place was really shook up. Alfred, even before he retired, which I think was '72 or something....

SZ: Official retirement was '69.

HF: ...was already beginning to show signs of Alzheimer's. We had the two heads of painting and sculpture, Selz and Seitz. Bill Seitz was far more charismatic, and Liz Shaw decided he was her guy. Bill was very self-centered, and when he was working on an exhibition he just would bug out from all the responsibilities of the department and stay home, theoretically writing a catalogue. It turned out the catalogue would be about fifty pages long or nonexistent. Poor Peter [Selz], who was much less liked, was really a much better administrator; he carried on things. Bill was always trying to put the skids on Peter in one way or another. Then Bill finally resigned on the eve of René's retirement or the eve of some tremendous thing--I forget what was happening, he was supposed to go to the Biennale--but really pulled the rug out in a very irresponsible way. That department was completely demoralized, and Jim Soby,

after his second marriage, which had taken place much earlier--he had always been the great smoother-over, and his new wife [Melissa] was very jealous of his connections with the Museum and tried to get him to give up a large part of his responsibility--so he wasn't around. All of the personal things going on: Dick Koch got a divorce and married Joanne Godbout from the [Department of] Film; there was a big to-do about that. The place was in absolute turmoil in one way or another. I'm sure there are other things that I can't recall at the moment, but the atmosphere was terrible and the lower staff were getting increasingly unhappy--we'll be coming up to that and the whole question about...the staff association [Professional and Administrative Staff Association (PASTA)]. It was really in a terrible turmoil. Along comes Hightower, and he was a sweet but rather weak character. He, in the middle of his first few months there, fired a much-liked person, Inez Garson, who helped run the study center.

SZ: Fired her for what reason?

HF: Because he wanted to put in his own person. That really set the staff on its ear. He had a meeting and he pledged that there would be no more such peremptory firings, in spite of which, not many months later, he fired a total of six people in different departments, just peremptorily. That was really the start of the staff association. There had been some discussion about should they form a union or shouldn't they; these little white-collar people just shuddered about the idea of a union, and there were really no precedents in other museums for it. Even before it became officially a union, the staff did hire a lawyer. There is a great irony about that. They hired Michael Horowitz, who had just made his reputation for having won a considerable victory for the nurses, helped unionize them. He was definitely on the liberal side and worked in the office of Ephraim London. He was very encouraging with these people. Well, of course the postlude to that was Michael Horowitz went down to Washington, had a complete reversal of personality, became David Stockman's right-hand man...[LAUGHING], but that was much later.

SZ: You were active in the organization of the staff?

HF: Yes, I was one of the founding people.

SZ: Believing that...?

HF: Believing that there was no way.... People were being peremptorily fired. There was no mechanism for complaints or grievances; there was no posting of positions, so that people would be brought in completely from outside, irrespective of whether there might be any staff person who was competent to do it. Of course, the salaries were low, but it really was not initially at all about salaries. René had already tried to do something about salaries, and especially about pensions, which were incredibly awful.

SZ: But the issue of peremptory firings didn't exist under René, did it? Or was it there somewhere?

HF: No, I can't remember people being peremptorily fired like that, but this Inez thing brought it to everybody's attention. They got the pledge from Hightower that there would be no more such things and six months later he fired six people. The negotiations were fascinating to me. I was on the negotiating committee, and all of us were completely inexperienced in anything of this sort, but we did succeed in getting those people back. The interesting thing is that I've always noticed that the immediate colleagues of somebody in the Museum are much better at spotting ability than the higher-ups often are, so that among the people who were fired was Susan Bertram from Willard Van Dyke's film department, who later became head of the staff association and then she became one of the assistants to Dick Oldenburg when he

was director and later had a rather important job, I forget what, outside; Mary Lea Bandy came into publications and was very soon spotted as being very talented and went from being head of the staff association to where she is now as head of the film department; Barbara London, who was another one fired by Willard Van Dyke....

SZ: Fired by Hightower.

HF: Fired by Hightower, but you never fired over the head of the curator; the department heads have to acquiesce in this. She was rehired back, not in Willard's department, but Riva Castleman took her in; there was no video department then, she started the entire video thing, and you know what her job is now. Let me see if I can think of other examples.... I can't remember who the six all were. Anyway, we got them back, which was absolutely a shot in the arm for this fledgling organization. Then we went through all the procedure of applying to become formally a union, which is a very complicated procedure, as you know. There were a lot of debates on that as to how inclusive it should be. The top negotiators were very adamant that it should go as far up as they would allow us to go in curatorial staff all the way down to restaurant people. Of course, the electricians and the movie operators had their own unions. The other big discussion was whether joining the union should be optional or whether everybody had to join it. Probably they made the quixotic mistake of making it optional, although of course they nevertheless had to bargain for everybody in the unit. It was very interesting. Again, I was on the negotiating committee, and we were concerned with setting up a grievance procedure and various other things. I think that the Museum is a much better place because of some of the things that we won. Posting of jobs, which now takes place routinely; there's no guarantee that an insider is going to be hired, but at least they know the job exists and can be considered. I guess there were certain health benefits; I forget all the things. Also, the things that had never been formalized were made much more formal. Then, of course, they had

the strike, the first strike [from August 20 to September 5, 1971]. Meanwhile, we were being attacked from outside; that was when the place was picketed by that famous batch of artists who in Marquis's book demanded greater representation for women, minorities and heterosexuals, according to her [LAUGHING]. I loved that, when I came to that little blooper. Hightower, I guess, was fired because the trustees thought he gave in too much to the staff.

