THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**MRS. SAMUEL P. (ELIZABETH) SHAW (ES)**
INTERVIEWER:	**SHARON ZANE (SZ)**
LOCATION:	**130 EAST 67TH STREET NEW YORK CITY**
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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: Liz, tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your family background.

ES: I was born in New York City. My mother was from Mississippi, my father, from Georgia. My mother never really learned the language; she was like an immigrant, I always thought. All of her friends were Southern. When I told her I was marrying a man named Shaw, from Boston, she said, "I know about those people. Led the Negroes in the Civil War; until that happened, we thought they were on our side." I said, "Sam, is this true?," and he said, "Yes, it's true, and we're very proud of it."

SZ: How did she get to New York?

ES: By way of Washington, D.C. She went there to work for her congressman, then my father and she married and moved to New York City, where I was born. I was brought up in the suburbs of New York, went to Smith College....

SZ: Which suburb?

ES: Ridgewood, in northern New Jersey. A very conservative town.

SZ: I guess that presupposes that this congressman she worked for was pretty conservative?

ES: He was a Southern Democrat. I didn't know for a long time that the Southern Democrats were worse than the Republicans, or more conservative, shall we say.

SZ: And your father?

ES: He was in the printing business; he was a great success. He was a very nice man and worked for a company called Newcomb; he was the chief officer of it. He loved printing.

SZ: But this was not in Washington; he started in New York?

ES: He started in Washington and then moved to New York.

SZ: And what was his name?

ES: Lawrence Roberts.

SZ: So you were born Elizabeth Roberts.

ES: I used to beg my mother for a French connection, which she could never find. Welsh, Scots and English.

SZ: I guess a lot of the Southerners were English.

ES: Yes. There were French in New Orleans, of course, in Louisiana, but....

SZ: And she never lost her accent.

ES: No. She stayed Southern all her life. She lived in exile, sort of, in the North. She liked it; it was perfectly alright.

SZ: Was she educated? I assume, since you said she came up to work for her congressman, that she must have been.

ES: I don't know what she got in the way of education. Her mother was a schoolteacher, and she read a lot. She was quite funny, caustic. She played bridge all the time. This was a typical suburban life, I guess.

SZ: You went to public schools?

ES: I went to both. I went to public schools, then I went to boarding school. I went to a very good public school in Ridgewood, but my mother wouldn't let me have lunch there, so I had lunch in the private school. It didn't make any sense, though, it was insane. It was a very bad private school.

SZ: But the food was good.

ES: She thought it was better. She thought that cafeteria food was not proper, wasn't right, it wasn't good enough. So I used to walk. It was not very far away, so I walked on my lunch hour, and I never got to know anybody. It was perfectly ridiculous. I walked to the private school for lunch and then walked back to school for classes, and took a lot of lessons after school, in everything you can think of, ballet, riding, elocution--everything.

SZ: Piano?

ES: Yes. Violin and piano.

SZ: Did you like any of it particularly?

ES: I loved dancing. The ballet lesson was wonderful; I liked that best. And I liked horseback riding. That was good fun. I just hacked around.

SZ: Do you have brothers or sisters?

ES: I have one younger brother. His birthday I'll never forget, because I was a happy only child for seven years, then he was born [LAUGHTER]. My father gave me a Louisville Slugger baseball bat for my seventh birthday.

SZ: And you didn't know why.

ES: I didn't know what to say, because baseball was not my favorite game. I finally said, "It's beautiful." I was very proud of that comment because it was beautiful. It still is; a Louisville Slugger bat is a beautiful object--probably in the design collection. It should be, if it's not. But he wanted me to be a baseball player. Then, when my brother was born, he left me pretty much alone, I could do whatever I wanted.

SZ: Did you like sports as a kid?

ES: Not particularly, no. I didn't like team sports very much. I hated field hockey in college. I've tried to get my children and my grandchildren to be more interested in sports you can play all your life, like tennis and swimming. I love to swim.

SZ: Because?

ES: Because you can do it always. It's kind of hard to get a hockey game together, at my age [LAUGHTER].

