

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: ALICIA LEGG (AL)
INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)
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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: Alicia, let's start the way I always start. Tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your family background....

AL: I was born in Hackensack, New Jersey, which is a suburb of New York City, but at that time it was a very small and quiet town, and very nice.

SZ: It's not that far from the city.

AL: It's about fifteen miles as the crow flies to Times Square, but a little longer than that to get to.... My father was a....

SZ: Could you tell me when?

AL: October 23rd, 1915. My father was a stockbroker and he commuted to New York--in those days, by train. My mother was born in Brooklyn, but at the age of four her family went to France.... Her parents were both Irish.

SZ: Irish-born?

AL: Yes. My grandfather was in the glove business, some Irish firm, and first he was sent to New York. They had, I think, at that time about five or six children.... My mother

was therefore born in Brooklyn, and soon, when she was four years old, they moved to France. So she grew up in France, and my grandfather was the head of a glove factory. It was a very good business in those days.

SZ: Because everybody wore gloves.

AL: They wore gloves up to their elbow, even beyond the elbow. They wore lots of kid gloves. So anyway....

SZ: Where was that?

AL: Grenoble. Grenoble had a university and there was a big English and American colony there. I don't know why, but I guess people like my grandfather, just making a good business. So there was a good...cultural life among these people. Of course, their children grew up very quickly speaking French. There were several more children, and finally my grandmother had ten children; Mother was the seventh.... My grandmother died when my mother was fourteen, and the boys were sent to Ireland for their schooling.

SZ: Was this Northern Ireland?

AL: Dublin, I think, but I think my grandfather came from the north, originally.... His background was Irish Quaker. My grandmother was Catholic. Anyway, the boys were sent to an Irish Quaker school and it was very severe and apparently awful, and the girls were sent to a French convent school. They grew up with this big family, and my mother ended up being the oldest daughter when her mother died and sort of took over as the hostess and remained there with her father, and the other girls got married. But finally my father, who was a cousin, went over to visit the family and he apparently had an absolutely wonderful time. He was about twenty-four,...and he had a wonderful summer there. My mother...visited him in Jersey City, where I think his family lived, and eventually they got married. That was in 1912. I have two brothers: Sam and Harold. I'm between them. Harold is two years older than I am. My mother died in 1953; the two boys long before had decamped and had married, so I stayed

in New Jersey with my mother.

SZ: So you always lived in Hackensack.

AL: Well, until 1953. When I was five, Mother took the three of us to France to visit the relatives.

SZ: She spoke fluent French, I assume.

AL: Oh, yes. She spoke English with a French accent. I was embarrassed to have a mother with an accent, in school--we went to public school, and she was different from other mothers, you know. Then we got to France and stayed with my aunt, and we were called the American invasion. Of course, Mother thought she was bringing us up in a French-European way.

SZ: Did she speak French with you?

AL: She tried to, but my father was American, so he used to make up his own language. We'd have these relatives who would come to visit and they were all talking French, and...he had a kind of lingo that he would make up. The sisters would get together and gossip and have tea, and he would say they were having a "coup de thé." He was making things up to try to defend himself. Anyway, there were a lot of cousins over there, so the first trip, Harold...we used to get on the wall of my aunt's garden and watch the children going back and forth to school. They were making some remarks about us, or Harold thought they were, so he asked our cousin Georges what he could say that would be insulting to the French boys. So Georges told him to say, "Je suis bete, comme des pieds." And he got up and yelled this, "I am an idiot like my feet." So of course they all roared with laughter and he was humiliated. It just showed how cruel children can be to each other. But anyway, mother thought she'd brought us up well; apparently, we were not considered to be as polite as French children. I don't really remember that. But we kept going back in summer vacations and gradually they thought we were alright. The French are very critical.... We still

have a cousin, the same Georges Blanchet. I don't know how old he is--close to eighty, I think. We see him, and he has a huge family, lots of children and grandchildren, so we still see them all, and they're very nice people.

SZ: So when you were little and went over there, were you speaking French, or just understanding it?

AL: I don't remember, but as we went back, we did pick up French. Sam is a whiz; he studied French in college and had a very good teacher at Yale. He was a French teacher and he married a Quaker girl from Pennsylvania, who also was a French teacher. When they retired, they went to France, so we're full of French. So that's about it.

SZ: So that's how you spent your summers.

AL: Yes.

SZ: And you said you went to public school in Hackensack?

AL: I went to public school up through one year of high school and then I went to boarding school in Philadelphia for three years.

SZ: Called?

AL: Ogontz School. It's defunct now. It's now part of Penn State--they took over the campus. It was a very...I wish I'd gone somewhere else now. Full of rich girls, and my mother was remarried and really didn't want me to be away, so I didn't go to college; I went back home. My god, I forgot to tell you: my father died when I was thirteen, and that was just a disaster. Mother was left with these three teenagers, and it was really tough on her. We all adored our father.

SZ: So it was tough on you, too.

AL: Awful.

SZ: Was he sick, or did he have an accident?

AL: He had pneumonia and died within two or three days. It was before they had antibiotics. So anyway, she eventually married a friend of theirs, a bachelor, and that was not so great, a bachelor coming into a house with three teenagers. It was ten years before she divorced him, so I figure he ruined my adolescence.

SZ: Just by virtue of being there.

AL: Yes.

SZ: So you went to this school which you say now you wish you hadn't gone to.

AL: Well, it was just a social place.

SZ: Not a serious place. Who picked that? Did you pick that, or...?

AL: Mother picked it.... She was advised by a friend she had from Grenoble, Harold Mason. His father was the American consul in Grenoble, and Harold Mason was a ...very good pianist, and he lived in Chevy Chase and he knew all about schools around here, and he taught at Ogontz School. He came and taught girls there.

SZ: Was that something you wanted to do, go away to school?

AL: I was willing to go because I wasn't happy at home anymore. It was pretty sad. But it was tough on my mother, because she wasn't happy either. Anyway, I began to be interested in art very early, with drawing and stuff.

SZ: Very early being what?

AL: As a little girl.

SZ: It was something you had a talent for?

AL: Yes, and I took painting lessons from a lady in Hackensack when I was...I don't know if it was before or after my father died. So I did that all the time, as well as at Ogontz. So I went back home and went to the Art Students League right away. I had two years of junior college at Ogontz. It was a country club, very little scholastic....

SZ: Were you a good student?

AL: I was a good student except in math, and it would have been difficult to get through college, because I wasn't good in math or science. So maybe it was just as well I didn't go.

SZ: I can tell, though, that you can do without either [LAUGHING].

AL: Well, I'm getting along. Anyway, I went right to the Art Students League, in 19...well, I graduated in '35, so I went to the League in '36. I had to commute by bus and subway.... So I did that for maybe five or six years, just on and off.

SZ: You liked to draw, paint?

AL: I drew. I had real academic training in drawing with George Bridgeman, whom you may not know about, but in those days he was a well-known draughtsman. He was old. Then I had various painting classes, and printmaking. I learned to do etchings and woodcuts and stuff. I did that. That's my grandparents in Grenoble; it's a woodcut.

SZ: It's wonderful. You did that when?

AL: I did that in the '40s, sometime before my mother died, before I left New Jersey. I have to tell you the story of that. There's a photograph that I did it from.

SZ: I see it.

AL: Can you see the silver teapot? Well, there it is over there. There's another picture there, of mother and her two sisters, all dressed in old-fashioned clothes. And that's she standing there....

SZ: In the beautiful, elegant dress. Before we move on, let me just pick up a few things. In terms of art, were there always things on your mother's walls, were you used to looking at things...?

AL: No. We had some paintings that she brought from Grenoble by an apparently well-known painter, Berthier; he's in the books, I looked him up. Sam has got a couple of them in his room. You know, nineteenth-century stuff, nothing at all modern. My father, he was a good cartoonist. I don't even remember talking about art with him. Anyway, at the League, even though I didn't have academic art training--well, I had some at Ogontz, I had art history at Ogontz--there was a man who would come at the lunch hour, a bookseller, and he had briefcases full of new books, art books, and he would spill them out on the tables in the lunchroom and we could all just look at these books. It was informal, but I really did learn an awful lot of art history.

SZ: Just from that.

AL: Yes! It was my introduction to art history.

SZ: You were there, I guess, it was right at the depth of the Depression.

AL: Yes.

SZ: What that must have been like....

AL: It was tough. Not on me, because we were not affected. My father died, but apparently he hadn't made any bad investments, so we were okay.

SZ: But I guess a lot of your fellow students....

AL: Oh, yes. Harry Sternberg was one of the teachers. He was a graphic artist and I think he was a real communist; he used to invite us to his studio and he would spout--he was very politically-minded....

SZ: A little bit more about the Art Students League, then. You just could go and you would keep studying; there wasn't a three-year course or anything.

AL: No, no, it was entirely freelance. I wasn't awfully hardworking, because I knew I wasn't going to have to make a living or anything like that.... Finally, when I...what happened? We sold our house. We had this great, big house.

SZ: In Hackensack.

AL: Yes, and there was just mother and me.

SZ: And you never considered leaving and moving into the city.

AL: I considered it, but I didn't do it, and the two boys were gone. So we finally...I thought it would be a good thing to go to Vermont because we had gone there in the summer and she knew people and it might be a good place for her to be permanently, and then I could leave. But it didn't turn out that way. Anyway, the war ended, and Sam was a C.O.; he was a pacifist.

SZ: Were you brought up as Quakers?

AL: No. Both my parents were Catholic, but they didn't practice it....

SZ: So you were brought up as Catholic?

AL: No.

SZ: As nothing?

AL: We were brought up at the nearest church where we lived. The first one was Congregational. Then we moved and we went to the Episcopal church, because that was.... They were not religious people, my parents.

SZ: So your mother sold the house in Hackensack and you ended up....

AL: She and I went to Brandon, Vermont, which is between Rutland and Middlebury. It was a nice town and we knew some people around there, because we had gone up there summers.

SZ: This was during the war?

AL: Well, previously.

SZ: So you'd gone up there with the thought of....

AL: No. We knew that area, and Mother hated the summer heat, so that was when we decided to go there. The trouble is, the house we bought turned out to be on a vein of marble, and the first night we were there, about two in the morning, the whole house shook, because there was a train, maybe a half a mile away, the Rutland railroad--just shook the place. She was not a good sleeper, so.... Finally, my aunt Molly came. She'd been through the Occupation in Grenoble and was just a wreck,

so she came over, and I thought, "Ah, I can go to New York." Meantime, I had decided I really should do some work, because I was just fooling around and I wasn't working as an artist. I have to tell you how I got a job at the MoMA. Aunt Molly was there, and I went to New York. It was during the postwar...I just couldn't get an apartment. Sam knew someone through his Quaker connections who had a co-op apartment on 24th and Ninth Avenue. The co-op was three boys and one girl and they needed another girl. I found out why they needed another girl, because the other one was just a slob [LAUGHTER]. She was a social worker and just never lifted a finger, never did anything, and the place was a mess. By then I did get a job at the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Sam knew a most wonderful man.... His name was Ted Walser. I had taken a course in typing and stuff up in Rutland.... I was typing membership cards for the Fellowship and I lived in this coop. The three boys were C.O.'s; one of them had been in prison. They were very nice, and the girl was nice enough, but she was just a mess. Both soldiers and C.O.'s would come and stay there on the floor in the living room. My room was the ex-dining room, with a curtain between it. It was really a crazy place.

SZ: Fun?

AL: Yes, it was fun, but it was tough, because you couldn't hardly get any sleep. So I lost a lot of weight and got sick, and I finally went back to New Jersey. My Aunt Molly was still there. My mother had moved back, bought another house in New Jersey, and there they were, the two of them. So finally, Mother died, in '53, so I moved to New York.

SZ: But you lived there until she died.

AL: Yes. We were very close....

SZ: You had another job. Did you work at the Met?

AL: Yes, I worked at the Met. No, I applied at MoMA first, and Ruth Morton--her name

was different then; she was married to Ted Morton. Did you know them? She was Ruth something-else then, and Ted was working at the Museum. She said to me, "What is your typing speed?" I said, "I don't type." So then she asked me various other things and found out that I knew French, and...she encouraged me to learn how to type, and said, "Well, come back when you can type." So I did.... I learned typing at Rutland, and I was already older than the farm girls were in this class. You had to take a course--it was really an arithmetic course, and it virtually started with one and one equals two. So I was going through the...examples, and you had to do them and then turn this in. So I got through adding and subtracting and multiplying, and I got to division, long division, which had always been difficult. So I was doing it according to the example and it never turned out right. I turned the thing in, and the next day, the teacher came up to me and all the girls were looking, and she said, "This is wrong." And I said, "Well, I tried. I know it isn't right, but I was following the example." And she looked at it and she said, "My god, we ordered five hundred copies!" So then, later, some of these little girls came up to me and said, "We'd like to take you to lunch." They were so sorry for me. Well, anyway, that was my business training. I did get a job at the Met.