SZ: How did the staff feel about his firing?

HF: You know, you couldn't dislike him; he's a very likable guy. Of course, having two new directors in the space of a year after having had two directors in the whole previous life of the Museum, for better or worse.... And then we went into a period of being run by committee, which is never very good for an institution. Bates had brought in, as head of publications...oh, Gray Williams had previously been in, it wasn't Bates who brought him in. Gray was fired. Bates brought in a friend of his, Bob Carter, and he, too, had troubles holding his own against the curators. And when he left, Dick Oldenburg became director of publications. But I was happily working away; I had a number of editorial assignments that I enjoyed very much. I was back doing editing, which I liked. Then...let me think what the sequence was....

SZ: I think the sequence was, there was Bates Lowry; then there was the committee, the troika; and then there was Hightower, and when Hightower was let go, Dick Oldenburg was made acting director.

HF: Yes, you're right, that's how it was. Yes, but the interlude between...there was quite a....

SZ: Did that feel like a rudderless ship?

HF: Yes, and of course it just aggravated the internal tensions, everybody fighting for turf.

SZ: A fight for turf that I wanted to ask to you about, which I think began at this time anyway was....

HF: It went back before, as I said, but was aggravated...

SZ: I was thinking in particular of what was going on in painting and sculpture between Bill Lieberman and Bill Rubin, the two Bills.

HF: Yes. Well, previously there'd been the Seitz-Selz division. Then Bill Rubin came in, certainly with Alfred's blessing, I think, and there was Bill Lieberman, who thought he should be head of painting and sculpture, or possibly director of the Museum.

SZ: Had he had much of a relationship with Alfred?

HF: Bill Lieberman? Oh, Bill Lieberman was hired as a kid when he was an undergraduate at Swarthmore College and came down and worked with Alfred and had various jobs. Either way, he was absolutely irresponsible at times; Alfred was furious at Bill, because Bill did all sorts of things. Once he disappeared for six months and nobody could find him.

SZ: He disappeared for six months?

HF: Somewhere in the South of France, with one of his amours; it was when I was still at the Magazine of Art. In some ways, however, in his taste and in his organization of shows and in his political handling of potential donors, I think it could be said that he is more the heir apparent of Alfred, even up at the Metropolitan, than Bill Rubin. Bill Rubin upset everybody in the department when he came in. We've already gone

through the business of automatic rejection of anybody new. Bill Rubin upset everybody because he had a highly academic orientation and thought everybody down to the secretaries, practically, should have a Ph.D, and did not at all respect people like Alicia Legg, whose knowledge had grown with the Museum, or Betsy Jones. I think I was the only person on the staff without a Ph.D. whom he considered academically well-qualified. He really downgraded the people who had gotten their knowledge and training right on the spot.

SZ: Of whom there were a number.

HF: Yes, of whom there were a number. Like Carolyn Lanchner....

SZ: And Alicia.

HF: Well, I began with Alicia. He had a much more professorial and didactic approach than Alfred, let's say. So the department went on being unhappy [LAUGHING]. Bill [Rubin] had certain rough edges; he was absolutely one of the most solipsistic people I know. You could pass him in the hall and I don't think he meant to cut you but he simply wouldn't see you, whereas if this happened with Alfred you knew it was because he didn't see you. I remember one great time. I was working with him [Bill Rubin] one time on something and I had a slight hoarseness, and I said, "Sorry, I have a cold." He didn't say, "How are you?" or "I'm sorry," he said, "Don't get near me, don't get near me, I'm very susceptible." Then people felt very sorry for him. He had that horrible operation, of course, which was awful.... He had been a football player in his youth and had had a cracked vertebra or something at the time, which had not bothered him; but the whole thing started splintering, disks and so forth, and he had a horrendous operation that lasted for hours, in which they had to take out bits of things, one by one. Of course, he has been lame ever since, and it hurt his ego very badly, because one thing he was proud of was his physical....

SZ: You mean he was a big, strapping presence?

HF: Yes. He always thought of himself, I guess, as an athlete. He was not easy to work with, as I know from having worked with him. He did get the Sidney and Harriet Janis collection, and he set me to work on the project. The arrangement was that there would be an exhibition and a catalogue, and one day he plucked me out of publications and sent me up to interview Sidney Janis with a tape recorder. I'd never worked a tape recorder in my life, I was terrified; I'm absolutely no good with machinery. Anyway, off I went, and I knew Sidney vaguely from the gallery and so forth, but we had these two good sessions on tape; there's a transcript in the Library, and a lot of it is the basis for the chronology that appeared in the catalogue. Then...I can't remember whether I was on that Book-of-the-Month Club project or what, but I was only partly in charge of the Janis thing; we had various people working on it. Lucy Lippard did some of the comments. I had to take her to task because I had the concept of what this catalogue should be, and I wanted not only comments on the individual works but I wanted them related wherever possible to what already existed in the Museum and how they related. Lucy was very bright but rather casual and thought she could do this off the top of her head, and I'd send her back to redo it. Eventually, I must say I rewrote enormous parts of the stuff myself. Jane Fluegel worked on the chronology; she kept getting pulled off on other assignments, so we kept getting further and further behind and Bill [Rubin] would call me up and scold me and I'd get poor Jane on the mat and she'd have been given other things, and Sidney was threatening to withdraw the whole thing. But eventually we got it out and Sidney was very pleased. There was a big exhibition, and Alfred's last official job was installing the show, which he did superbly. Now, what else, where are we in events? In the '70s?

SZ: Yes. I guess you could finish talking, since we started on this, you mentioned the strike, but we really didn't get into it and what its effect was.