SZ: Were you a good student?

ES: Yes, I was a good student.

SZ: And you liked it.

ES: I loved it, I just adored it.

SZ: Tell me the name of the boarding school you went to.

ES: It was called the Northampton School for Girls, but it doesn't exist anymore.

SZ: And that, I guess, is what made you realize you wanted to stay in Northampton?

ES: A lot of people from there went on to Smith. No, I think I wanted to go to Smith before. I think I'd always wanted to go to Smith somehow.

SZ: Why?

ES: I wanted a big college, and I wanted to be in New England, absolutely. I don't know. I didn't know anybody who had gone to Smith, until I went to boarding school and then I did, of course.

SZ: It wasn't in your family, then.

ES: No. Mother wanted me to go to a Southern school. She thought it was silly to go to a big school in the North. Mother once told me that nice boys went to Woodbury Forest and Princeton. I think she'd never heard of Harvard or Yale.

SZ: Woodbury Forest.

ES: Yes, a Southern school.

SZ: So you graduated from high school in what year?

ES: Thirty-nine, or was it '38? Thirty-eight, because I graduated from college in '42.

SZ: And you then you started at Smith. I have my own reasons for asking. I would like to know what Smith was like in the fall of 1938.

ES: It was the most exciting place in the whole world. It was just wonderful. I had a small identity crisis right away. It turned out there was another girl in my house--I lived in a very small house--called Betty Roberts, and we'd get our mail mixed up. But I loved it, I adored it. I'm a little worried about Smith now, to tell you the truth.

SZ: You were going to describe for me student life in the late '30s in a place such as Smith. I'm hoping you will do that for me. The Depression was a bit on the wane, though it wasn't over.

ES: It was over as far as we were concerned. We wore the usual uniform: pearls and shetland sweaters and skirts. Our shoes came from Brooks Brothers; they were sort of white. And polo coats. Nobody had cars, so you walked a lot and bicycled. I never had a bicycle while I was there. I thought it was a very cheery place. I liked the house system very much there, all classes together, and I liked my house, Capen, which was small. I didn't do very well my freshman year, but then, eventually, I got into special honors, which I just loved, so my last two years were very, very happy.

SZ: What did you study?

ES: History.

SZ: And did you know when you went there that that's what you wanted to study?

ES: I think I liked it very much, yes. I hadn't had an awful lot. I liked traveling, and I liked reading about history. Smith had a wonderful library, and the last years I lived there I had a carrel. We took our coffee break in the faculty room. I had a seminar in honors on the French Revolution, and Smith had all the newspapers. I was reading day by day accounts of the French Revolution; it was the most thrilling thing I've ever done.

SZ: What about social life?

ES: That was pretty active, but then I got secretly married when I was at Smith.

SZ: You could have gotten thrown out for that, as I remember.

ES: I suppose. I told them, eventually. We had that interim president; I forget what his name was. We had Nielson and then we had Mrs. Morrow, and then we had this other man whose name I forget. I think he was the one I told that I was married and wanted to continue. By that time, I was halfway through the special honors program; I was a junior. I got married in my freshman year, secretly. Privately; let's not say secretly. It was a boy I'd known all my life from my hometown, who was at Dartmouth. Boldt was his name.

SZ: But you still were at Smith and he was still at Dartmouth.

ES: Yes. He graduated that year, and I continued at Smith.

SZ: In terms what would have been a normal social life, it's not something that you....

ES: I used to go out with other people occasionally when he was away. He moved out to

the Middle West for a while. I had good friends at Princeton, Yale, Harvard. I did all the usual stuff. My first husband was a real rebel about college. He was editor of the newspaper at Dartmouth. He must have wanted to abolish things like that: abolish Phi Beta Kappa, abolish the fraternities and all that stuff. We had a close group of friends, one of whom subsequently hired me for The Museum of Modern Art: Tom Braden, who was best man at our secret wedding and who I think was responsible for telling people and breaking the secret some years later. After he got out of the OSS, he went to work for Nelson [Rockefeller], and then Nelson put him in the Museum as secretary.