SZ: You knew you wanted to work in a museum?

AL: Yes. I had already applied at the Modern, which told me to come back, and I had also applied at the Met. I got a call from the Met, so I went there and there was an opening in the Costume Institute. It was for a receptionist and there was typing, just membership cards--the same thing I'd done at the FOR, but I did learn office procedures. I was there for eighteen months.... The founder of it was Adelyn Bernstein, who had been the mistress of Thomas Wolfe, and she was a fascinating woman. She was a really nice woman, and tough.... I got to like her later. One thing that Mrs. Bernstein managed to get through my head...sometimes you had to work half a day on Saturdays.... There was a Labor Day weekend and my mother was still living in Vermont and I was supposed to work on a Saturday before Labor Day. My mother was expecting me, and I asked my supervisor if I could go and I could see that she was upset, and before I knew it, Mrs. Bernstein came to me, very serious,

and sat down and said, "You know, this is a job you've taken and there are responsibilities." I was just stunned by this reprimand. I just thought she was scolding me, but I had no idea she was going to.... She finally said, "Go ahead, take your weekend."

SZ: And the second part was?

AL: She really drilled into me the responsibility of holding a job, which I had no idea of. And then she let me go. That was an important lesson. Anyway, I stuck it out there for eighteen months, and then I....

SZ: In using the words "stuck it out," it wasn't anything that you....

AL: No, I wasn't interested in costumes. It was interesting because all these designers would come in and the books were there and I sort of was the librarian. All of that was interesting if you were interested in the fashion industry, which I wasn't. It was definitely a kind of commercial milieu, but fascinating, you know. I've forgotten why...I had something wrong with me, some back trouble,... and I said I was going to quit, and I went over to France, spent the summer, and when I came back I went back to MoMA as I'd been told to do, and then I got a call and my first job was in the library at MoMA.

SZ: And why MoMA? Why did you want to work there at that point?

AL: Because when I was at the Art Students League, that's where we all hung out. MoMA was the place to go and all the young people just gathered there. So I got to like the collection. Well, I didn't know the collection, but I loved to go there. So that was the place I wanted to work in.

SZ: You liked modern art even then.

AL: Oh, yes. Also, I made a very good friend. Her name was Harriet Berger. She was

English; she was, I think, born in England of an English father and an American mother who was a Southern-belle type. They'd gone through the war in Europe, and she and her mother, they were trying to get out through Spain and were arrested and had a terrible time.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

AL: Her parents had a villa in Monaco, so she spent a lot of her time in France. She went to the Slade School in London, so she had some good training. She was wonderful, very intelligent and attractive. Her father was a weird eccentric. He bought this enormous house in Englewood, New Jersey, right near where we used to live. So her mother and my mother became friends. Finally, she married and had two sons; she eventually died, about fifteen years ago. A wonderful girl. I knew her at the League.... We also went to Hayter's. You know Stanley William Hayter? That was in 1950. He came over...Atelier--what was it? Atelier something, a number [Atelier 17]. He had been teaching in Paris, etching and printmaking. He was well known. So he had to get out of Paris and came and opened up an atelier on 8th Street. We went to that, and people like [Joan] Miró came and used the presses, and a lot of the European artists who were here during that time. So that was interesting.

SZ: Was she connected with MoMA in any way?

AL: No. Oh, and Fannie Hillsmith is another person who...it was Fannie who got us to go to the Hayter studio. There's a painting by her hanging down near the door. She's now eighty. She's up in New Hampshire. Anyway, it was very interesting.

SZ: So you began at the Museum in 1949.

AL: Yes.

SZ: Which was a very interesting year, because that was René d'Harnoncourt's first year, and I guess there had begun to be a lot of change.

AL: Yes. I think after I had been in the library about eighteen months, then Andrew Ritchie came, and I heard that they needed a secretary and I applied for it and got it. It was interesting working in the library.... The first thing I had to do....

SZ: You were working for Bernard [Karpel]?

AL: Bernard, yes.... He was a lovely man, but sort of an ab-dab. One thing about him was, I didn't know much about being a secretary, but I was filing his letters. The filing in his office, in this librarian's office, was not chronological. I don't know what system he used. So I had a real stumbling block then.... I think I managed to get him to stop doing that, because they were losing letters all over the place. I mean, this was an eminent librarian.

SZ: Was Pearl [Moeller] there at the time?

AL: Yes. Then I worked for Pearl for months--I was there eighteen months, and I think it was ten of them. I was filing [Soichi] Sunami negatives that had been backed up and hadn't been filed in years, and in doing this, I learned the collection. I didn't know it at the time--I was pretty bored--but it was a great way to learn the collection.

SZ: You didn't know you were learning it at the time.

AL: No. It just took months, and it wasn't exactly exciting work.

SZ: I thought the library was pretty large at that time. I'm not trying to make any comparison, but it was a place where people did come to study.

AL: Oh, yes. [PAUSE]

SZ: Something I asked you before put me in mind to ask you a little bit about the fact that all the time you were attending the Art Students League you said that you used to go to the Museum, the old Museum, for exhibitions....

AL: I usually went with somebody else or a group of people would go. We'd have lunch out in those days. I just remember eating out in the garden; it must have been in warm weather. That was before I worked there, so I don't know what visitors did in the winter...about eating lunch.

SZ: I had asked you about the library, that it was even then a place where people really came....

AL: Oh, yes. There was one Mr. Krauschauer, an elderly German film buff, who lived in the library. He came every day and he had a table in a place that was more or less assigned to him. He was weird; I think he came out with some kind of publication. He was knowledgeable, but he was very strange. He was one of these characters who hung around the Museum. I just can't remember any more than that, but he was like a piece of furniture. I think at one time he may have been a knowledgeable and distinguished person, but I don't really know. I'm not a film person myself. And then, of course, there was the staff who came down to use the library. At that time the library had a slide service, and many teachers and instructors came in who were going to show slides to their classes. They would come in and pick out slides. One of my jobs was to sign out these slides. Some of them were well-known people, none of whom I can remember right now. They were from the Institute or some museum or school, or artists came, got slides. But they gave up slides, and I don't really know why, for the public. I used to shelve the books, and file photo negatives. So I really had had about all there was to do, besides being a cataloguer or a bibliographer, so I was sort of eager to go upstairs. And I was lucky--there was a place in the Department of Painting and Sculpture. Andrew Ritchie came in just then; he was new. That was when the painting and sculpture department was separated from the collection, which remained under Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller; there was a staff servicing them, including, when I first came, Olive Bragazzi.... Very soon after I

came, Betsy Jones became Alfred's assistant, and she became a very good friend and a very important member of that department. And Sara Mazo--she's the widow of [Yasuo] Kuniyoshi. Sara was there before I was and was a very useful member of the department. Then, as I say, when Ritchie came in, the collection was all under Barr and Dorothy Miller and those people I just mentioned. The exhibitions that were temporary exhibitions, they used to do everything, they used to do those shows, but I'm sure it just got to be too much; there wasn't enough staff to handle it. So they separated the exhibitions, and that's what I started working on with Ritchie.

SZ: I thought that they separated those two functions largely because they wanted to have Barr still....

AL: ...working on the collection.

SZ: And I guess it was also acquisitions, right?

AL: They wanted him to finish his book. He was working on the first of his Picasso books and the Matisse book, and he was, I think, too burdened with the administration part of the Museum.

SZ: When you went into [the Department of] Painting and Sculpture, René had already....

AL: I think he was made director while I was still in the library, but it was very close, in '49.

SZ: Let me ask you, because it's certainly been said and reported that there was tension among staff members and between, I guess, two basic camps.

AL: Monroe Wheeler, I think, was very ambitious and was critical of Alfred and thought he wasn't a good administrator, which was true. So he was a kind of agitator, I think, as far as I know. I think they brought René in, who served as an ameliorator--he soothed everybody's tempers and more or less said yes to everybody. I think in a

way it was a good job, because I think things worked better. I came in after Alfred was more or less fired and then wouldn't leave and was put in a little closet off the library. That period must have been hectic and miserable for everybody, but I came in after that, so I can't describe it.

SZ: What was the atmosphere when you came in? How would you describe it?

AL: There was some tension. From the point of view of our department, the separating of Ritchie from the collection wasn't altogether...he wasn't very happy about that. I think he resented not.... Of course, I think he attended all the meetings, but he didn't have a voice in the collection as much as Alfred and Dorothy did. It's very hard for this all to work out amicably.

SZ: The way it was set up, you mean?

AL: Yes, because in the beginning it was Alfred who did everything, and he did it well; but then, I gathered, things from an administrative point of view were going haywire. But I was too inexperienced to know most of that. I was just doing my little job and wasn't aware of lots of stuff at that point. But eventually, Ritchie got fed up. He really wasn't dynamic; he was a good art historian; he had done his Ph.D. and everything, but he just wasn't dynamic. So I don't think they lost a great deal there. But he was a nice guy, wonderful to work with. He was good at administrating. He organized the loan section under him. Margaret Miller--have you heard about her?--she had been there,...but she must have been assigned to the loan part of that department because she had been there I don't know how long back. She was very knowledgeable, had a great deal of great taste, but her problem was that she wouldn't commit herself in writing. They could never get her to do a text, and that stunted her growth. She didn't advance; I don't think she was even a full curator. She did the first collage show the Museum ever did [Collage]. That was, I think, in '48; it was before I came. It was a stunning...I went to see it, and it was a knockout. Collage was a new thing. But she did not come through with a catalogue. But she was a wonderful woman. Another person who was in the department was Alice Bacon--

have you heard about her?

SZ: A little bit, but you tell me.

AL: She was an attractive girl from a cultivated family from Rhode Island. Her father was a poet who had a certain reputation. I've forgotten where she went to college, but she was very capable. One little problem was, she had an impediment in her speech; it wasn't a stutter, but it was some problem that made it difficult to communicate. This leads into the artists' viewing program--do you know about that?

SZ: It was one of the things I had on my list.

AL: Well, Alice must have.... Maybe the artists' viewing took place from the very beginning that the Museum opened. It was inevitable that artists would be coming forward or someone bringing them forward, so I don't know how it worked before my time, but by the time I got there, there was a procedure. I think it was once a week, or possibly twice a week. By the time I came, they had these days, so by appointment, they called up and made an appointment to come in, and the system was that we did not give an opinion or criticize the work, we looked at it simply for our own information. That was droned into them from the beginning, but of course what they came for was an opinion. It was obvious that the reaction of the viewers turned out to be an opinion, I'm sure, but the idea was to satisfy them that we had seen their work, and actually some of them did not go away very happy, because if the work was terrible, it was very hard even to smile. But Alice had this incredible disposition. She could be very noncommunicative and she just saw these people and sometimes the viewings would be well over an hour. The problem is, from the artist's point of view, they couldn't understand a word she said, so that was difficult. Anyway, she had a marvelous insight; she knew what was good, and she took notes, wrote up these interviews. We had an artists' file, so she would describe the type of work in a few words. Some of her notes were wonderful. I don't know how many years she did it, but eventually, it came to me. So I was doing this, and I must have done it for at least five years, and it was really rough. I had three episodes...well, first I should say

that the value of this service was questioned from the very beginning. Was it worth the time that was given, or was it simply to let an artist come and pour out his personal problems, which is what they would often do. It was like going to a psychiatrist and hearing about all his troubles. It was very difficult when you're cooped up in a room with this one person and you're a captive audience, and you're not allowed really to express anything.... I have the memory of only a very few artists who turned out to be any good, but only two that I heard of prior to me was a northwest coast artist--not [Mark] Tobey....

SZ: I was going to say Tobey.

AL: No, the other one.

SZ: Well, we can fill that in.

AL: The one that comes in the same breath as Tobey. He makes little animals and birds...I'll look it up.... Anyway, this man...Graves, Morris Graves. Well, Morris Graves apparently just walked in.

SZ: This was before you.

AL: Yes. And Dorothy Miller, who used to do all this, snapped him up. Of course, Morris Graves was made by this visit. Loren MacIver was another one who walked in off the street. Again, I think Dorothy was doing this at that time. I don't think any great name came up through Alice's period. James Lee Byars, you know about him?