HF: It went on forever. It was a long, long....

SZ: It was certainly highly publicized.

HF: Well, that was partly me. [LAUGHTER]

SZ: I had a feeling.

HF: I did most of the publicity.

SZ: Feeling must have been fairly bitter to have gotten to the point where the decision was made to do that.

HF: I have to go back, because Bob Carter had left, and Dick Oldenburg came in as head of publications. I had a marvelous relation with Dick; we got along like a house afire. I said from the second day he came in, because we still had a committee going on, no director, that he should be director. I was terribly impressed, because the first thing he did was get copies of every publication the Museum had ever done, from the first catalogue on, and set them out on the two tables in his office and really looked at them. All too many people walk in the door think the place was born the day they arrived. So I was enormously impressed by this. He was very warm and outgoing, and as I say, we had a great relation going. One of the publications in the works when he first came was Four Americans in Paris, on the Stein family's collections; the exhibition was being directed by Margaret Potter, and the catalogue, consisting of several essays by outside contributors, was being edited by Irene Gordon, then in the publications department, who also wrote one of the essays. Meg Potter fought with everyone, including the downstairs people working for the installation. I was abroad on vacation, and when I came back, Dick was in despair; Meg and Irene weren't speaking, Irene had written a most intemperate letter to one of the contributors, the designer, Carl Laanes, refused to work on the book because he couldn't handle the two battling women. Well--I'm back--the Marines have landed!

Dick took Irene off the editing, I wrote a conciliatory letter to the offended contributor, I cajoled Carl into going ahead with the design article by article instead of waiting till all the material was in. At first Meg was all sweetness and light, she was so glad to be rid of Irene, but soon she began writing equally insulting memos to me--I'd go in to Dick and say, "I know the only important thing is to get this catalogue out on time for the opening of the show, so I'm not going to reply, but the day after...!" Well, the production manager, Jack Doenias, worked like a demon with the printer, and about four in the afternoon of the day of the opening, advance copies were delivered, and Jack and I walked into Dick's office and presented him with one--he almost wept! Years after--I guess the day I retired--he told me he thought I'd saved his job--which of course led ultimately to his becoming director. One of the problems was that I was working on the catalogue of Claes's book, and as his brother, he was of two minds about that. But the trustees, I think, had no idea of the staff problems, and certain of the curatorial staff and of the directors were more sympathetic, I think, than others, but there was really no attempt to make any kinds of concessions. That was a very difficult time, because while we were fighting very hard on this inclusive membership thing for the poor waitresses, none of them would join the strike. So the restaurant went on happily. We never succeeded in closing the book store. And it was a very cold time of year, it was winter.

SZ: You did a lot of picketing?

HF: Endless picketing, and we had to picket the front entrance, the back entrance so they couldn't come in from 54th Street, and the warehouse, where the books were. There was twenty-four-hour picketing going on, the result of which was very morale-building for the staff. We had two romances result from this, people who got to know each other on the strike and got married eventually...neither of whom are here now.

END TAPE 9, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 9, SIDE 2

SZ: The process of unionization and the strike, because there were groups that were not included, do you think it was, in the end, a divisive thing?

HF: What do you mean by groups?

SZ: Some staff were left out. The decision was made [about] who was management.

HF: That was one of the points of arbitration.

SZ: You wanted everybody.

HF: We knew we couldn't have the department heads. We said that we should have everybody except those people who had the power to hire and fire. We thought that, for example, Alicia Legg, Betsy Jones, that rank of people, should be in because they were not hiring and firing. Of course, it was in the interest of the administration to cut off as many people as they could; but people like Alicia and Betsy were very, very active in the strike, very supportive of it. We got a lot of publicity, I may say. Claes Oldenburg contributed a poster for us [LAUGHING], to be sold for the benefit of PASTA. We had various groups from other publishing houses or museum people come and picket with us on various days; that was always a chance for publicity. Any strike, however, is very embittering. We were furious, of course, at those damned waitresses. In all the discussions, should we include them, yes we included them, they didn't join the union, we still had to bargain for them, and none of them went out on strike, so the restaurant was able to go on. At one point, Pierre Apraxine--I don't know whether he was head of the staff association, but he was pretty high up--nearly clobbered us because he got so angry he hurled a rock at a Ryder truck. Of course, he immediately resigned before he could be fired, but this really shook us up. A strike is a very embittering thing. It went on for over six weeks...bitter cold. Eventually, we

got the settlement, which wasn't all we wanted, but we certainly got some things written into the contract that were good, I think. I think it's just the idea that there is a regular grievance thing and some clarification of positions and promotions. Oh, going back to the period of the interregnum, the trustees in their wisdom decided to have one of those surveys by some group....

SZ: A management consultant study.

HF: ...who came in and had no idea what the Museum was like. They spent endless time establishing these mad criteria and we all had to fill out various forms. I remember Dick Oldenburg was quite new at the time when he had the interview, and he came into my office just roaring with laughter, because they had no idea that the Museum was not like the Ford factory or something, and nothing much came of it. However, there were certain criteria that internally were established through the union settlement, that were much more definite. The things about leave, and so on and so forth, were codified, which had been terribly sloppy until then, I must say. Of course, it was partly because the Museum had grown from a very small, intimate thing to this large, complicated organism without considering what needed doing. Anyway, winning the strike was marvelous for the staff, but the trustees, I think, thought Hightower had given away too much of the store. So when they had the second strike some time later, he was far more hard-nosed and the staff, which had been very pro-Dick, turned very anti-Dick. He was rather ill-advised by Ethel Shein. For example, Liz Shaw would come out the front door and run the gantlet, with everybody shouting at her. Eliza Parkinson--she was Eliza Parkinson, not Mrs. Cobb, then--would come out the front door. Ethel advised Dick to go out the back door to avoid the pickets, which he did, which was psychologically a terrible, terrible mistake.