SZ: So he worked for the OSS, a guy who breaks secrets? [LAUGHING]

ES: Yes. So Tom hired me, and that was very nice. I was working at the New York Times at the time, and Tom called me up, as I recall, and said would I like to come over and work for the Museum. I spent all my time hanging around there anyway, so I said sure.

SZ: You studied history with the idea of doing what when you got out?

ES: I don't know.

SZ: I guess when you got out the war had started.

ES: I had to go to work, initially in city planning and housing and then for magazines and....

SZ: That's right, you went and took a masters.

ES: No, I did some graduate study, but I didn't get a masters. I worked at housing and city planning. Hardly anybody was around; it was mostly men, and all the men were away in the war, so it was a great time for me to get good jobs. It was fine, and I learned a lot.

SZ: But you didn't have a real plan.

ES: No.

SZ: You mentioned before that you loved history, you loved traveling. How much traveling had you done by the time you got to Smith to while you were at Smith?

ES: I spent just one summer, four months, in the British Isles. It was the summer before I was accepted. I only applied to Smith, no place else, because we didn't in those days. I got mail as we biked around [the British Isles] and was sort of waiting to get my acceptance. It was very different than it is now; there's terrible anxiety, and you're applying to twenty-five places. My children wouldn't even consider Smith.

SZ: Because?

ES: They didn't want to go to a single-sex school. They'd been in single-sex day schools in New York all their lives, and they thought that was enough.

SZ: Do you agree with that?

ES: I do really. Of course, now we've got so out of whack. The only single-sex schools are expensive private day schools in New York City or other big cities. All the boarding schools are coeducational, all the public schools are coeducational. It's an odd thing, it seems to me.

SZ: It may really be a phenomenon whose time has ended.

ES: I think its time is up, yes.

SZ: But you loved your time there.

ES: I loved it. I had a marvelous time. I was very active in campus affairs, I was president of my house and I was on the judicial board and all those things. It was fun, and I liked the faculty that I worked with and I got to know them very well in the honors program, which I loved. I haven't seen any of those people since then; I've not kept up at all. I ran into a friend at Princeton about a year ago who had been a very close friend in college and we were back together again as good friends within five minutes. It was very nice. I got a note the other day from Emily Clemmons, who was a good friend in my house, and she said, "I hope you're going back to your fiftieth." She went on and on, very nice, sweet, chatty letter. I've not laid eyes on her for fifty years, nor do I know her married name. She didn't give it. She just said, "Love, Emily," as if we were still sixteen and in constant communication.

SZ: It does do that to you in some way, I think. Wasn't that Nancy Reagan's class?

ES: I think she was a class--if she really went to Smith--a year ahead of me. So she claims. I don't know; I never knew her. I never saw her, never heard of her.

SZ: What about the whole field of art. You said that you went to the Museum long before you worked there, so you must have had some interest in it.

ES: At Smith I took an introduction to the history of art, which I found absolutely riveting. It turned out I had a good visual memory, which I didn't know, but when we got to modern art, my mind was absolutely blown. It was Jere Abbott, you see, teaching it, who was working at the Modern. With the introductory stuff, it was easy because I could remember the slides, but I didn't learn anything, but then when he came on the scene, he would have one slide on for half an hour and you damn well did look at Cézanne and begin to think about what he was doing, so that was just terrific. When I eventually ended up living in New York, I spent a lot of time at the Modern and I loved it. In fact, in college I used to get books.

SZ: Did you come into New York?

ES: Oh, yes, we came in a lot, to shop--we never shopped any other place--and to go to the theater, and with beaus I'd come in to go to the Rainbow Room or something like that. My father came in every day.

SZ: Do you remember your first visit to The Museum of Modern Art, or an early visit?

ES: Yes. I worked at the New York Times, and we used to go over a lot from there because of the movies, and we'd go over for lunch sometimes in the garden. That was before the garden was all fancied up by Philip [Johnson]; it was little pebbles and simple.

SZ: What were you doing for the Times? That was your first job?