SZ: This was through your period.

AL: Yes. Well, I think the first incident that I had was in 1958, April 15, the day of the fire. I was in the office, and the telephone rang and it was the front desk saying that there was an artist who wanted to bring his work and he didn't have an appointment. I was starting to say, "Well, if he doesn't have an appointment...." The receptionist was

obviously in a tight spot, because he was insisting on coming up. Just at that point, we noticed smoke in the room. People were starting to say there was something going on.

SZ: In your office.

AL: In the office. The room was filling with smoke, and you could hear cries and excitement. So I told the receptionist there was something going on up here, and she said, "This man insists on coming up." And on and on, and finally, all the people in my office--Alice and Margaret and another girl, and Ritchie was next door--left. And there I was, still in the office, gagging. Finally, I just said, "I'm hanging up." So I went out, and there was nobody, except Monroe Wheeler, whose office was next door, and he took one look at me, and I must have looked scared, and he said, "Don't worry, come with me," and we went arm-in-arm down the hall toward the fire stairs. When we got a little bit on, he kind of panicked, so we were hanging on to each other. We got in the fire stair, and of course all kinds of people were coming down calmly and it was alright and we got out. You probably will hear other stories about that fire. So that was one experience with an artist who was rather insistent. Another one was another call from downstairs saying there was an artist [Jamie Lee Byars] down there who wanted to come up and no appointment, and I said, "Well, I'm going to the dentist, I have a toothache. I have a dentist's appointment." "Oh, he has to come up right now, he wants to come up." I said, "Sorry, I'm leaving." I hung up and went downstairs, and there this tall, thin young man was waiting at the elevator, the door of the 21 elevator. He said, "I want to see you," and I said, "I'm going to the dentist, I have a toothache." "I'll go with you." And he went with me, waited in the office. I would have had lunch then, but we went right back to work, to the office, and I brought him upstairs, and he had this long tube, a cardboard tube,...and he also had like a bandanna handkerchief with his clothes on a stick. He said he'd come from Ohio or someplace and looked as if he had come with this thing over his back. He was an attractive-looking guy, and he said he had been in Japan and had come back, and here he was, sort of fresh from Japan. So we went up, and on the fifth floor, the little room where you interviewed people was too small, so he rolled them

out right there...by the elevators, and they were these fabulous sumi-e ink black-on-white on rice paper, and they were very, very good. Dorothy Miller walked by; she was totally attracted. And Mrs. [Celeste] Bartos, a collector and trustee, stopped, [and] she said, "I want one." Well, several people, we all...I mean, I bought one. It was about six feet high; it was in such bad condition I didn't bring it down here. It was a marvelous abstract black-on-white thing.

SZ: What was his name?

AL: James Lee Byars. He's become quite well known. He's an exhibitionist...everything about him is....

SZ: You said there was some question about whether these artists' viewings served a legitimate purpose.

AL: Once in a while you get somebody like him, or Graves. Very few.

SZ: But whose idea had it been originally to do this?

AL: I don't know.

SZ: So it was just a thing that was done.

AL: It was inevitable that a museum of that kind would have artists coming, and they would have to cope with them. It had already developed into some kind of a procedure by the time I got there. It went on and on and on; I think it's still going on in a way. Then, these write-ups. We were all very conscientious about writing up the stuff, because two or five or ten or twenty years later, the same artist turns up, and either he's better or he's just no good at all, but at least you then look up what was said about him and it gives you a vague clue as to how to handle him, whether he was promising or not. So the final story I'll tell you was when Peter Selz had left and there was no department head. Of course, both Margaret and Alice Bacon had since

gone, and I was more or less the acting head, just carrying on the department. I was also carrying on this artists' viewing thing. One day--there were just the two of us, we and a secretary, Karen Bokert, so this artist came up and he was black, a rather impressive-looking man, and he had a cane, carved, a rather African-looking cane, and a portfolio. He opened up the portfolio, and it was the sickest, most psychotic, awful work you've ever seen, just dreadful. So we had to go through all this, and he said he'd been to the Guggenheim and the Whitney and they had rejected him. He was obviously...you knew that there was a great deal of antagonism there. I just did my best to be noncommittal, but it was so terrible. He was there over an hour, so finally we eased him out. The next morning, before I went to work, Karen called me up and said, "Have you seen the paper?" I said no--I didn't get the paper til I went out. She said it was in the Mirror or the News, one of the tabloids. She said, "That man who was just in murdered three or four people." The story is that on the way from MoMA--he worked as a mail boy in some office, I think it was in the garment district--he had his portfolio with him and he showed it to the office workers....

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SZ: Repeat what you said a little bit.

AL: He went from the Museum...and he went home and got a gun and then went to where he worked and sprayed the office with this gun. He showed the work and got a very bad reception, because they laughed at him. So then he shot them. He was arrested, of course, and it got in the paper. So then I was so upset, because I thought it was obvious that he was very sick. I called up the precinct and they said, "The detective on that case has gone on vacation." This was just a routine thing to them. I said, "Can't I talk to somebody?," because I wanted to point out that this man was psychotic, he's not all there. I never did manage to do that, and I never heard any more about it.

SZ: Did you do any more artists' viewings?

AL: Oh, yes, it went on. One person who came in was Claes Oldenburg.... It must have been in the early '50s. He had these little notebooks. I later, of course, got to know his notebooks, but I just thought they were...it shows how unobservant I was, because he was showing just scribbles in a notebook. I looked at them, but I treated him like all the other artists and didn't snap them up and say I want to see more. It's a terrible thing to say that I goofed on Oldenburg. I saw him at a gallery when I was buying a Lucas Samaras piece--it was the Greene Gallery--and Oldenburg came in. We remembered each other, and he was very nice. I thought, gee whiz, by that time I knew more about him, and I was crushed to think of how I had brushed him off that way. But I later did a show of Oldenburg, so that was.... Anyway, Oldenburg was one of the artists I saw. It's a difficult thing to know whether this is worthwhile or not, when you get somebody like me who did not recognize the quality of his drawings, which was there.

SZ: I don't know. For instance, Alfred Barr did not react to a lot of the Abstract Expressionists' work.

AL: Yes, but I would say the Abstract Expressionists' work is so subjective that it's hard to.... Oldenburg's drawing is classical: he knows how to draw. Even his scribbles, I now just love these scribbles. I'm telling a story about me, not about Oldenburg.

SZ: I understand that.

AL: I think Alfred would have seen that these were good drawings. I didn't. That, by the way, is a [Willem] de Kooning. He gave it to me. We did a de Kooning show [Willem de Kooning, 1969]. Who did that show? I guess it was Bill Seitz, but of course I was working with him. But they don't let us accept works from artists that are marketable, so the Museum has first refusal on the de Kooning; it's in my will. I gave a list of works that I got, that--well, some of them I bought myself--any of the artists gave me. Some of them, before I left New York, [the Museum] took them; if they don't want them, then you can keep them.... The point is that you're not supposed to make a profit on the work. It really wouldn't be right. But John Elderfield wants that, so he'll get it.

SZ: I want to go back to the point you were making before, because you were saying that it was a story about you, and I assume it also has to do with the kind of development that you were undergoing, being in that department and learning.

AL: Yes, it was a good indoctrination.

SZ: Was Ritchie a good teacher for you?

AL: No, not particularly. He wasn't an inspiring person. He was a lovely man, nice to work for, but he wasn't great. But he certainly was a good administrator. I think he felt he wasn't involved in the acquisitions, and that made him unhappy. You see, that has to do with dividing the department; I think it didn't work out, because eventually they put it back again.

SZ: What about Selz? Was that a situation where you felt you were...or was it just by doing, without a person?

AL: What do you mean?

SZ: I'm talking about your learning process....

AL: By that time, I knew quite a lot about how a museum goes, and it was this experience of having...Ritchie, Selz and Seitz were all academics. Where had Ritchie been? He had gotten a Ph.D.... He had been director of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo. Selz had had no museum experience, nor had Bill Seitz, and they just didn't know the procedures of a museum, and that happens with loads of professors, art history professors, who are guest curators, and then they clash with the museum professionals. Betsy Jones went from MoMA to the Smith College Museum [of Art], and she had to deal with the art professors there. It's not easy. A lot of them have learned art from black-and-white photographs, and they have no sense of scale, they don't know what size a picture is, but they know all about it. They know a lot, and they are full of chutzpah--rightfully, because they know so much, but there they are in the activity of putting on a show. Andrew didn't have any sense of color; he wanted to have some awful colors on the wall. And then Bill Seitz, who I just loved and had a marvelous line and was very knowledgeable,...did this Monet show for us [Claude Monet: Seasons and Moments, 1960], the one about the different themes--Rouen Cathedral, the haystacks, the various themes. So he did this show and it was basically chronological. He did the Vetheuil and the Seine valley pictures first, and then, finally, toward the end, he did the Water Lilies. So it was chronological in that sense--the themes followed each other. So when the pictures all came, there they were on trolleys, so the first you do is to take them and lay them out against the wall on the floor. Bill immediately started, he knew exactly what date every picture was. Somebody was saying put all the Vetheuil and Seine valley pictures over there, start with them, and the other theme here--blocking them in themes--but he had to go right up immediately and put one picture, change it from the beginning to the second, third, fourth, and he lined them up absolutely chronologically because he knew that's the way they were painted. Then Alfred Barr came along and--this was just a momentary thing that happened, Bill just did this very quickly--and Alfred appeared and we all said, "How does that look?" Alfred said, "Well, you know, those two frames kill each other, and this one and that one would be better together or separated," and Bill said, "But they're chronologically...that's the way they were." It suddenly dawned on him that it really didn't matter. There were these little things that the academic

latches onto because he hasn't worked with the actual objects. You're treating them as objects that have to be compatible. Bill was so smart that of course he never did that again; he caught onto everything very fast. He was a joy to work with and sorely, sorely missed.

SZ: What were the circumstances around his departure?

AL: I think that the department was...you see, Selz was sort of dismissed, and Bill was left, and I don't think that he wanted to be the head of the department, so he left.

SZ: There were some reports of a misunderstanding.

AL: I really don't know.

SZ: And Selz was essentially asked to leave.

AL: Yes.

SZ: Because...?

AL: There was something about vouchers for trips he'd taken. He was asking to be reimbursed for more than he deserved.

SZ: But clearly there was some other dissatisfaction.

AL: Yes. He just wasn't up to the job.

SZ: Ritchie and Selz--well, Seitz was there--but what part did René d'Harnoncourt play in what went on in your department during those two tenures?

AL: Very little that I know of.

SZ: Nothing that you felt or saw.

AL: No. He was always there as a kind of benevolent uncle who anyone could go to, and people did go to him, but I really wasn't high enough up to observe or to be informed about things like that. But I know the department was a mess; it was not working well. Then...where are we now?

SZ: In terms of time, if we're following this line? It was '65 when they left.

AL: They did?

SZ: Yes.

AL: It was '67 that Barr and d'Harnoncourt both retired.

SZ: Barr retired in '67 and d'Harnoncourt retired in '68 and then was subsequently killed.

AL: Then what's-his-name...I can't even remember the successor to d'Harnoncourt.

SZ: Bates Lowry.

AL: He was a disaster.

SZ: And when he came in, he came not only as director of the museum but....

AL: ...of our department.

SZ: What was that all about?

AL: He had a...who did he have? Meg Potter.... Do you remember her?

SZ: After Selz left, there was a period where there was not an official director of the

department.

AL: Yes.

SZ: You really carried the ball during that time?

AL: Yes. I had Jim Soby to weep to, but he didn't really make any...he was sympathetic, but he didn't get anywhere.

SZ: What was that time like? What kinds of problems did it present for you?

AL: It was unhappy. But then, the Bates Lowry thing with Meg Potter, who was a...she lived--was it in my house? Eventually, yes, she lived down the street on 76th Street from me.... She certainly had her master's degree, had studied at the Institute and knew Marga Barr and was a very, very bright person.... She knew Bates Lowry very well, so when he became head of our department, she was made his, well, the head of the--what's the name of that awful man that Bush has?

SZ: [John] Sununu?