SZ: Because?

HF: Because these other people were coming up and confronting us and he was sort of

sneaking out the back way, which did not increase our respect for him. Ethel thought it wouldn't be good for him, she didn't want him to run the gantlet; she was protecting him. But it was the worst, psychologically it was awful.

SZ: What you're saying is that you think that changed his standing.

HF: It changed his standing with the staff, and he became far more reclusive. People like Harriet [Bee] that he knew very well, and was very fond of, she says Dick has changed, Dick has changed enormously. There was no real warmth with the staff. The staff was delighted when he was made director, I mean, absolutely overjoyed, a very warm reception.

END TAPE 9, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: HELEN FRANCO (HF)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

**LOCATION: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: JUNE 17, 1991

BEGIN TAPE 10, SIDE 1

SZ: You and I thought that we would start today with your really telling me about your famous book An Invitation to See--how it came about and anything else you can remember about it.

HF: It came about because for years and years and years the bookstore had plaintively been saying we need something for the general public, and so did public information.... It kept being carried on the futures list and never arriving because the curators were not at all interested in something for the general public and they wanted their own catalogues and so forth. So one day, the head of publications came back and he said we have a new book to add to our futures list.

SZ: Who was the head of publications at that time?

HF: I'm trying to remember whether it was Bob Carter or Carl Morse. Bob Carter was somebody who was brought in by Bates Lowry and didn't last very long. That was earlier, because he was the one who brought in Dick Oldenburg; Dick was already director at this time, so it must have been Carl Morse.

SZ: Was that a general attitude, essentially, at that time?

HF: What?

SZ: You said for the general public--that the curators were not interested....

HF: They couldn't give a damn about the general public. They wanted their things and monographs on the artists they were doing and so forth. They couldn't give a hoot.

SZ: So the impulse was really an economic one, is that what you're saying, in terms of the bookstore?

HF: It wasn't economic, it was a feeling that we were an educational institution and we have a right to have something for the general public, and the only thing they had was that very small pamphlet from years back by Alfred Barr called What Is Modern Painting?, which was still a bestseller. We had this enormous public coming in and there was absolutely nothing for them on the Museum as a whole. So anyway, Carl Morse came back from the meeting and said, "We have a new book to add to our futures list." I said, "What's that?" "Well, Willard Van Dyke"--who was then head of Film--"wants to do a book on the grade-B film." I was sitting opposite him at his desk; I picked up a pencil and threw it down, and I said, "Goddamn it to hell! We don't have anything for the general public and Willard van Dyke wants to do something on the grade-B film," blah, blah, blah, rant and rave. When I shut up for a minute, he said, "It's really not Willard's fault." I said, "No, but it's perfectly obvious that those curators don't give a hoot in hell for anything for the general public and they're never, never, never going to do it. Anything in the world is going to take precedence, including a book on the grade-B film, and if they're not going to do it, I'll do it." At that time we were operating with both Bill Rubin and Bill Lieberman, co-equal, in painting and sculpture. We decided that, if it was going to be for the general public, it had to be relatively inexpensive. I guess we decided on 125 paintings--it was just to be paintings, everything in color--but the bright idea [was] of doing everything so that the

same transparencies could be used for postcards, which we were very, very low on. So I drew up a list....

SZ: That must have been fun. So you really got to decide what you thought would be....

HF: Yes, and I wanted it to span the collection. It wasn't to be a history but representative of various tendencies, from the earliest things that we have to the then-current. It had to be approved by both Bills, and they didn't make too many changes, as a matter of fact. So then I set to work, and as I started working on it, I got the idea that, instead of making it straight chronological, I would do it by pairs, compare and contrast. That was quite fun to do. Although in general the earliest works in the Museum are at the beginning and the later towards the end, it does not follow through that way. I had great fun working on it and found very interesting things, not only in published materials, but there's a lot in the files of painting and sculpture--letters from artists and things like that. The designer, who was Carl Laanes, got very excited about this pairing thing; he'd thought it was going to be very boring, but he got very interested in this. Then I wrote an introduction to it, and the title comes from something that Alfred Barr had once said, in the introduction, I guess, to the masters book [Masters of Modern Art]. I had that, and I had a lot in the book about Alfred. But then I wanted to dedicate it to the public of The Museum of Modern Art. So down comes a thing from Oldenburg: "Didn't I want instead to dedicate it to Alfred?" So I said, "Goddamn it, I thought there was enough about Alfred and I thought an author had a write to dedicate a book as he or she wanted." So I won out on that one. I guess they printed about 5,000 the first time. There were a couple of disasters, because a couple of the illustrations were in upside-down, and the color was not terribly good. They improved it later, but to my great sorrow, Alfred was so put off by the color he never said anything to me about it, but his wife called me up to say she liked it, liked the introduction and so forth. Since it was priced...I forget what, but relatively low.... Oh,