ES: No, I'd worked in housing and city planning in Detroit and in Philadelphia before that, during the war. Then I switched out of that and worked for Holiday magazine. Then we moved to New York, my first husband and I, and I got a job at the Times. Then Tom called me about a year later and asked did I want to come to the Modern, and I thought that would be fun.

SZ: He asked you to come over as...?

ES: To work in the public relations office as an assistant to the head of the department, who was a woman named Betty Chamberlain.

SZ: She wasn't there very long, was she?

ES: She was there a long time. First there was Sarah Newmeyer, then it was Betty Chamberlain and then it was me. I came in as Betty's assistant. Tom said, "The thing

is, Liz, you're supposed to wear stockings, not speak to a trustee and learn how to write a lead to a story." I said, "I know how to write a lead and I always wear stockings." The trustee thing, of course, turned out to be wrong because some of the trustees became very close friends.

SZ: But that's an interesting thing.

ES: Tom was worried about the politics of the place and who on the staff was, I guess, close to various trustees and using that influence one way or another.

SZ: What was Tom's position there at that time?

ES: I think he was secretary of the place. He'd worked for Nelson at Rockefeller Center and then got this job. He then left and bought a newspaper on the West Coast and married a girl who worked for Nelson, Joan Braden.

SZ: Did you have to come and interview with Betty?

ES: No, I was sort of hired without any...I don't think I met anybody else. It was later that Alfred became a very close friend. After I married Sam, he became an even closer friend; they liked to birdwatch together and stuff like that. René [d'Harnoncourt], of course, had a very odd position at that time. He later told me that he didn't realize when he first came in, with the longest title in the world, Executive in Charge of Manual Industries, and no say in trustee selection, not even an opinion--they didn't tell him when they were thinking about new trustees--he was shocked at that. I think he felt that at least his opinions should be solicited; they didn't have to follow them, but they should at least know what he thought.

SZ: When you were hired, had he already been made director? It was the same year.

ES: Yes, but he wasn't director yet. I don't know who was running the place.

SZ: That was the committee.

ES: He was appointed director in '49.

SZ: So it was the same year you were hired.

ES: Yes, but of course Tom must have been in there as Nelson's man. I'm sorry you never talked to Allen Porter; he probably had some amusing stories, most of which, I think, were probably true.

SZ: Tell me, in 1949 when you got there, what the place felt like to you, what the atmosphere was.

ES: It was small. This was two building programs back, so it was much smaller than it is today--much. It was pretty much the way it was when it was built in '39. There was not an extensive part of the collection on view; that was still a struggle. Then there was this sort of funny troika that ran the place, [Alfred H.] Barr, d'Harnoncourt and Monroe [Wheeler]--not an easy truce.

SZ: You could see that from the beginning?

ES: Sure, but I liked them all. I used to dine with Monroe a lot and I loved that, it was very good fun. We went to his place for dinner one night--this is Sam and me--and took a taxi, and the minute we drove up there was an ancient car in front of us and an ancient couple staggered out of this ancient car and we thought, My God, we'd better wait til they're in because we're not going to be able to get past them to the door. So we waited for a bit and then we went in and went up to Monroe's apartment and went in, and there was the ancient couple! It was the Sitwells. One summer René went abroad

and there were lots of rumors that he'd been fired. The Primitive Museum [of Art] had opened about a year before and rumor had it that he'd been fired or that he was leaving the Museum to go the Primitive. It was a mess and a scandal. I went to Alfred and told him of these rumors, that the press was after me for some kind of answer, and Alfred said, "Oh, René would never do such a mean thing to the Museum as to leave at this point," which I thought was the perfect answer. I used it of course, and it was very effective. It was all just rumor. I don't think it was necessarily started maliciously, but it was growing the way those things sometimes do, and it makes trouble for the institution if people think the head is going to leave, that there will be changes and so on.

SZ: Going back to the time you were hired, you were hired first to be Betty's assistant?

ES: Yes.

SZ: Tell me a little bit about Betty Chamberlain.