AL: Yes [LAUGHING], she was the Sununu to Bates Lowry. Since I knew her personally, it was difficult for me to see her being elevated to a position of such power. Both of them, they came with this attitude of.... Well, first of all, I felt this severely, because I don't even have a B.A. degree, and they were very much the academics and degree-conscious, so I think Bates was eager to just eliminate everybody who was not of that calibre. Somehow, he didn't manage to do it, but his attitude was that way. He wanted to just revolutionize the way things were done. We had this exhibition procedure that got us through pretty well putting on these big shows. He didn't seem to feel it was important. I just don't know what was the matter with him, but he did not fit in, and we didn't warm up to him. And then, it was [John] Hightower. He was another flop. So it was a really tough period.

SZ: Some of that we can do later, because I know it was a tough period, with Hightower, especially, and there was a lot of political.... But in your department, once Lowry left, the [William S.] Lieberman-[William S.] Rubin struggle began.

AL: Yes. I'd forgotten Rubin.

SZ: Maybe we ought to go back. You went into the department, I think, in '51, as secretary to Andrew Ritchie.

AL: Yes, and then very soon after that Rubin came in as a guest curator of the Matta show [in 1957]. He was, again, another academic who didn't know anything about museums, but he was dying to know. You see, this was a case of being in our section, and what he wanted to know was what acquisitions were coming up. He wanted to know all that. Our section was not au courant, and he kept trying to prod me to find out these things. First of all, I didn't know them, but I would not have told him if I had known. Anyway, he did lean on me a lot, and I did help him out.

SZ: As a guest curator.

AL: Yes. We were good friends, because he was green. We're still good friends, but he's still green [LAUGHING]. Anyway, he has some very nice qualities. So Bill Rubin was not on the staff, but he was floating around and involved.

SZ: During all those years, from the time he did Matta on.

AL: Yes. He was in and out.

SZ: Was he a strong personality even then?

AL: Oh, yes. I've forgotten when he did come in.

SZ: Sixty-seven, with a title of some kind.

AL: D'Harnoncourt, he did it through d'Harnoncourt. No, Alfred proposed him, I think.

SZ: But Lieberman was already around.

AL: Lieberman had been there since long before I was. He was the print curator, and the print room was directly connected with the library at that time, there was a physical connection, so Bill was always going in and out of the library when I worked there. He and Hannah Muller--did you know her?--she was the assistant librarian, a rather coarse Jewish lady, brilliant bibliographer. She did all the bibliographies. She and Bill Lieberman used to tell dirty jokes. Of course, I was sitting there, filing these negatives. Half the time I didn't even get the jokes. Anyway, Bill Lieberman eventually ran the print department, and Betsy Jones, of course, was working with Alfred on acquisitions. Curators who went to Europe and saw works of art, if they thought we ought to have them, were supposed to notify the registrar that this piece was coming. He never did that, and Dorothy Dudley was going crazy trying to keep up, and Betsy, on the other end, was trying to keep up the books and stuff, because Bill just was not responsible. I'm floundering. I don't know where we are now. Somewhere along the line, Bill Lieberman got to be made the director of the department. That was funny.

SZ: Why funny?

AL: Just having Bill Rubin sitting there, stewing. That's what I mean was funny.

SZ: Because Rubin....

AL: Rubin was younger than Lieberman, but he was certainly more advanced academically. And, of course, Lieberman had all his connections and his maneuvers. I imagine he's maneuvering up at the Met.

SZ: For the short period of time that he was director of the department, in terms of any

kind of leadership or in the way we've been talking about it....

AL: He was terrible. What happened to Meg Potter? We all ganged up on her, and she was dropped. It was awful.

SZ: She remained behind after Lowry left?

AL: For a while, but not long.

SZ: What was the sense during this time--you've described it pretty well in terms of leadership, lack of leadership, whatever--but in the sense of what was going on in the department....

AL: Good things.

SZ: So the two things were not really connected or dependant on [one another].

AL: No. I mean, we were all doing our work, and there were some good people. They're still there. Judith Cousins--you know her? Incredible. Of course, Carolyn Lanchner is very good, and Laura Rosenstock, and, of course, Kynaston [McShine]. I understand he's having a sabbatical. Oh, well, I don't know what will happen when he comes back. And there's a new man there, I hear. I've heard good things about him.

SZ: There's a new man there--there are several new people there.

AL: Yes, but this new man, I gather, is significant.

SZ: Just going back for a minute to the Rubin-Lieberman thing, you were obviously aware that this struggle was going on?

AL: What did Bill [Rubin] call Lieberman? Le grand guiguol. I really didn't hear Lieberman's side of all this, so I don't know.

SZ: The department staff was partial?

AL: I think we stuck with Bill Rubin, most of us. He was impossible, but still....

SZ: What kinds of positive things do you think he contributed to?

AL: Bill Rubin?

SZ: Yes.

AL: Well, I think the Picasso show [in 1980] was good. I didn't think the primitive show ["Primitivism" in 20th Century Art, 1985], I didn't think that was a good idea or ever worked out or anything.... He did some other shows, now I can't remember. I think his writing is pompous. Kirk [Varnedoe] is a better writer, and Bill Seitz was a good writer.

SZ: I guess part of what you're saying is that the activities in the department, even though there is a director of the department, it's all very....

AL: It goes on, and it gets done.

SZ: There isn't any great sort of direction from on high--everybody has his fiefdom, in a way?

AL: Yes. I imagine the period when Alfred was put on the shelf must have been the worst that ever happened there.

SZ: In terms of morale?

AL: Yes.

SZ: But that's not anything you experienced.

AL: No, so I can't really speak about it.

SZ: For your time there, in terms of morale, what was the worst time?

SZ: I think it was the Bates Lowry-Meg Potter period. I don't even remember Hightower.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2

SZ: Let's get off this for a little while and go back to you and your career there and how it developed. I know you got the title of associate curator in '65.

AL: I don't even remember when I was made curator.

SZ: You were made curator a year after the [Sol] LeWitt show, in 1979.

AL: I remember feeling some resentments, and it was because of my lack of professional degrees. There were some young curatorial assistants who'd come in and I was still the secretary and filing and doing all this stuff, and they didn't know what they were doing. I don't know, I suppose it's inevitable [that] in any organization this happens, that some people are supplanted by others, rightfully, because of their qualifications. Experience is not always a factor. If you have a long bit of experience, you know more what to do than some other people, but that doesn't always get across. But, I loved every minute of it. I mean, I loved and hated every minute of it.

SZ: What about your interest in and knowledge of sculpture, how did that come about?

AL: Oh, I want to show you my stuff. I've got some ceramics in there. Sculpture, yes. I got assigned--I think it was Bill Rubin, who didn't want to have anything to do with sculpture--assigned all the dirty work like pedestals and vitrines, what to do with

sculpture....

SZ: He did not know that much about it?

AL: He didn't care about it, he wasn't interested in it.

SZ: Ritchie had done a sculpture show, right? Twentieth Century Sculpture or something like that?

AL: Yes. It was a dopey show.... [LAUGHTER] I don't know, it wasn't great. I guess I was there.

SZ: For that show?

AL: Yes, I must have been.

SZ: It was '53.

AL: Yes, I must have worked on that show. Well, I ended up being involved in sculpture, I think because Bill Rubin didn't want to be bothered, and that was a very routine and tiresome thing to be doing. In the long run, I got interested, because it was installation, the placement of sculpture, that really interested me. So then Bill and I got into these fights, because he considered sculpture in a second class to painting. In a gallery, he would put--not only he, but loads of people--put sculpture in a corner, so you can't see around it, or up against the wall.

SZ: Same problem.

AL: The idea of putting it in the middle of a room means it'll get in the way of a painting. My argument is, all you have to do is move. You see that painting there. You could put a sculpture over here and it would have some white wall behind it, between those two. There's usually some white wall, and if you put it sort of in front of that white

wall, then you can stand there and you could see the painting on the side. But Bill could not, did not want to cope with this. His idea was it was just a great big space with everything up against the wall. So we had some fights. In the Picasso [show], I did all the sculpture, the pedestals, cabinets, everything, and then, of course, there was a question of where it was going to be and I started fighting to get them off the wall. Claude Picasso was hanging around, and [Dominique] Bozo was working with Bill. Bozo agreed with me very often, and he was just taking in all this argument, because he couldn't believe that a person at my level would have the nerve to talk to a curator.

SZ: Dominique couldn't believe that, because that's not the way....

AL: Well, apparently, in France your underlings don't speak up. But we had these arguments.

SZ: You weren't afraid to fight with Bill.

AL: No. One reason was, I'm older than he is. He had to lean on me a lot when he first came, because he was very new.

SZ: And green, as you said.

AL: So we had this mother-son relationship.

SZ: You had that history. [LAUGHTER] *Enfant terrible*....

AL: In reverse. So I began growing up fast, and I started asserting myself. So I won some and I lost some. Do you know the Matisse Serf--I think it's 1901, one of his first sculptures, of a nude man, very expressionistic? Well, he [Rubin] put that in the Matisse room [in the new building]. He had it up against the wall, back to the wall, and he had some other early Matisses, all in this room. Somehow it dawned on him-- I didn't say anything, but somebody must have said--these things ought to be back

down in the Post-Impressionist room, they're even before Cézanne. In other words, they don't belong up [there]. So he said, yes, he was going to move that piece down. He got a wonderful painting of that same model. This was Bevilacqua, who as a young man was the model for the Rodin John the Baptist, and as an old man he was Matisse's Serf. He [Matisse] also did a painting of that man, which we got. So of course Bill wanted to put the painting and the sculpture together, which he did. I heard--he didn't tell me and nobody called me to say they were going to move The Serf--I just found out that it had been moved down to the Fauve room. I went down to see it, and there was The Serf backed up to the wall, next to the painting, in a fairly small gallery. Right away I thought the back of The Serf is better than the front, it's so muscular and all that, and why not turn it sideways? So I had the guts to go and say to him, "How about that?" And he said, "Well, let's try it." It isn't great, because the room is not big enough, but you walk in on the behind of The Serf, and then right next to him is this painting, and it makes great sense. That was a year before I left, and it's still that way. When I got back, I'm glad to see that it hasn't moved. But he can't seem to see a sense of space and what to do with space.

SZ: That's what sculpture is, in a way.

AL: Yes! You've got to get around it. The big Picasso head, he wanted that up against the wall between two paintings, two paintings of the same model, Marie-Thérèse. First of all, he asked me, "Where would you put that head?" I said I would put it right in the middle of the room. I could see that he wasn't too keen about that. He put it there, and about two weeks later, he wanted to move it. So he moved it, between these two paintings, on this horrible platform sticking out. It went back.

SZ: Because he saw the folly of it?

AL: Finally. In the meantime, Kirk Varnedoe has changed things, and I've forgotten how it is now.

SZ: The installation of sculpture....

AL: The garden I did.

SZ: I know, but just in general, things have been written about you, about how skilled you are at it. Was that a science, was it taught to you?

AL: No, I just had a feel for it. I think Alfred always did the right thing as far as...in many cases, except for the Balzac. Did I tell you about the Balzac? He had it in the garden, sort of against the weeping beeches, that mass of trees in the center, he put Balzac with his back to the trees, near the pool, facing west. Finally, the trees began growing and getting closer and closer, so he was bang up against the trees. When we were doing the new installation and the garden was emptied, because there were changes, architectural changes in the new wing. Balzac went to Brooklyn for a year, and several other sculptures went here and there, because we had to clear the garden. When the reinstatement came, we were bringing all these things back. It was a Saturday, and they closed 54th Street for a day, and this Rodin came on a flatbed truck and was parked outside, and there were several other big pieces. They were all brought in and lifted over the wall with a crane.... You can't have any traffic and all that with a crane, so it all has to be done in one day. I had worked out...Philip Johnson had a big plan of the new garden, as it was to be; it was a scale model and his office had made little sculptures of some of the existing things,... I made little models for all the stuff.... In the meantime, Al Elsen, the Rodin specialist from Stanford, had always been griping about Alfred putting Balzac on a low pedestal. Of course, I was defending him, I thought everything Alfred did was great. So I was fighting Elsen for several years. Finally, I was in Paris, and at the Blvd. Raspail there's a Rodin Balzac. I had seen it many times, but I saw it again. So there it was, with a man standing next to it. I thought, "He looks like an American." So I went up to him and said, "Are you six feet tall?" And he said yes. I said, "Would you mind standing up against that pedestal?" It was one foot above his head. I thought, "That's what Al Elsen thinks." So then Elsen did a Rodin show at the National Gallery, and at the top of the escalator he had the Balzac, and it was on a seven-foot pedestal. So I made my little sculpture to scale with a seven-foot [pedestal]. I showed it to Rubin,

and, of course, [Richard E.] Oldenburg. I showed it how I thought it would be, and placed it on the axis of where it is now--got it away from those bushes so that you could see it from a long distance from the restaurant. It's on the same walkway axis, but its behind is now facing just the education office--I mean its back, he's in a dressing gown. So that was the only negative thing about it, but the rest of it gave it a.... So they all okay'd this, so I went ahead. On that famous Saturday we got the pedestal in place and the crane lifted him and set it on it, and it was very exciting. A week or so later, Carolyn said to me, "You know, Rubin wants to move the Balzac." He'd already approved this thing.