the great fun was doing the cover. We decided to do a view into the galleries, from one gallery to another. The photographer was Malcolm Varen and he comes along with a Polaroid and tries out different shots before we do it. We wanted a live body in there looking, so Carl Laanes, the designer, was supposed to be it. It turned out in the Polaroid that he had on white sneakers and they came out absolutely glaring in the test shot, so somebody was sent upstairs to get a pair of shoes for Carl to put on for the purpose. Anyway, it was fun to do. The book came out and was very well received, and as I say, it's gone through eight printings since, with the only change being, well, we got the pictures right-side-up and some improvement in color, and when an artist died we'd change his dates. There was one, a Frank Stella that they sold, so I had to substitute another one. The bibliography changed; the bibliography was just books published by the Museum itself on either artists or movements that were discussed. As I say, it's gone through eight printings without revision. I counted up the other day, it's been about 100,000 copies printed, which for an art book is pretty good. Originally, it was in both paperbound and cloth; about three years ago, they didn't print any more in cloth, just paperback. I was naturally very pleased and felt vindicated. Then, of course, they came out with that mammoth Abrams book [The Museum of Modern Art: The History and the Collection, 1984], which is very hefty, very expensive, and I don't think it's good.

SZ: Because?

HF: The comments are very sappy, and some very arbitrary decisions about color are made; I forgot who they have in black and white--somebody like [Mark] Rothko, which doesn't make any sense at all. Poor Harriet Bee had a terrible struggle with that. Again, it was for the general public and the curators--the heads of departments were supposed to write the comments and none of them were in the least interested; it was like pulling eye-teeth getting it done. Sam Hunter's text wasn't very good, and Harriet really made whatever virtues of the book that it has. It's a big, unwieldy thing, you know, and compared to the Masters [of Modern Art] book, which Alfred had done

years before and had many more perceptive such comments.... So that's the story of that. Then...I'm trying to think if it was done before or after I retired, because I get very confused in that period.

SZ: It was a confusing period.

HF: Yes, but I know when I retired that Hightower was still the director and Dick was still head of publications, so the first strike must have been after that....

SZ: Hightower was director during the formation of PASTA.

HF: Dick was head of publications when Hightower was fired.

SZ: And then Dick was brought in as acting director for about six months and then was made director.

HF: That's right.

SZ: He was made director in June of '72; Hightower was out at the end of '71.

HF: Yes. An Invitation [to See] I worked on in '72, and it came out in '73.... It was after Hightower, definitely. When I retired, though, [in 1971,] Dick was still head of publications, because he went to Hightower, and I took early retirement by two years.

SZ: Because?

HF: Because I didn't like how things were going at all in the whole thing. I thought all sorts of quality things were going out the window and all this internecine [fighting]

was going on, and with no really strong direction from the top. So I took retirement at sixty-three instead of sixty-five. Dick was still head of the department, not even acting director, and he decided that they should give me a really bang-up party, for the whole Museum, including all the downstairs staff all the way up, which was really fantastic, because it had never, never, never been done. It was in the garden, and I guess it was either on my birthday or very shortly thereafter; it was May or June. It turned out to be a beautiful day. I have a wonderful document that they made, which is a black-and-white, sort of Art Nouveau figure, and everybody signed this blessed thing. Also, they presented me with the metal version of Oldenburg's Mouse as a present, about this big. Of course, one of the big things I'd done was work on the Oldenburg monograph. It was very exciting, I was really very thrilled. Dick took me and a few of my close friends out for dinner afterwards--Alicia [Legg], Betsy [Jones] and so on--so it was great. Shortly thereafter, there came the strike.

SZ: So you retired and you just....

HF: I didn't go off into the sunset because there was an anticipated publication on René d'Harnoncourt, with special reference to his installations, at which he was a great expert, with a lot of wonderful diagrams of his and photographs of the installations--a lot of material--as well as biographical, but what was really interesting was this visual stuff. Ludwig Glaeser, who had been in the Department of Architecture, started on this.... Now I have the kind of amnesia that comes when you don't want to remember something. There was a guy named...I'm trying to remember his last name...Mordecai Omer, a young Israeli, and he'd been given this job and worked on it. Then I don't know what happened, but it was left hanging and I was supposed to finish it up. So I worked on it, and that was between the time when my book came out and between the two strikes. I worked in an office in the next-door building, since demolished, where Alfred also had been shunted off after his retirement. I'm trying to think when I was sent off to Italy on Italy: The New Domestic Landscape.... 1972.

SZ: So this was all in the same period.

HF: All the same period, because I was also working on the Sidney Janis book.

SZ: So you retired but you just kept working.

HF: Right. Italy: The New Domestic Landscape was...I retired in June [1971. The exhibition was held at the Museum from May 26 to September 11, 1972.]... Hightower was still here when I had my farewell party, I know that. Dick was still sitting in the department. Anyway, Emilio Ambasz, with whom I'd worked on something--I can't think what--he was going to do this big show on Italian design and he requested me to be the editor of it. The whole thing was very complicated, because he was dividing his time. He was really at an office in Milan; the book was being printed in Florence. It was a series of essays, which were all done by Italians and supposedly being translated in Italy. I went over and was there from...it really gets complicated, because I know I left in something like the end of January, so