ES: She was an interesting woman. She did not wear stockings and she had a lot of hair on her legs. She was quite abrupt in manner, had been handsome, I think, as a young woman, had been married and divorced. She was a very good friend of Howard DeVries, who was at that time the senior critic at the Times. She was a good friend of Homer Page, who was a good photographer; he used to hang around the office quite a lot. She was a good friend of Edgar Kaufmann. Betty had sort of a natural style and I think was very well brought up and educated. [TAPE INTERRUPTION] [She was] a little brusque. Basically, although well educated and well brought up, she was eccentric at this time in her life, and rather deliberately, I think, rather rough in her clothes and in her manner. She worked very hard. I remember once I suggested to her that we subscribe to Time magazine and she said, "Why? They hate us." That would seem to me all the more reason to subscribe, but that was not her view.

SZ: What was her basic approach to the press?

ES: It was not nearly as friendly as mine, that I know. I did a lot when I became director of the department in terms of expanding the information, making more material available, more photographs available, more special memos and letters to the press with suggestions of things that might interest them particularly, and I knew many more people in the press. Keeping in mind that Newmeyer was almost crazy at the end of her tenure. I had her desk, Newmeyer's desk; nobody had ever bothered to clear out her files! All this stuff was there. It was incredible to me, because she'd been gone for several years.

SZ: She had been there a long time, from the beginning.

ES: That's right, and all her stuff was still there. Did you ever see an article that was in the Saturday Evening Post, I think, that was called "The Museum and the Redhead"? That actually explained a lot about Betty. It was a spread and the main photograph was an enormous photograph of Sarah sitting on a stool with her legs crossed, looking very glamorous, redheaded, long legs. "The Museum and the Redhead. Everything changes at The Museum of Modern Art. Even the walls change, but the publicity director goes on forever." Well, she was fired almost immediately, because, of course, I think the trustees felt that they were the continuity and provided the core of the place.

SZ: And they didn't like the implication that someone else might?

ES: That the public relations director was more stable than anything else, which is really silly. She never should have done it; I don't know why she did it. So Betty came in from the opposite tact: not flamboyant, not at all claiming that she was running the place or had any extra influence, anything. I always thought Betty didn't like the press very much, but maybe she really did. She wrote a history of the Museum. She was sort of eased out, Betty was, later.

SZ: She resigned.

ES: Yes. She wrote a history and she said, "I'm going to leave for at least a year," and during that time I was acting head.

SZ: So she was still there.

ES: But she didn't work in the building, no; she worked someplace else, at home.

SZ: Writing this history.

ES: Yes.

SZ: Which I've seen.

ES: You have seen it?

SZ: Yes. Parts of it are in the archives.

ES: Really. Well, that's probably good. It was a very small office.

SZ: Where was it located at that time?

ES: It was on the fourth floor. It was before the building was made so much bigger, you see. The place was so much smaller, it was really very nice. I knew everybody; they weren't necessarily all close friends, but we all knew each other and you knew what was going on. Tea, for example, late afternoon, very late, five-thirty or six, was all staff, and you got together and you talked to people. I had tea with Alfred almost every day. We'd all eat lunch together a great deal, so there was a lot of informal give-and-take

about what was going on. The committee structure was much simpler. There were fewer trustees and a much smaller staff. I liked it very much. I loved being director of the department.

SZ: Did it take you very long to learn what had to be done?

ES: No, it really didn't. I had worked for newspapers, I had worked for magazines, and almost all my friends did, so it was easy, in that sense, to know what they would want.... Also, you see, it was fun to develop techniques for handling Museum public relations, it really was; it was good fun. The monthly schedule of events, I made that up, and it was fun to do that.

SZ: Because that didn't exist before?

ES: No.

SZ: Before you came, what would you describe as essentially the duties of the public relations office. What did she [Betty] do? She just wrote press releases for shows?

ES: She wrote press releases for shows. I think that's primarily what she did. She didn't particularly like to read the press. There was a young man, whose name I now forget, who did a great deal of reading for her. He scanned hundreds of publications, newspapers and magazines.

SZ: She, of course, had to deal with that Emily Genauer piece. When was that, in 1944?

ES: The teacup piece.

SZ: Yes.