SZ: Did you like it where it was and how it was?

AL: I was very pleased with it. I thought the bonus was that you could see the top of it so well going up the escalator. I never thought of that, that you'd get a nice view of the head. That just was an accident. I was crushed.... I wasn't going to say anything to him, and I thought any day now he's going to tell me this. A couple of months passed, and I said to Carolyn, "What's with the Balzac?" and she said, "He's changed his mind." So, as far as I know, it's still there. But the expense! Getting the crane, closing the block. Imagine!

SZ: But also, this was the area of your artistry.

AL: Of course, that hurt, but I was also appalled at the idea of having to galvanize this move. One thing I did wrong, and fortunately we were able to correct it, I put the Henry Moore backwards, that marble Moore--it's almost identical from one side to the other. Of course, the donor, Mr. [Gordon] Bunshaft, notified us that it was backwards. So those are the little things that happen.

SZ: You trained Laura, really, to be your successor?

AL: Yes. I think she's very good.

SZ: What did that training entail? What I'm really asking you is, what you're saying is that a lot of it is instinct, that it's a very personal...

AL: Yes. It means being.... And of course for me it got to be terrible, because you have to stand up, be on your feet for hours and hours. That's part of the training. But there's all kinds of routine stuff to do, boring stuff.

SZ: But the installation?

AL: I don't know. Now she's probably doing installation. I love it. I mean, I loved doing it. I think it's creative. Well, it's like architecture, and I'm sort of interested in architecture. Space is what I think is....

SZ: Did Philip have any input?

AL: No, but he was very nice. At this part--you can just look at the pictures--I said something about his garden. He said, "No, now it's Alicia's garden."

SZ: Which brings us up to today, right?

AL: Well, it was shortly before I left.

SZ: I'm thinking that in the paper not long ago there was a piece...there's Bill. Now these are all pictures from the party.

AL: Yes. Do you know people? Oldenburg and LeWitt--those are my two favorite artists that I worked closely with.

SZ: I think the Oldenburg show [Claes Oldenburg] was in '69?

AL: Yes, and the LeWitt was about '79 or so.

SZ: So you developed friendships with them.

AL: Yes. Sam and Edna and I went to Italy and we saw LeWitt--he has this place in Spoleto--and we enjoyed that. Now he has a place in Connecticut; I guess the children are getting to school age.

SZ: That show was a very important show for his career, and that was something you wanted.

AL: I think I was assigned to do it.

SZ: Is that how it happened?

AL: He used to work at the Museum, so I knew him before. I don't know if I proposed it or not. I think it just became...he was on the list of artists to do, and I got to do it.

SZ: Was it a difficult show to do?

AL: Yes. I'll show you--I have a wall full of the installation in the next room. I'll show it to you.

SZ: Did you enjoy this party, Alicia?

AL: In a way, but it was kind of a strain. It was a very nice party, though, out in the garden. It was cold.

SZ: I see Mrs. [Blanchette] Rockefeller is wearing a raincoat. Not you, you just have a blouse on.

AL: I know, I was freezing.

SZ: There's Helen [Franc]. Anything about the Oldenburg or the LeWitt show, any...?

AL: No. I thought they were wonderful to work with, both guys. It's a lot of work, and, of course, catalogues are so difficult to do. I didn't write the text of either of them, but I did the catalogue.

SZ: You also worked on the great opus.

AL: Picasso. Yes, I certainly did all the sculpture installation of the Picasso....

END TAPE 2, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SZ: One thing that I still had on my list that we haven't talked about was the departure of Guernica.... I was there, and I know it was very bittersweet--sad, actually--for a lot of people. I guess there was a lot of behind-the-scenes maneuvering and negotiating.

AL: Well, I don't know. I think it was routine: they wanted it, and it was understood that when Franco died that it would go. So I don't think there was anything too clandestine about it.

SZ: I was thinking as much of the process of getting it packed up and getting it out and worrying about the security of it.

AL: That, of course, was handled by [the] registrar. One of the things about the Museum, any museum I guess, is the expertise of...different functions you leave to them. I do

remember being reprimanded, being brought up short, when Sunami--you probably don't remember him. He was a lovely old man. I had known him way back, and I finally got to be a curator of some level, I've forgotten which, and it was a matter of getting some sculpture photographed. I was telling him which side to feature, and apparently he resented that. I got a message from Pearl Moeller to lay off on telling Sunami what to do. This was the way you learned. In a sense, I really thought this was important. I felt that he wasn't photographing it right, but he was the master photographer, he had been there for many years, and he was resentful of some young squirt telling him what to do. So you'd run into that kind of thing.

SZ: What about that famous Nelson Rockefeller quote, "I learned everything I ever needed to know in politics at The Museum of Modern Art."

AL: Yes, that could be. The registrar has its fiefdom, and if you don't respect it, you get in trouble. The conservation people--oh, lord, that is another sacred area.

SZ: But is that something that you successfully negotiated or avoided?

AL: No, I think you get it by osmosis. You make some mistakes and then you catch on and go on from there. I think everybody's doing the same thing. Some people catch on faster than others. You're not going to go out to California to talk to Betsy Jones, are you?

SZ: I might. I know that she's somebody I should talk to.

AL: Absolutely. So sensitive and smart.

SZ: I think I interrupted you before. You were going to say something more about the big Picasso show.

AL: It just went on for ever and ever; it took a long time. My part of it was these blasted pedestals.... I had pneumonia, one of those walking pneumonias, so I was home for ten days or so, and I was cutting out scale models. I forget what I worked with. I had everything all over the floor. I got a lot of it done right there. It was a matter of making a list to order these pedestals. We...how did this happen? Oh, I know. Dorothy Miller...of course, she did all this before me; I sort of took over a lot of what she had done, both installation and all the dirty work. She found a man who was making some kind of aggregate, stone aggregate, material for sculptures. I'm trying to think of which piece...a bronze that was on the terrace of the café restaurant, the one on the west side. We used to have a kind of café restaurant on the west side, and there was a terrace there, and tables. There was a piece of sculpture, Henry Moore's Large Torso: Arch. It was on about a three-foot-square base made of this stone aggregate, and this man was trying to interest the Museum in doing more. I guess she [Dorothy] ordered this one piece, one base, and they used it on this terrace. For some reason, she never followed up on it, but it lasted and lasted and lasted. It was very successful. You see, we kept having these wooden pedestals that would last only a few years, and you'd have to repaint them and then they would rot, so it was a constant keeping-up-with-the-pedestals, which is not exciting work. It's just the most boring task.

SZ: As exciting as filing Bernard Karpel's correspondence [LAUGHING]?

AL: Yes. This was a kind of long-lasting stuff, and I've forgotten now what I...I found out who did this, got in touch with him. It was a weird man who had a kind of a one-man factory. He was located not too far away from New York, but by the time we got going, he had moved to Florida. Anyway, he produced the pedestals for the outside garden. It was very tense, because it was maybe the weekend before we opened. He arrived in this rickety old truck from Florida with these things, a black man. And

they're working like magic; it seems to work success[fully]. But I imagine he...what are we going to do eventually? He was old [LAUGHING]. All I know was the Hirshhorn [Museum and Sculpture Garden] started...the Hirshhorn maybe got it from Dorothy, and then they went all-out with it. I kept going back and forth to the Hirshhorn.... It came true, anyway. But this is not inspiring work. Of course, the height idea is very important and can be creative or a disaster; sometimes people don't agree on heights.

SZ: What, for you, was the most pleasurable thing you did? What gave you the most satisfaction?

AL: Installing a show, working with the pictures and spatial relationships.... Bill Seitz left, so I got to install the de Kooning show and the Matisse sculpture show [Sculpture of Matisse, 1972], the Schoenborn collection [The School of Paris: Paintings from the Florene May Schoenborn and Samuel A. Marx Collection, 1965], and a Matisse show that came in the '70s, forty-five Matisses. I did quite a few shows. Oh, the Matisse cut-outs [The Last Works of Henri Matisse: Large Cut Gouaches, 1960]. That was interesting.

SZ: And the garden?

AL: Oh, the garden. That was very exciting and exhausting. I could hardly walk. You know I had that M.S. [multiple sclerosis].

SZ: I didn't know that it was M.S.

AL: I didn't either, until I got here.

SZ: You thought all that time....

AL: ...that I had a viral infection. In 1961 I was at the Metropolitan Museum at a concert, and I suddenly could only see the center of the stage; everything else was blacked

out.

SZ: Like a peephole?

AL: Yes. That was on a Friday night or something. The next day....

SZ: Did that come and go?

AL: No, I was still that way over the weekend, so I called my eye doctor and he wasn't in, but his assistant was there. So I went, and he said, "I think you better go to a hospital." Then, of course, I called my medical doctor, and I was at Lenox Hill Hospital for about two weeks. They were testing me....

SZ: And it was just your vision?

AL: Well, that's what it started with, the vision. I had various brain tests and things. Finally, they sent me home to 76th Street. Two days later, I came down with a high fever. It was awful, for about two days, and then I noticed that my right side was not working. I went to a neurologist and all that, and they said, "You don't have a brain tumor." But they didn't tell me that.... You know, M.S. is very hard to diagnose, so they did not say that. They indicated that I had a viral infection. They put me on high cortisone, and eventually...I was out of work for about two months. But gradually, my walking got worse and I started falling down. One day I was trying to catch a bus and I was running and I fell down right in front of the bus, just as it was.... The bus driver was furious. This was in '61.... Then I went to Amsterdam with the Oldenburg show, and I went to London to install his show at the Tate Gallery. I was going somewhere in London and I fell down. I was in Paris and I fell down in the gutter, and a taxi was coming along and put on his brakes and was swearing at me. So finally, I came back and said to my medical doctor, "I've fallen in Paris and London and all over New York, and I'm really getting as though I can't walk." This was a woman, a German woman. I said, "Don't I need a brace?" And she said, "You sure do." She did not tell me, and she kept me going on this cortisone.

SZ: Does that mean that she knew but she didn't tell you?

AL: Of course she knew, she must have known. Then she finally died. I went to another neurologist, and he didn't tell me, because she must have told him not to tell me. Why I don't know. I'm getting worse, but I've managed very well. So when I came down here, they wanted to have medical reports, and I referred them to this neurologist in New York. So once I got here, a couple of years went by, and I finally said, "Maybe I ought to see a neurologist. I used to go regularly in New York." He [the doctor here] said okay and sent me to a neurologist. On the way--they sent me in a car into town--you always get a paper to give to a doctor if you're going to see a specialist. That's between them and the specialist, they handle it, they pay for it all. I opened this paper to see the exact time, and there was a letter from this neurologist, so I read it. And he said, "Lenox Hill Hospital records indicate that she had M.S., but she was not told." I said to this neurologist, "Well, I've just found out that I had M.S." And he examined and said, "Well, I don't think you have M.S. Let's have some tests." In the meantime, this M.R.I., it didn't exist before then, so I had an M.R.I. Anyway, he was a very blunt man, and he said, "Your brain has M.S in spades." Isn't that a nice way to tell me [LAUGHING]! So apparently the spine was okay, but apparently....

SZ: Your brain has....

AL: M.S., in spades. It indicated the damage in the brain. The brain tells the muscles to move, and I can't do anything with this hand. That's why my leg is so weak. So I'm lucky. I could be a lot worse.

SZ: Would it have made any difference had you known? You obviously thought you had something else, the effect was the same, I guess.

AL: Dr. Baumann...

SZ: You were not the only person to use this doctor. I know this name.

AL: Anni Baumann. She's dead now. She was a tough old German. She was so thrilled that I worked at the Museum. She loved the Museum, and she just wanted me to keep the job. And maybe she was right. Another thing that happened, as I gradually got worse and I was still working....

SZ: It was hard for you to do that?

AL: Oh, it was terrible. Somebody--I don't know if it was d'Harnoncourt, some executive of some kind--saw me walking from Sixth Avenue and said, "This is terrible. She can't walk." The last two years I was there, I had taxi service, door to door. So you know, that was a decent thing.