maybe I have the date of that down wrong, but Dick was definitely either director or acting director when that was being done. I went over at the end of January with a lot of material. I was going to be sitting in Florence, because that was where the book was being produced and Emilio was commuting back and forth between Milan and Florence. Since I was going to be gone for a number of months and my then-cat was sixteen or seventeen, I couldn't see leaving him behind. Italy is an enlightened country, where, unlike England, you don't have to put your cat into quarantine for six months, so I was going to take the cat with me, since I wasn't going to be moving around. I was being very casual about my own date of departure until somebody in the department said to me, "Well, you know, only one animal per flight is allowed on a plane." So I immediately called up whatever it was--it wasn't the Italian airline, it was Pan Am or TWA--and applied for a date and applied for the animal. They were able to confirm my flight immediately, but since only one animal per flight is allowed in the cabin instead of in the hold, this has to go back to their central computer in Omaha, so they said, "We'll let you know in forty-eight hours." Forty-eight hours later, I get a phone call: "Miss Franc, we're happy to tell you you have pet approval." So I called up the consul and found out what you have to do--got a tiny little thing like a passport for him. I was told you have to have shots and things from the vet and so forth. I went to the vet and asked for advice; I never had a cat who didn't abhor every means of travel [LAUGHING], so I got a sedative for him. I only had one of those cardboard carton things, so I bought him the equivalent of a Gucci to go. By that time, he was an old cat with special diet things, so I went off with a not very large suitcase of my own; all the manuscripts in one thing, photographs and everything, very, very heavy; a carton of cat food. Daisy Barr, who is very fond of animals, went out to the airport with me to see me off, and she looked at my bag and she said, "Is that all you're taking of your own?" I said, "Well, anything else I can get in Florence." The cat had had a sedative before he left, and I bought him a leash and a collar, which he had never had because he was a completely indoor cat, and practiced with those and everything. The plane was practically empty and I got the seat in front of the bulkhead, and the flight attendant said, "You can take the cat out and put him on

the seat next to you, except at landing, take-off and meals." So the cat was perfectly happy sitting next to me when I took him out. There was a little Indian boy about five years old across the aisle, and he and the cat had a great flirtation. However, about the time we got to Rome, the sedative was about to wear off, and we had to get off at Rome and go through Immigration and Customs and take a bus across town to the Termini and get a ticket to get on the train and get up to Florence. By this time, I was in need of a sedative. On the train, again, I had a little ticket for him. The conductor was very nice; he let him out. I finally got a cab and got to the hotel, and the poor cat was so traumatized by this that for forty-eight hours, whenever I went to the closet to get my coat out, he dove under the bed because he was sure he was going to be subjected to another form of torture in the way of transportation. However, I was in the hotel a very short time, and the adorable head of what was called Centro Di, Ferruccio Marchi, which was producing this catalogue and their establishment was across the Arno on the side where the Pitti Palace is, he found for me a great apartment in what would be, well, like service flats in London, which was connected with the Excelsior Hotel. It was directly across the bridge from their establishment, so I had a lovely suite with a little entrance hall and a living room and a little kitchenette and a bedroom and a bath. The cat was enchanted with this. The first morning we were there, I said, "I want my room cleaned, please, between nine and ten," so I could go out and do errands and then work. The first morning, and in comes to do this place a brigade of three people--a head chambermaid, an assistant chambermaid and a porter. Well, the cat went up in the air like this, but they did this sort of cleaning operation very fast, and then they made great friends with the cat. He was very happy thereafter. I still have friends in Florence. The people I had known who were friends...the one I mentioned to you, Rita Pelagatti, who was Dr. Offner's Italian assistant, and her classmates--they were about two or three years ahead of me in graduate school and they had all gotten their laurea the year I was there, in '33--Rita had died, but they had gone up the ladder and were respectably head of...Anna-Maria Ciaranfi was director of the Pitti, and Luisa Beccherucci, head of the Uffizi. So I had them and so forth. The cat was thoroughly spoiled, he was

delighted. Among the other encumbrances, I forgot to mention my portable Olivetti.

SZ: The same one that you had before? You told me that you had the portable Olivetti for a long time.

HF: Yes, but in Spain I didn't have that. That was where I had the Spanish-language one. It was very complicated, because it turned out that these alleged translations in English were unbelievably unusable and all had to be extensively rewritten and reedited. I was both editing and working with design and production, and the very, very lovely people at Centro Di: Ferruccio Marchi, the director, and his wife, Alessandra, who has a degree in library science from Pomona, had a marvelous library, especially for modern art; it was a private library, but everybody came in and consulted. She was a bibliographer and published lists and catalogues; she's since carried on the firm after the death of her husband. They were very nice to me, but I was literally working from--it was like Sweden all over again--I was working from nine o'clock in the morning till two o'clock in the morning, either with them or typing away on this editing job. Emilio would come down about once a week, and had great troubles, because with the Italian train system and strikes and slowdowns, he didn't know whether it would take him five hours or eight or nine to get down on the train. We worked away on this thing, and the cat, who at home was used to a contract that he would be fed an ample amount in twenty-four hours but nothing said about regularity of mealtime, because I was working late and so forth, he gets there and decides he wants his dinner at six, and he lets this be known by jumping up and sitting on the papers. I'd look at my watch and say, "Oh no, it isn't time yet, Domino," move him, and back he'd go. Since I was working very hard, I like to eat rather late anyway, and I had this whole kitchenette thing, but I'd stop and have tea at four, forty-three. In Florence there's this immoral concoction of truffled paté, and I'd have that. That cat could smell that from here to there, and he'd come leaping over. Besides being very expensive, it wasn't very good for him, but I'd dip my finger in and give him a little lick. One day, I'm sitting going clatter, clatter, clatter at the Olivetti, and I