ES: My guess is that she ended up probably not speaking to Genauer, whereas Alfred Barr ended up speaking to her. I think Alfred sent her a note when she retired. But there was always a nervousness about contact with the press. It was really very strange.

SZ: On her part.

ES: On a lot of people's part around here; not a lot, but on some people's part. It was hard to get them included in social parties and things like that, because Emily Stone didn't really think they were appropriate. I think Alfred did. I felt Alfred was interested in the press and in the galleries, the dealers and so forth, a big interwoven complex.

SZ: I guess also after the war you had kind of a media explosion, too. The whole situation changed.

ES: I think you're right. Certainly art criticism became much more serious in the daily press. It had for a long time been just on the society pages, and then it gradually became a newspaper thing on its own. The Times always had coverage and so did the Herald Tribune, but around the country there had not been very much, and that began to change, with magazines like Time putting in an art column, which was widely read.

SZ: What I'm suggesting is that it was a fertile time, really, to be there.

ES: It was a marvelous time to be there, an absolutely wonderful time, a terrific time. We did press previews, obviously, and I always used to take them and sit down there. I loved it. Betty never did; she didn't like it. It was great, it was really wonderful and I was very lucky. Betty was a stickler for accuracy and clarity; that was very important. And honesty, no question about that ever.

SZ: Had she been a working press person?

ES: I think she'd worked for Time or Newsweek.

SZ: Did she like modern art?

ES: Oh, yes. I don't think she had many friends who were artists, but she loved modern art She brought me back a [André] Masson on a trip to Europe, a print.

SZ: What was it like for you, coming in in 1949, folding into the life of the Museum? I think it's [Russell] Lynes who makes a point that after the Second World War there were lots of personnel changes, so that things were a little bit in flux in that way, I guess until René's position was really secure. On the other hand, it's been suggested to me that then, as now, it's never easy for somebody new, that it really takes time before one feels, and is, in fact, accepted.

ES: I felt so at home at that place as a visitor, and I just loved the place. I used to go to lunch there and I'd go to the movies there, hang around, read the books, buy reproductions--I bought Georgia O'Keeffe's Barn--all kinds of things. I felt at home. The only thing I didn't know, really, about the place at all was where the ladies' room was on the office floors, and Tom Braden showed me the men's room by mistake. He didn't know either, obviously.

SZ: There was a shortage of ladies' rooms?

ES: No, he just didn't ever bother to find out. It was very much like going home.

SZ: And the other staff members were accessible?

ES: They were very sweet. I thought it was great.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

ES: [Edward] Steichen was head of the photography department, Richard Griffith was head of film and Bill Lieberman was head of prints. Andrew Ritchie came in very shortly, into painting and sculpture. Porter McCray was there, and of course Monroe in publications. I did a lot with publications; that was good fun. Monroe used to take me around to the booksellers conventions, flying a tiny plane that scared me, the Doubleday plane--Doubleday was [a distributor of] Museum books. It was a company plane.

SZ: There were press releases and other functions relating to exhibitions, but then I guess there was the whole issue of the Museum and its image.

ES: Yes. I got The New Yorker to do some profiles, and that was very exciting and good fun.

SZ: The one on Alfred.

ES: Yes. And some "Talk" pieces. I got Holiday, my old employer, to do a big piece, which they did, and that was very good fun. Dave Scherman photographed that, and he was absolutely thrilled to meet Blanchette Rockefeller. She was so beautiful and so nice and so sweet. He'd never seen her before, and he said to me, "You know, Liz, she photographs like a million dollars." So that was all fun, too, to get somewhat broader things.

SZ: Those profiles [in The New Yorker] were really something.

ES: I think I still have the galleys that Alfred corrected. I should give them to the archives. [PAUSE]

SZ: You actually just gave me the cast of characters, most of them. Let's go back to Alfred and René d'Harnoncourt and their relationship, because that is also something that is in dispute, whether they got along, whether they didn't, how things got parcelled out, what kind of a director René was.