SZ: But you said at the end that you had to stand a lot, and that was hard.

AL: It was awful. That Picasso show, so much on my feet.... I want to show you something in there. Are we stuck in here because of this material?

SZ: Well, we're stuck in here, but I just had one other question and then I can turn it off and we can go and look.... When Dick Oldenburg was appointed first acting director and then director, that was an unusual situation, to have the director of the Museum have a brother who was a very prominent artist. What was that like? Oldenburg was close to him.

AL: I remember during the Oldenburg show, Dick was not the director then--Oldenburg used to, you know, we'd eat in the staff restaurant and he would fool around with the people. He was very clubby. But after Dick became director, Claes didn't want to come back to the Museum.... I guess he didn't feel like family anymore. It was funny. But I think they're congenial together.

SZ: Dick doesn't have any say in exhibition scheduling or anything, so that the question of....

AL: He had the show before Dick came.

SZ: That show, yes.

AL: I think it certainly helped.... We got to know Dick through Claes, I think. I think Claes is a much more exciting person than Dick is.

SZ: He's an artist.

AL: Yes.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: ALICIA LEGG (AL)
INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)
LOCATION: BALTIMORE, MARYLAND
DATE: OCTOBER 17, 1991

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 1

SZ: Alicia, you were just talking about this lecture series that you gave down here. I think you were about to tell a story.

AL: I gave three lectures on Monet a week apart. The last one covered the late pictures, including the Water Lilies series.

SZ: The late pictures of Monet.

AL: Yes. I was able to talk about the trip I made shortly after the show that we did in 1960, and I worked with Bill Seitz on that exhibition [Claude Monet: Seasons and Moments]. I was going to France--I guess it was the summer of 1960--and having worked on the show with Bill, I naturally wanted to go to Giverny to see the site of the Water Lilies. He wrote to Michel Monet, the remaining son, with whom he had discussed everything for his show, and it was arranged that I would go on a certain day. So I had some French friends who had a car, and they were very excited by this prospect because Giverny was closed at that time--it was before the grand opening with American money and all that, but it was still a marvelous place. We were invited to come for tea, and when we got there, and we saw from a distance an elderly, bearded man--white hair, white beard--seated under a tree. We went up to him; I doubt whether he got up from his chair, but I can't remember. Right away he said, "I am Jean-Pierre Hochedé." I was very interested in that because Monet married Jean-Pierre's mother after his first wife died. Madame Hochedé [Alice] apparently

had been a well-to-do woman whose family owned a chateau in Normandy. Her husband, I've forgotten his first name, was a very enthusiastic collector of art and a patron of the arts, and he was one of Monet's backers. Frequent times, when Monet was hard up for money, he went to Monsieur Hochedé. It was a big family, six children, and at that time Monet had one son and his wife was expecting another, and they were pretty hard up. Then Hochedé went bankrupt. I'm really not certain about his life, but it seems that Madame Hochedé and he separated at that time. Then Camille Monet was ill; she had been ill for a number of years, I don't know why or what it was. She was not a healthy woman. So Madame Hochedé and the six children moved in with the Monets in Verteuil, which is a little town on the river. It couldn't have been a very big house. Then Camille, very soon after, delivered her baby, which was Michel Monet, the second son. She never really recovered, and the next year, she died. Madame Hochedé was there on the spot and she really raised, not only her own six children, but the two Monet boys. She couldn't divorce her husband, but when he finally died, which was some years later, she and Monet married. Apparently, neither of them felt any need for this, but by this time, and this was much later, one of her daughters was about to marry an American painter. There were several Americans who were painting around Giverny. In the meantime, they moved to Giverny, because Monet, by then, was beginning to get some fame, and Ruel was selling his pictures. Not only Ruel, but the Bernheim brothers. In other words, he was able to buy the house at Giverny and the property. So then they all moved in there and they were a family of eight children and they grew up there. The [children] were teenagers. To get back to this charming old man [Jean-Pierre], who was delighted to talk about his life there at Giverny, he loved it.... He married; I don't know any more about his family or his career. He certainly was a fond member of that clan. He was a lovely old man and very much interested in art and the art world and, of course, in Monet. Eventually, a vintage automobile drove up and out of it came another little old man--in fact, littler--and that was Michel Monet. He was very nice, but he wasn't as...well, his personality was more quiet, but he was a very pleasant man. Of course, my French friends were just thrilled with all this. They were all talking French and having a good time. So we were shown the house. I hadn't been there before. The house was well-kept inside. It's not a big, impressive place,

but as you may have heard, the dining room and kitchen are fabulous. The kitchen is all tiled and has wonderful cooking pots hanging around, and the dining room is filled with Monet's Japanese prints on a yellow wall. Anyway, as anyone who has been there recently knows, they kept it exactly that way, and it's a very nice place. So I was able to tell that story at the end of my lecture series. That was about it.

SZ: People liked that.

AL: Oh, they were thrilled.

SZ: Matisse--well, you weren't really set there then, but Picasso, did you ever have anything to do with him?

AL: No. I've seen...the houses from the outside, the houses that he lived in.

SZ: But this was something special.

AL: I did an exhibition of Matisse sculpture [[Sculpture of Matisse](#)], and I went to Paris trying to get some drawings related to his sculptures. I saw Madame Duthuit, his daughter. She came through with one drawing, and I was out trying to find another one. She referred me to a dealer over on the Left Bank. I spent two days trying to track down this drawing, and this dealer had it but just wouldn't cooperate. I later learned that obviously he was in the process of selling it, and it's now in the museum at Ottawa. I guess the negotiations were underway at that time and the dealer didn't want to admit he had it. It was very tricky. So that was a disappointment to me, because it was a wonderful study for the four backs, the reliefs, and just a great drawing. It's in Alfred Barr's major book on Matisse, which is why I wanted it; it made me want to get it.

SZ: That brings me to one of the things that we didn't really talk very much about last time: Alfred Barr, your relationship with him, impressions. And Dorothy Miller as well, because I'm sure in the day-to-day workings in your department that those

relationships....

AL: I was not really as close to Alfred and Dorothy as the others in [Museum] Collections. At that time I was in the loan department of painting and sculpture, and that was under Andrew Ritchie, when I first went there.

SZ: That was when the department was split.

AL: Yes, so my initial experience was not very close to Alfred Barr, except that he walked by our department and Ritchie and our subsequent curators were on the painting and sculpture committee, so naturally there was a lot of contact. But he was a very approachable person, even though he seemed to be in a fog sometimes. We all loved him. He was very sharp; his mind was keen. When I worked in the library, way back, of course he was constantly there. He really was a scholar and spent many hours in the library.

SZ: And Dorothy Miller?

AL: Dorothy was just a marvelous, dynamic woman. I guess I had more contact with her because I was interviewing artists who came to the door and she kept an artists file and we kept an artists file and compared notes. She was always up on what was going on and helpful to me with that, with questions. She was just a very attractive and very pleasant and engaging person.

SZ: Once the department was reunited, in a sense, I'm sure there were many occasions when you had the opportunity to attend acquisitions meetings?

AL: I did eventually get on the committee. I forget when it was. I think it was when either Selz or Seitz was the director of my part of the department. Of course, then I was able to observe Alfred during the meetings, but I wasn't involved with him. When he was ill, he became more and more forgetful. We didn't know at that time what he had, but it apparently was Alzheimer's. It was very hard to deal with him because he

would forget meetings or he had to be led to an office that he was going to, he'd lost his way. But I did, after Betsy Jones left--she was devoted to him and of course very close in his office, and she would often have lunch with him--after she left, I very often, somehow, took on this, well, I didn't feel it was a duty, but several of us made a point of getting him up to lunch and back to where he was. He finally went to a retirement home in Connecticut, and several of us made trips a number of times to visit him. There was one that was very poignant. Sara Mazo and I drove up. He was in a wheelchair, and we pushed the wheelchair to a lounge where the patients could receive guests and have tea--I've forgotten whether it was a canteen of some kind. We had brought him some grapes and he was very happy with these grapes. A lady, another patient, came up and made a beeline for his grapes. He was trying to protect his property. A nurse came running up to her and said, "Mrs. So-and-So, drop that grape!" Apparently, she had diabetes. It was really hard. He had not indicated that he knew us at all, and there he was eating his grapes and having this little set-to with the lady. Then, all of a sudden, he looked at each of us very closely, and you could see a glint of recognition in his eyes. Then he started to cry, which was the most devastating thing because it seemed to indicate that he saw that we were there seeing him in his condition. Then it passed, and he went back into this kind of cloud again. We were just crushed. In a way, we were briefly uplifted, but then again we were very unhappy. So it was a very, very sad and rather long period, his illness.

SZ: By the time you sat in on acquisitions meetings regularly, he was really not a factor.

AL: Not in the end, but in the beginning he was running it. At that time, the very beginning, it was the whole Museum; the heads of all departments reported on various acquisitions, and they were brought in. I remember being fascinated by it, seeing things from other departments, too. It was, I guess, unwieldy. Eventually, the departments held their meetings separately.

SZ: How did you feel about that, given the fact that one thinks about the Museum originally as a place where all these various....

AL: I think he was really the head of all of the departments. It was he, I think, who said we should have photography and all that. It was to him that acquisition proposals were made.

SZ: What I guess I'm asking is, it seems that, for instance, the fact that other departments could see what was being looked at and considered and hear the discussions surrounding these works, that that was really tied to Alfred and his vision of the institution, and that with Alfred's exit, that sort of broke up and it all got much more segmented.

AL: I am really not in a position to say what the dynamics were.

SZ: But for you, what that meant.

AL: I don't know. I just went along with it. I continued to go to the...I really do not remember. We had our painting and sculpture acquisition meetings and I attended them, but I don't really know, or can't remember, what went on.

SZ: At those meetings?

AL: I can remember what went on, but what made the change occur. It was possible that it was because Alfred finally died and there was no need for an overall supervisor of the collection. The collection was run by the different department heads.

SZ: What would a typical acquisitions meeting be like?

AL: I can't remember whether there were ever minutes of the last meeting, that kind of thing. I don't remember anyone reading minutes of the last meeting and passing them or not passing them. I don't remember that; it seemed to go right into whether

there was some issue that might be discussed. Then, of course, there were lists of proposals; there were lists of gifts that had to be approved and then there were proposals from the staff, usually the head of the department. Then the thing was brought in and the discussion took place. Of course, the pictures began getting bigger and bigger and it was impossible to see them in this small room where we used to sit, so we'd have to take over part of a gallery and put chairs there, things like that. I think they're still doing it, because in the reconstruction of the Museum, I can remember some of us felt that we should have a very large room for this kind of thing, so that you wouldn't have to be trundling pictures back and forth to different places. I don't know what's happened now. It was not considered important enough to designate a space for acquisitions.

SZ: Were those meetings generally congenial?

AL: Well, there was some argument back and forth, but most people were pretty civilized. If they proposed something and it was voted down, they didn't cry. Of course, everybody was happy when a bequest came in and we all looked at it and thought it was great. There were more times like that than the other. It was a nice thing, to get all these great things.

SZ: What would happen if you got something that wasn't so great, a gift from somebody who was important to the Museum?

AL: I think most things were accepted, but there wasn't anything very derogatory said about it if someone didn't like it. I think there were very few things that were offered that one could reject, except for contemporary work. Some contemporary work was only known by the staff, and the staff person had to get up and defend it, and sometimes they didn't make it, it was turned down.

SZ: One thing I wanted to know something about, especially in the early days, was the relationship between the Department of Painting and Sculpture and the International Program, especially because you said you were part of exhibitions, the loan side of

it, and I know that the International Program was....

AL: We did exhibitions for it, but the exhibitions were organized just like any other show. Of course, there was the problem of borrowing from other departments, trying to get good things from drawings and prints, for instance, when you were doing a show. And, of course, if it was going to travel, if it was very good work, they were reluctant to let it go; but this is the same you'd get from any lender. The process of putting together an exhibition is simply luck. Well, no. You have to know what you want and you have to be persuasive enough to achieve it. Some outside lenders are basically very eager to lend to the Museum because it enhances the value of their work and also because they are thrilled to be part of a big exhibition. But the interdepartmental [loans], you weren't always able to wheedle your colleagues, for many reasons.

SZ: It's been suggested that there was a certain feeling after a while that, in a way, the International Program was competing with what was considered to be the normal operations of the Museum, that it was a similar endeavor but separate from and yet calling upon the resources of the departments, and that there was some unhappiness with that.