hear a clatter, clatter, clatter from the kitchenette. The cat had succeeded in opening up the refrigerator, which was one of those small under-the-counter things, and was gorging on truffled paté. Emilio was enchanted by this and when we finished up the job he brought me a beautiful vase out of the collection and he brought a can of paté for the cat--needless to say, I ate it, not the cat. I was there from January till sometime in the summer, June or so, and working this incredible schedule. Of course, the people who were setting the type, nobody spoke English, excepting the two Marchis; not the designer and the production people. But it was a great team, a really fascinating team. I'd be up there and in the middle of the morning I'd say, "I need some benzena (benzine)," which was an espresso from the shop downstairs--I fueled on benzena. We had a big fight about the cover--have you seen the cover? It has those cut-out things; Emilio wanted this. It was battle strife, back and forth, about that, and about the title, because they thought "The New Italian Landscape" did not really explain to people that it was a design show. We had endless telephone conversations back and forth before it finally got a subtitle, whatever it is [Italy: The New Domestic Landscape]. The editing got done, the production got done and I had a very nice time. It was being printed up in...where all the Palladios are...not Mantua, not Rimini--Vicenza! Anyway, I went up and that was fun, saw the proofs on press, which I always enjoy. Towards the end, I was getting more and more tired, and I wanted somebody to come and do the proofreading of the page proof with me, because I knew I was too tired to do it just on my own. So I called up Dick and said, "I want somebody to come and do this with me." He said, "Oh, there must be any number of people in Florence who can do this." I said, "No, there aren't. I want somebody who really knows English and proofreading and who isn't going to go into cultural shock about being in Florence and really can work very intensively on this thing." Well, the first person I asked for was Jane Fluegel, who had lived in Italy. She worked on the Encyclopedia of World Art, which was produced in Italy. For personal reasons, she couldn't come. Again, there were long conversations, and Ethel [Shein] offered to come, and I said, "Ethel's fine, but she's not an editor." So I finally persuaded them to send me Pat White, who was the person who had been hired to

work on the John Russell Meanings of Modern Art, which was the successor to the aborted Abrams book that I'd worked on with Lane Faison. Pat had been in Italy before, so I said, "Bring Pat." She came and stayed two weeks, and it was a dream, because she just worked like a demon until two o'clock in the morning. The Marchis were very nice; once a week they'd have me over, in the evening, a Saturday night or whatever, and I met all sorts of people there, including Harold Acton. They were very nice. One hazard of being there was that the Italians were in the middle of an election campaign, and as you know, there are umpteen parties. We were on the corner of the Lungarno and the street that goes up like this to Sante Croce, and endless sound trucks would come by at all hours of the day and night. One night, Pat and I said we'd stop at one or two o'clock and decided we'd have to go out for a breath of air; we went for a walk and ran into a Communist demonstration coming in the other direction. Anyway, Pat saved my life and was a dream to work with. Finally, I was done and I came back. Coming back was not as difficult as going, because in the first place, I didn't have the manuscript, and I didn't have the cans of cat food to take. I stopped overnight in Rome just to break the trip, so it was an easier transition back home. Eventually, the book came out, and we were pleased with it. Emilio was pleased, and we had the exhibition, which was interesting, I thought. Then I was working on this blessed aborted thing on René.

SZ: As a freelancer, then.

HF: They would hire me for projects. Then came the second strike, which was much bitterer, because I think the trustees had decided that they'd given the store away in the first one. The big point which we went out on strike for was essentially....

END TAPE 10, SIDE 1

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HF: ...titles. I may have mentioned before that the staff felt that people, even if they were of curatorial rank, if they did not have the power to hire and fire, were not managerial. Of course, the administration were eager to cut off as many people at the top as possible, so they insisted they were managerial. So really, that was the major point that they would not budge on and we would not budge on. I remember Dick had said, at the time of the first strike, "You'll all very altruistic about this now, but what it comes down to is it's all going to be what PASTA wants is more money and more benefits." He wrote a memo which was addressed to all the PASTA members, saying, "This action is only for a very few people and you people down the line have nothing to gain by this," trying to divide the ranks, which did not divide. I think it was a more bitter strike than the first one, which is saying a lot, and largely because the staff felt that Dick, who before had been somewhat understanding, had been completely corrupted by the trustees. I think I mentioned to you about the business of going out the front door and going out the back door. We were just furious at that; we thought this was really ignominious. It was a very bitter strike.

SZ: So you were still a member of the union.

HF: I was still a member of the union, and they had even allowed me to be on the negotiating team, even though I was theoretically retired. The negotiating team got really nowhere that time.

SZ: You negotiated with whom on this when you met with management?

HF: Different people. Dick Koch was there, [John] Szarkowski. But the real sticking point was the man who still is their counsel, Bob Batterman.

SZ: Because?

HF: Everybody hated him. He was really not willing to give an inch on anything. We had

to, as before, have pickets for the front entrance, back entrance and the warehouse. At one point, the Teamsters, who were affiliated with local 37, which was our union, they really sent a lot of goons; we really didn't like that. There was one very disagreeable incident up at the warehouse, where they would try to stop people going in. I saw this one woman; I got in the elevator with her and I said, "What were they trying to say to you?" She wouldn't talk to me. I got off, she got off. I came back and discovered that the story had gone out from somebody at the warehouse that I had hit one of the people. I was absolutely infuriated with this. Finally, I got them to back down, that this wasn't true at all, but it was very embarrassing. I was extremely strident at this. The result was that I was cut off from any access to the Museum when we went back.

SZ: When the strike was settled.

HF: When the strike was settled. Except what was interesting was, Dick, with whom I'd had all these very close relations before...and I went off--I guess we had lunch, but it lasted forever. We talked about different things. I said he didn't really believe this other story, and I told him how infuriated they were at this business of his going out the back way. We discussed a lot of things. However, I was banished, meaning, I regret to say, that all of this material of René's, I don't know what happened to it. It really was on loan, these diagrams from Sarah d'Harnoncourt. Some of it was turned over to Arthur [Drexler] to decide whether he could do anything with it and he wasn't interested. At last it was in some closet, and nobody knows what's become of this material, which I felt very bad about. [René d'Harnoncourt's diagrams and drawings are with his Papers in the Museum Archives.]