ES: René was a marvelous director in a thousand ways, I think. For example, a new curator putting up his first major show, René would go downstairs at six o'clock at night after everybody had gone home and help him with the installation, and nobody would know it. That was great, because René was a great installer of shows. René was the kind of man who...he told me once that when he got a book as a present from somebody he would dictate his thank-you letter right away before he could even open the book so he could say, "I'm looking forward to reading it," and it would be true. He was extraordinarily personal in his dealings with people. René once came into my office to tell me I was getting a raise. I don't know whether he thought you couldn't really discuss money or what, but anyway, he wrote it on a piece of paper in tiny, tiny, tiny handwriting and he passed it to me and said, "You're getting a raise." I said, "René, thank you so much, I'm delighted." He said, "Just giving the devil its due," which I think he thought was a compliment [LAUGHING]. He spoke no language very clearly. He said he was embarrassed to go to France because he had such a bad accent, and with his name, d'Harnoncourt, people expected him to speak French. It was René who really helped Alfred back into a position of extreme power in that place, and I think Alfred knew it. Alfred used to get impatient with René, but he got impatient with everybody.

SZ: Because?

ES: René didn't get involved in everything, and Alfred thought he should. They were never very close personal friends, I don't think, though they certainly worked together on a lot of things in absolute harmony. It was they who decided not to tell the police that it was

the Museum that had been robbed. Somebody took the [Vincent] van Gogh Sorrow, I forget what it's called--a naked woman bent over--a beautiful print. Alfred and René together, in consort, reported this to the police, but they gave their home addresses--this is so childish--instead of saying The Museum of Modern Art. It took a little bit of time for this all to get put together, and I don't know who they thought they were fooling. In fact, it made it a bigger story in the end and they did not want a big story. That's understandable; one never does for a theft.

SZ: They did without...?

ES: They didn't tell me, no. I just had to handle the press the next morning.

SZ: And how did you do that?

ES: I found out the truth and told them, that we had indeed been robbed. The print was returned, anonymously. One of the Rockefellers made a big effort to get those two together, to make them friends, close friends. It couldn't have been Laurance. David must have invited them to Laurance's place in the Bahamas or wherever it was. I remember Marga [Mrs. Alfred H. Barr, Jr.] say that they were all going down together. She thought the idea was to have them all become very buddy-buddy. But they were very different temperamentally, those two, totally different. What they needed was a good working relationship, not necessarily a friendship. And Sarah [d'Harnoncourt] was quite different, I think, from Marga. Have you talked to Sarah?

SZ: Not yet.

ES: Or Anne [d'Harnoncourt]? I wonder what Anne remembers. I like Sarah very much, and Anne. But they [René and Alfred] were very different. René, for example, once told me that the reason he bought such a modest house in Sag Harbor was that he wanted to have a place that nobody felt he should invite them to. The apartment was sort of

that way too, very big, on Central Park West. He hardly ever invited anybody there; it looked like my apartment, all filled with boxes. Whereas Marga Barr used to give parties all the time in connection with the Museum. She had lovely cocktail parties and dinner parties and was always promoting the Museum and art. She loved to entertain, too. René, of course, was very close to Nelson. Alfred lost a lot of the trustees that he'd been close to at one time.

SZ: He had lost them by then?

ES: I guess so. Stephen Clark, certainly. Alfred Clark once told me at a party that his father had fired Alfred Barr, and he was very proud of that. But they were extraordinary people, I think, Alfred and René and Monroe.

SZ: You've talked a little bit about René in that way. Talk about Alfred Barr a little bit.

ES: He was absolutely marvelous. To me, very, very, very sweet, very knowledgeable. I learned an awful lot from him. I sat on the collections committee for twenty years, a long time, until I left, and that was the biggest education in the world, Sharon. Can you imagine sitting down for three hours as curators presenting their works...? I saw Alfred a lot outside; we saw him almost every weekend, he'd come to the country with us. Their country house was in Vermont and they couldn't use it except in the summers.

SZ: So they'd come with you?

ES: So they would come to our place for weekends, I guess first to the place in Connecticut and then Dutchess County.

SZ: So you had a real friendship with him.