AL: Yes, it was pretty hard on the collections to be constantly having to let go good things, but I'm not really certain that I was a part of that. I don't remember being aware of this animosity.

SZ: Do you remember the garden before Philip did it the first time in '53?

AL: Yes, because I went there in '49. That's when I was an art student and used to hang out there, at least in the early '40s, and it was a very informal, gravel ground with trees that had a plot around them. There was a kind of stand, like a bar, that served tea, and umbrellas and chairs and tables. I can remember this gravel was pretty hard for women with heels to walk on, but otherwise, it was okay. It was just very pleasant, and of course no one expected much more. There were areas where sculpture--and this was all Alfred's doing--had either a brick wall or some kind of

fencing as a background for sculpture. There were some nice arrangements where you could see everything; the idea was that you could walk around and suddenly find something in a corner. This was all deliberately laid out, and I was impressed with that. I don't know what else, but I just remember it all very pleasantly.

END TAPE 4, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 2

SZ: Do you remember what you felt after the first transformation?

AL: I remember the construction. Putting in Philip's marble floor took a long time and a lot of noise. We were right above there, and it was a long, trying period. Then that staircase that went up to the upper terrace.... It made a totally different setting.

SZ: You took over responsibility for the garden in '72, I think it was?

AL: Yes, I guess so. That was when Betsy left, and, yes, I guess that's when I took over. Of course, Dorothy Miller was still in charge, but I took over things like pedestals. I don't think I had anything to do with the placement, because Dorothy was still there. Maybe she wasn't; I'm not sure when she left.

SZ: Progressively, I know, it was all turned over to you, but what about things like landscape architects and such, and how much discussion did you have with Philip along the way?

AL: Very little. We talked about pedestals, Philip and I. He came up with a design in wood, and we all felt wood was not a solution because it rotted so quickly and kept having to be repainted, so we never really went ahead with that. Then Dorothy--and this was long before--she tried out a composite material that a man brought in and had a flat kind of pedestal, well, it was about six or eight feet high but was a flat platform, made for either a Henry Moore or...now I've forgotten what this piece was,

but it was a major standing bronze, must have been about six feet high, and it was placed on the west terrace of the Museum where we used to have tables. It was a plastic material that had stone aggregate, pieces of stone, very close, that were held together with this plastic, so the overall effect was of a stone object. So we all sort of forgot about this. It went on and on and on there, and then, finally, we began to think about pedestals for the new garden, and I don't know whether it was I or someone else who realized that this thing was still there and it was still being used. [TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION] So somehow I guess I looked up who had made this.

SZ: Was this the guy in Florida?

AL: Yes. So you know that story.

SZ: You told me that. You didn't tell me the first part, but you told me the rest of it last time, how you found him and all that.

AL: We ended up using him, and as far as I know, I haven't heard, it's still okay.

SZ: I think last time I asked you, and you said you didn't have that great a memory of the time of the Bates Lowry interim committee and John Hightower. You said it was just uncomfortable and that was kind of it. I think at the same time there were a lot of social upheavals, and I know that artists were coming to the Museum and there was pressure on the Museum to show more black artists and women.

AL: Yes, that was during Hightower.

SZ: If there's anything you can remember about any of that, concurrent, also, with the formation and the rest of it....

AL: I remember I was abroad when that black show went through, so I was really not involved with that, but I heard it was very unsuccessful, that it was a flop, but I never

saw it, so I don't know. What else?

SZ: I just want to know if you can remember how you felt then and with respect to today.

AL: I was very unhappy during the Lowry regime. I do think that one good thing he did was to reunite the painting and sculpture department. Having it separated never worked well, so that was a good thing. One thing that bothered me was that I may have felt threatened because Lowry's idea was that people had to have not only a degree but a Ph.D. degree to do anything, and here were several people, including myself, who had started out with no degrees and learned on the job. I had been a witness of some scholarly people who came in as guests who had no real idea of how to handle works of art, and I just think that there is a difference between art historians and museum curatorial people; there is something good on both sides, but it would be nice if they could merge both of their attributes. There's a kind of wall between them sometimes. Lowry simply did not want to hear anything about how we did things. We had a system that didn't interest him, and it was frustrating to deal with this power over us, over our heads, that was moving without maybe trying to collaborate with the existing staff. But that may happen in any organization. Look what happened with Anita Hill when she moved. She was beginning to feel that she was not listened to or appreciated, and I think that happens very often.

SZ: I think Grace Glueck wrote that it was the staff of the Museum that did Bates Lowry in. I've said this to some other people and they've had varying opinions; do you think that that's a fair statement?

AL: Since I had really no clout.... I wanted to give him some files that would show him how we did things, and he was not willing to look at that. That was a kind of affront, but I didn't do anything about it. Maybe other people higher up.... I guess I just had a few affronts like that, so I didn't consider myself a real friend in the way I had done

with someone like Alfred Barr or René. He didn't really attract friendship, I don't think.

SZ: That sort of brings up another related, in my mind, issue, which is the issue of the role of professional staff and the role of the trustees in this institution, and how those two roles sometimes interact and what the structure is. I'm thinking, for instance, of Walter Bareiss, who was an important trustee in your department, who for that interim year, between Lowry and Hightower, was of some administrative importance in the Museum and how you related to that. Did you know Walter Bareiss well?

AL: Yes, I knew him, but not well. I certainly felt that he was approachable. I don't remember going to him, though, for anything. For instance, Jim Soby I was very close to and could go to him, which I did; that was way back, when there was nobody running our department.

SZ: That's when you kind of took charge.

AL: Yes.

SZ: And you went to Soby and he encouraged you to do that?

AL: I went to him, but nothing much came of it. I've forgotten what the issue was now. But he was a nice person to go to.

SZ: Because?

AL: He was a nice person to go to because he had been very much involved in the department and he understood whatever it was I was talking about.

SZ: Over the years did you have certain trustees with whom you developed a relationship? Was that an important part of what you did?

AL: Aggie [Agnes Gund], I was pretty close to her. I can't say that I was very close with

anyone else, except Jim Soby. I'm beginning to forget.

SZ: Let me ask you this question: knowing Aggie, how do you think her presidency will change things?

AL: I think, from what I saw, that she certainly seemed to understand a lot [about] staff unions, but of course at that time she was not what she is now. I would think that would make her more approachable. Having been so open at that time, I imagine she is now. [TAPE INTERRUPTION]

SZ: I want to ask you to tell me a little bit about what you remember about the two strikes, there was the formation of the union, but, more than that, what you felt the issues were at that time.

AL: I guess maybe the initial issue was that the staff didn't feel as if we were being included in some decisions. This is possibly irrational, but I think that was the way a lot of it started. Of course, the pay was very bad and the inflation and stuff was beginning to mount in New York, and there were a lot of people who were not making it. It's hard to live in New York City on low pay. I know this has been said, that, way back, one didn't need a college degree. The Museum took young girls just out of college but maybe not with an advanced degree; certainly there were very few masters. A lot of these people came from fairly well-to-do families and it didn't matter to them that the pay was low, so it became a pattern. The whole country was beginning to feel the pinch, so I think that was one of the causes of the strike.

SZ: We're talking about the second strike, the long strike?

AL: Both of them were about pay. That was really a major problem, and it probably still is.

SZ: You said the first strike you didn't participate in actively.

AL: I participated. It was the summer, and there I was, sitting out on the sidewalk every day. I couldn't picket, I couldn't walk, but I supported whatever was going on. Of course, that didn't warm the hearts of some of the upper echelon on the staff, but everybody was basically very nice. There were some people, curators that joined the strike, who could have been fired. It's rather hard to take that position.

SZ: The end effect of all of this was?

AL: I would say that it was not very successful, because everybody loved the Museum and wanted to get back to work.

SZ: Alicia, on a couple of the major exhibitions that you really put together, if you could just think back, anything that comes to you, personal reminiscences.

AL: I guess the first big show I did was the Oldenburg show [in 1969]. I knew him, not well, but I knew him as an artist. Actually, I really loved it when I was interviewing artists.

SZ: When they were coming in off the street.

AL: Yes. He had brought in these little pocket notebooks, five inches, and he used to make sketches, wherever he was, like many artists. Most of the things he brought in were from these notebooks, and they were very spontaneous sketches. I was so unresponsive, I just missed the boat and didn't realize that these were exciting and did not show them to anyone else. There were many, many artists who came and never got seen by more than myself or Alice Bacon, who preceded me, because they weren't exciting or even barely exciting. I'm sorry to say that I didn't react to these drawings, and, of course, he is a master draughtsman, he really can draw. These were not the greatest works, but they showed what he could be, and he certainly turned out to be awfully good. Somehow I kept up with him; I used to run into him in galleries and I got to know him, but not terribly well. He was still living with...Patty, his

first wife. I did go to their loft. They had a loft on 14th Street. I don't know why I went there, but anyway, I kept up with him. When in one of our department meetings about exhibitions the name of Oldenburg came up as one of our important shows to do, I think everyone knew that I knew Claes, and so I was appointed to do the show. I didn't propose it, it was already on our list, but I was assigned to do the show. He had worked at the Museum years before. I don't know whether he was a guard or.... A lot of artists had worked at the Museum. He knew a lot of the staff and the underground people and got along well with all that. Just doing a one-man show, needless to say, you have to rely, pretty much, on the artist himself, which I was glad to do.

SZ: In terms of selecting?

AL: Yes. We went through lots of things, and, of course, I had some favorite things, which I mentioned and wanted, and he came up with many more things that I didn't know about and then would go down to his loft and see more and more. He was still working on the soft stuff then, and Patty, his wife, was there at the sewing machine. She made these things from his patterns..., but now, it turned out, there was going to be an exhibition and there was a matter of making selections, so I relied very much on his ideas of what should be in the show. I don't think we had any arguments, but, of course, there was always a question of how much you can accommodate, and there were times when the curator of the show has to make some decisions about numbers, and then it's a matter of what has to go, and this is very hard to do. That takes place in any exhibition, especially with a living artist. But it was a great experience. He was nice to work with.

SZ: So you were able to resolve those issues.

AL: Oh, yes. He is just so funny--funny, ha ha, not funny, peculiar. He's witty. He reacted well when we started installing. He understands construction and things like that.

SZ: Did you plan the installation together?

AL: Yes. I had a pretty basic plan and we went along with that pretty much. He did not object to it, but, of course, when it came time to hang things, he had a lot to do with that--what was the best way to show one thing and another. It was great. There was one very funny incident. With these temporary walls you can build rooms, so we had a bathroom and he had all these appliances in soft material, and it was virtually a soft bathroom. There was a tub and a sink and a scale and, of course, there was a toilet. The toilet was in a corner, and it was a marvelous white vinyl, a soft material, and the bowl was blue, as if you had put one of those materials in. So we got it all installed and it was toward the opening of the show and there was a heavy rainstorm outside. The next morning, it turned out there was a leak and the water came straight down into the toilet [LAUGHING], which was not only appropriate, it was very funny. The whole staff was amused by this. They found the source of the leak and stopped it, and this material, the vinyl, was waterproof and the water was wiped off. There was no danger, no drastic problem. You know, this is days and days and hours and hours and everybody gets exhausted, but that's the nature of a show. It's like the theater, you're working toward a deadline. The show must go on, and all that stuff. As far as I remember, you never missed the boat, you always make it. There was one show--it wasn't mine--when I was first there, in 1953, the first big Matisse show, and Alfred made the selection and Margaret Miller, who was a wonderful curator in our department, was very good at installation and she designed the installation, which was very fine. This show was works that had not been seen in this country because it was soon after the war, so it was going to be a great revelation to see all this new stuff. They were coming by ship; this was still back in the days when transportation was by ship. At the last minute, there was a dock strike in New York and the ship did not make it and had to turn back and go back to France. It was a few days before the opening, maybe a week, two weeks if it had to come and go back again, so we had this terrible interim period of trying to settle this dock strike. Eventually, they did, and so the pictures set off again, came back, and the night of the opening we had the galleries all built and everything ready, all the Matisse pictures from here hung. But the major part of the exhibition was coming from France. I guess we had maybe two days, or less, and the night of the opening we were still hanging pictures in the back rooms when the French ambassador was making a speech in the first gallery. It was

that close. So that was exciting.

SZ: But the show did go on.

AL: Oh, yes. It was great.

SZ: What about the catalogue for the Oldenburg show? Whose idea was that?