SZ: How did you feel about being banished from this place that you had...?

HF: I really felt upset about leaving this d'Harnoncourt project up in the air. I thought it was penalizing René's memory and not me. It was a horrible job because the

material was in a mess and what Mordecai had done with it was a mess.

SZ: I meant beyond that, because it was obviously an important part of your life.

HF: Oh, yes. Of course, what happened is that the staff was extremely supportive of me, and I was known to all of the downstairs staff, too. There's much less turnover, I may say, among the guards than there is upstairs, so I can walk in and all sorts of people whose names I don't really know say, "Hello, Helen." After all these years, they still know me and associate me on the side of the underlings. I really felt bad about being evicted. I felt probably that I had been overly strident, especially for somebody who wasn't on the staff, but I really was upset about having the d'Harnoncourt thing taken away, because I thought it was no great treat for me, but they owed it to René to do something, and nothing ever happened to it as a result. What did I do after that?

SZ: I have two questions. One I pulled out of the transcript and I had made a note to ask you and see if you remembered, because you'd said it in another context, about "playing dumb," when you sort of know what's going on but you don't want to let on. You talked about it in the context of the magazine, but you said, "Years later, I did that again at the Museum."

HF: With Liz [Shaw], on something or other.

SZ: I didn't know if that was worth pulling out or not.

HF: I forget, but it had to do with Liz trying to get me to react to something. I can't really remember what it was, but I know it was a tactic I used.

SZ: It's obviously not important. When you were working on the d'Harnoncourt material, was Alfred still here off and on?

HF: Alfred was increasingly amnesiac, so that....

SZ: You still saw them socially?

HF: Oh yes, because I remember one evening I got a call over in that annex building; he hadn't shown up somewhere and Daisy asked me to look on his appointment book to see if we could find out where he could be, because he would sort of wander off and not appear at times. But he was working on the chronicle for the PASIT/MOMA [Painting and Sculpture in The Museum of Modern Art], and he had that office over in the same building where I was.

SZ: So you obviously redeemed yourself or were rehabilitated [LAUGHING], so that they let you back in before too terribly long.

HF: No, I didn't have any jobs from the Museum. I had other things outside, but not with them. I still saw...a lot of these people were very great friends of mine. By this time, I guess, Bill Lieberman had left. I forget when he left.

SZ: He left in 1979, I think.

HF: As late as that?

SZ: Yes,...'79..... He was here when I first was here; he hadn't left.

HF: They were having that peculiar double-headed head of painting and sculpture and things still were not very good. Porter had left and Waldo was head of the International Program. Publications, I think, they've done very badly by, in the sense that it infuriates me if you look at the annual report. The publications department is put in with ancillary services, and the same person is the head of restaurants and the shops as is head of publications. To me, this is absolutely an inexcusable thing. I

think it is one thing to have the bookstore and the design shops regarded as commercial ventures, but having known the entire history of the Museum's Department of Publications--Alfred brought it up, Monroe [Wheeler] brought it up--as an essential part of the Museum's educational program and with all the prestige the publications had, that it should not be considered as important as the curatorial departments are I find absolutely maddening to this day. Of course, it is difficult, but I think it is really downgraded very much by this.

SZ: You think the quality of what's now put out has suffered?

HF: It isn't that. It's not a balanced program. There's no overall policy, just what the department heads want to do. As I say, this big Abrams book, when it came out, was really a disaster, everybody thinks, to the point of Harriet having to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Then there's this thing called Access that they've been working on, which Harriet is very skeptical about. Of course, they do some absolutely great books, but they would never do another thing that wasn't directly related to the exhibitions and collections, such as [John Rewald's] The History of Impressionism.

SZ: There are other publishers who do do that, right?

HF: Yes.

SZ: But what you're saying is that that should be within the Museum's scope....

HF: That they shouldn't disregard a thing such as this, because with commercial publishers you get coffee-table books, and also, I think more should be done on critical and philosophical texts, such as the Venturi book. It's called Paper no. 1 of the Graham Studies on Architecture, and there's never been a Paper no. 2. With the fantastic prestige and importance of that book, I think they should be looking at that kind of thing as a possibility that we would do. A collection of Alfred's writings was

not done by us, it was done outside. Sidney Janis's memoirs, which certainly they could have done, they never have considered getting a subsidy for. I think they really should have done that; it's directly related to the Museum. They used to do really charming things, like the Calder book...little books like that. I wanted to do one, and I still think it would sell beautifully, and Bill Lieberman says they've lost his notes on it; I still think they should do it. [Marc] Chagall did for a ballet a whole series of watercolors on a ballet called "Aleko," and we have the whole set. I wanted them to do a small picture book on that, which I still think would sell very well. Bill wrote some essay for it and it just vanished somewhere; nothing's ever been heard of it. They have never published a checklist of the drawings; I understand one is now in the works. Tools that would be useful, I think, for reference they don't do.

SZ: Would Alfred have wanted that, do you think?

HF: The drawings? Oh, sure. Because PASIT/MOMA had always...but, of course, everything is very difficult and everything is so expensive now, publications that come out. I don't know. So is that the end for today?

SZ: It looks like it to me. What do you think?

HF: I think that's good.

SZ: Thank you very much, Helen.

END TAPE 10, SIDE 2

END INTERVIEW