AL: The soft catalogue? It may have been his idea, but I think it was not successful. You have to have it lying down. Helen Franc worked with him on that. Barbara Rose did the text and Helen was the editor. I did the catalogue. We were all working pretty hard.

END TAPE 4, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 5, SIDE 1

AL: I worked with Bill Seitz on the de Kooning [in 1969] and several other shows. The de Kooning show, I've forgotten now, somebody else was going to do it, then I don't know what happened. Eventually, Bill Seitz did it. No, it was after Bill died. It was Tom Hess who did the de Kooning show. Bill Seitz, I think, had been going to do it. So Tom Hess was then a guest curator. He worked through our department, so I worked with him very closely. I did the checklist and all the dirty work. He worked with the publications department on the text. I installed that show, because he wasn't involved with that kind of thing, and I thought it was a very nice show. De Kooning was not very well; he didn't come to the opening. He was nice. I forgot to tell you that these two shows were [sponsored by] International Council, and they had big to-dos. The Oldenburg show went to London and to Dusseldorf and to I don't know where else. Both Claes and I went to those places for the installations. I thought the Oldenburg show looked better here. Dusseldorf, at least, had a marvelous hall, a very high-ceilinged place, so the black vinyl fan, a revolving fan, hung from the ceiling, and it was great. In our place, you know, the ceilings are so low you can't do

anything exciting like that. Then, for the de Kooning show, I also went...to Amsterdam, and de Kooning came. His [de Kooning's] mother was still living, and that was very nice. We worked with the Stedelijk staff, and the rapport and relationship was very good. It's amazing when you go to different museums, they all have work crews, and the work crews are always great; they are skilled, and I'm sure they are instructed to keep their own opinions so it's the artist and the museum person, the curator, who decide where things go and how they should look. So there are times when there are discussion about that, but most of the time it worked out well. Those were two big shows that I was involved in. Then I did the Matisse sculpture show here, and that was interesting.

SZ: That you talked about last time.

AL: Let's see, what else? I did an international show that took me to South America [?exhibition title]. It was an exhibition of four realist artists--de Kooning, [Jean] Dubuffet, [Alberto] Giacometti and one more...[Francis Bacon]. That was dealing with the International Council. The show opened in Caracas and the year was '73, I think, because it was the year Picasso died. Was that '73? Yes. I remember we and all these International Council people were at a wonderful villa somewhere outside of Caracas having a lunch, and the host had a phone call, and he came back and made this announcement.... This show went to Caracas and then we all went to Bogotá, where the exhibition was going to go later. Then it went to Sao Paulo, but I didn't go there. I came back to New York, and then, finally, the show went to Mexico, and I went to Mexico City for that installation.... It was nice, because I was able to get some nice things from the trustees and from the International Council people. They were all interested, and they lent some good things. So that was good.

SZ: You also talked a little bit about the LeWitt show last time.

AL: Yes. That was another case of an artist who worked at the Museum. He worked at the Museum when I was there, early in my career. I knew him from way back and sort of watched him showing downtown. As I say, I saw the development of his work.

I think the time came when everyone thought we should have a LeWitt show and they picked me, I guess because they knew I knew him. I didn't propose it, I don't think. I didn't have the nerve to propose shows at that point.

SZ: But you were friends?

AL: Yes. He was another nice person to work with.

SZ: And you liked his work.

AL: Oh, yes, very much. See that? He gave me that for my retirement party.

SZ: Was that a hard show to do?

AL: Yes.

SZ: Because?

AL: Well, getting those wall drawings done. You had to get the walls up to make them on, and then putting these modular sculptures together was...of course, we have good people, handlers.... It was a nice show.

SZ: What was the last show you did?

AL: I think maybe LeWitt. I can't remember. I don't think there was anything major [after that show]. I remember the last couple of years I was trying to bring the so-called PASIT/MoMA up to date.

SZ: Why am I thinking of the Louise Bourgeois show? Did you do that?

AL: No, Debbie Wye did that. I was sort of an advisor to Debbie Wye. I was involved in it, but it wasn't my show.

SZ: Did you have a friendship with Louise Bourgeois?

AL: Yes, I had known Louise for years. It was in the early '50s.... There was a wonderful thing called Atelier 17, on 8th Street, which had come over from Paris with Stanley Hayter because of the war. He was an English artist who was located in Paris, but he had to get out. He came over here and gathered a number of people for etching. It was a print studio. So I went there to learn about etching. I had studied etching at the Art Students League, but I went there to try and do more. They had several presses, and people like Miró were using the presses and came in just like any other artist. Miró was especially nice to work with. The Spanish people weren't involved in the invasion; they didn't have to leave the way the people in France did. We had this invasion from France of European artists, especially with people fleeing the Nazis.

SZ: A lot of them went back, though.

AL: Yes. It was just a very fruitful period for Americans, to have these foreign artists here. Anyway, Louise was in this class, and so that's where I met her and kind of kept up with her. I've sort of lost touch now.

SZ: Did the same things hold true for the LeWitt show as for the Oldenburg show? How did you work together in selecting the works or deciding what was to be done?

AL: Same thing. It was a matter of selection. I knew a lot because it was where he was living, and then there were photographs and we talked about them. The show went to La Jolla, and the two of us went to La Jolla for that. I think, basically, that these artists really made their selections, and my role was to see how much [was to be included]. I never had any problem about quality because the stuff was all good, so it was just a matter of how much could be included. I think I had to make some of those decisions, but it really was the artist's selection. I have never had any trouble with living artists, but I remember that Andrew Ritchie had problems with [Jacques] Lipchitz. I remember him saying that the best artist is a dead artist. Lipchitz was a

nice guy, but he was difficult to work with. But I didn't have any trouble [with the artists I worked with]. I went with René to Paris to install a show at the Rodin Museum; this was in the '60s. It was a show from our collection and it was mainly in the garden of the Rodin Museum. Then there was another thing I did in Paris, The Art of the Real, and that was one of the early Minimal shows. Eugene Goosen did that show. He was a nice guy, a critic....

SZ: I was going to ask you how the Parisians took to that.

AL: Well, I'm thinking of here that it didn't go over well. Actually, it was in the Grand Palais, and I don't think it was so bad. I remember we installed--a Tony Smith work-- on an island in the Champs Elysée.... It was a multiple wood construction in this traffic island. It was in March, and it was cold and rainy. I was about four or five days out there in the cold, with the traffic whizzing by. It was very effective, but I'm sure that a lot of the French probably thought it was awful. My mother had an old friend on the Ile-St.-Louis and I used to go to her place for tea, and she wanted to know how it was going. These works were transported from the ocean by the river, and they came right by this lady's apartment on the Ile-St.-Louis, on barges, these crates and stuff. So Paris was aware that something was going on, but I have a feeling they thought it was pretty silly.

SZ: I think you were going to say something about that show you installed in the Rodin Museum garden?

AL: Yes, that was very nice. D'Harnoncourt was the super installateur, and he did a good job. It was out under a kind of avenue of trees. There were some things indoors, I remember--a Marisol piece. There were some indoors and some outdoors. It was good contemporary American stuff. Oh, I had a trip to Japan, as a courier. There was a Matisse show in Tokyo and Kyoto, and we sent the Dance. I think it's fourteen or seventeen feet wide, so the requirement was that a person from our museum be present. For the Tokyo show, someone else went over; then it was moved to Kyoto. My job was to bring it back. I was in France. Sam, my brother, lived in France

through all this time, and he and his wife were there, so I was visiting them and went from Paris to Tokyo. Then I went by train to Kyoto and spent five days or so there, but I got there just before the show came down. That was the point: to inspect the pictures before they were packed. So I got there the day before the show closed and saw it, and it was very beautiful. They had organized the show and they had some pictures from the Hermitage and other places, like us--all kinds of good places. There was a nice woman from the Hermitage. There were people from all the museums sort of congregated there to get their stuff and supervise their packing. So I spent a day checking the pictures, and they were in good shape. Then I had free time, so I went to see all the temples and shrines and things. Since I can hardly walk, I had to take taxis everywhere. In a couple of places, they made you take your shoes off, and I said I couldn't do that, I couldn't be without my brace, so I had to put this kind of slipper over my shoes. Anyway, it was difficult. It was great, but it was exhausting. So I spent whatever free time I had doing that. Then I had to go back and be there while they were being packed. They had these flatbed trucks and the idea was for the shipment to go back from Osaka, then it was supposed to be a nonstop flight to New York. I was taken in a car behind this truck and we got to Osaka and I was met by a Japanese airline person, who introduced me to a little man who was going to be what I called a chaperon. This little man was going to sit with me. He spoke English. The other man announced to me that the plane was going to stop in Tokyo, and I said, "I understood there were no stops, it was nonstop from Osaka." No, it was going to stop in Tokyo. So there I was, alone, with no cohorts, and there was nothing to do but get on the plane. It stopped in Tokyo.... It was a cargo plane, an enormous thing, and the whole body of the plane is open. At the rear of it was this great, big maw where trucks were driving in and out. I saw everything go in, and when it stopped in Tokyo, they told me I had to get out of the plane and go to the airport terminal. I said, "But I'm supposed to stay with the plane. I should not leave the plane." "Oh, yes, you have to go, you have to go to the terminal." So I had to go down these high metal stairs; there was a railing and I made it. I sat down at the bottom of the stairs and I said, "I'll wait here." They said, "No, you can't do that, you have to leave this place." The terminal was as close as our center here, so I said, "Alright, I can walk that distance." He said, "Oh, no, you can't go on the tarmac. We'll

have some transportation for you." So I had to wait. A great, big bus came, just for me, and I got on this bus with my keeper [LAUGHTER], and he had to give a voucher to the bus driver. They put me in a room all by myself. I could have at least sat outside and watched the people, but no. An hour later, they came back for me. I had to take the same bus, and the same business of vouchers. This is all between Japan Air Lines.... So then we got to the plane, a plane, with this open maw, and I could see the Matisse crate standing up and the other pictures all stacked there, not inside the plane. There was a man who was obviously furious when we drove up. There was this exchange of words, and I could tell that he was angry that I had not been there. He kept pointing to me, and he was the only one who understood the protocol of museums trying to do their work. He did not want to move those pictures until I was there to see them go in. So I did. The rest of them, the Japan Air Line people, couldn't care less. But you know what they did: they changed planes. They moved our pictures out of the first plane and put them in another one, and that, really, was not kosher.

SZ: And you weren't even there.

AL: No! I had no idea they were going to do it, but if I had, I would really not have left. They would have had to pick me up.... Anyway, the whole thing was not really right. Then we got back and took off and I realized why this little man was there. We had two seats right behind the two pilots and to the left of this little man was a microwave, and it was his job to cook my dinner in the microwave [LAUGHING]. Bit deal. That was the end of that trip. I really have some question about the need for a courier, but if one museum does it, then they all do it.

SZ: And that's how they do it.

AL: They won't lend a picture unless some one from their staff gets a trip. It's really not that, but the principle is there. So....

SZ: Are you done?

AL: I really don't know what else to say.

SZ: I'll just ask you two last things, because there are quotes that I found. Let's just see if you have anything to react to. I think Betsy Jones said you fought some very admirable losing battles--she was quoted as saying that.

AL: About me?

SZ: What was she talking about?

AL: About the high ceilings. When we were building this new wing, I really felt that we should plan to have higher ceilings. It boiled down to the fact that they would have had to eliminate one floor of that apartment [building], and the cost...I don't know. We didn't have high enough ceilings, and we ended up with lower ceilings. I think it's a disaster, the new wing. Did you talk to Betsy?

SZ: No. I hope I will. I found that somewhere. You think that's what she was referring to?

AL: Possibly, but you ought to talk to her. She's just terrific. She was a jewel in that department. All the acquisition procedures, she had it right, down pat.

SZ: I guess you're going to come and see how the collection has been reinstalled.

AL: I did, and I think it's very nice. I liked it, pretty much everything I saw. I hear that Robert [Storr], the new guy, everybody likes him, so I hear good things about him.

SZ: Here's the other quote. I guess Dick [Oldenburg] said this at your retirement. He said you were the classic back-room curator.

AL: Bathroom curator?

SZ: Back-room [LAUGHTER]. Well, yes, that too.

AL: Maybe so. I do remember dealing with some of these art historians, who knew an awful lot but didn't know how to pick up a picture. There are differences between professions.

SZ: But you feel that your talents were recognized?

AL: Yes, I do. I enjoyed every bit of it.

SZ: Thanks.

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END INTERVIEW