ES: Yes, very close. My husband was executor of Alfred's will. We used to always

exchange presents. We once gave Marga a case of wine as a Christmas present, and she called me up and said, "I know why you did that, because the wine you had at our house last night for dinner was so terrible." [LAUGHTER] Alfred was extraordinarily knowledgeable, about everything--mushrooms, music, theater. Did you like Good Old Modern, Russell's book?

SZ: Did you?

ES: Yes, I thought it wasn't bad, but I thought the Museum was quite mean about it. We wouldn't even sell it, you know.

SZ: I guess they thought there were a lot of inaccuracies in it, but also, it wasn't authorized.

ES: That's the same old trouble, like the Barr biography, which I thought was terrible. It was not authorized. I complained bitterly to Louis Auchincloss, who's a good friend and who reviewed it favorably for the Times, and he said, "Well, Liz, write your own. You can't refuse to see somebody and then not do a book." Marga told us not to talk to the author.

SZ: So you didn't.

ES: I'm quoted from archive material, which, I must say, upset me somewhat. It sounds as if she talked to me, but she didn't. Eliza [Mrs. Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson Cobb] talked to her; I don't know who else did. Sam didn't and I didn't, and I know a lot of people who did not. Marga asked them not to. Marga had hoped John Russell would do the biography, but I think John found Marga kind of hard to deal with.

SZ: It will not be the only biography of him to be done.

ES: No, but it does stop things for a while, and people are dying. It's too bad. I don't know

what the answer is. The whole thing interests me, the whole question of biography and authorization. The [John] Updike thing right now is interesting, what's going on there.

SZ: At this point, which was after the war, how important a presence was Marga in this whole scenario?

ES: Very important. Marga had an absolutely fierce sense of loyalty, and the people who did not support Alfred during his time of troubles, she really never spoke to again, so her circle had somewhat diminished. New people came in. Leo Steinberg became a friend and supporter, and the [Victor] Ganzes. They knew quite a lot of artists and dealers and other museum people, of course. John McAndrew was a good friend; they were down quite a lot. Who else was there? Monroe wasn't married, Philip wasn't married, Porter wasn't married. Sarah [d'Harnoncourt] was terribly sweet, although she'd been very, very sick at some point after this, so she wasn't doing very much in terms of the Museum. She'd go to the openings. I saw Sarah about two years ago at an opening. She looked marvelous, and she said, "The guard didn't recognize me, so I didn't tell him who I am."

SZ: So what you're saying is that there was a somewhat smaller circle of people who could develop these kinds of family friendships.

ES: Yes. And then the new trustees tended to be much younger. People like Joanne Stern, Lily Auchincloss, Barbara Jakobson; all of them came right out of the Junior Council, really. Beth Straus; Johnny Parkinson, Eliza's son. There began to be another turn of the wheel.

SZ: But Alfred's position, as you said before, had really been restored because he was doing the collection.

ES: Yes. He controlled the core of the place, really. Alfred, as you know, had set up the

place, modeled on his course at Wellesley, and of course those were radical innovations, including film and photography and design. When he was ousted, he wrote a book, in a corner, but he still had some power; Jim Soby sort of kept things going for him, and [James Johnson] Sweeney, in a way. But when he came back into power...

SZ: Because of René.

ES: Yes. When the collections department was formed, that was a very powerful entity. Alfred ran that department, and therefore all the other curatorial departments were subservient to him. Film was somewhat outside, because it takes so long to see a film. Nevertheless, I think Griffith was in awe of Alfred, because, there again, Alfred knew so much, you see, so it was terribly intimidating. He, after all, had been to Russia, he had seen all these Russian films. It goes on and on. Ditto photography. Steichen recognized in Alfred a presence. Of course, [William S.] Lieberman adored him and he was being trained by Alfred all along. I think the younger staff that came in--Bill Seitz, for example; he was very nice, a wonderful man--they all thought Alfred was marvelous. I think Alfred interceded and helped Bill get his doctorate in contemporary art at Princeton, which they'd never done before. And Peter Selz.... People said that Ritchie left because of the Barr-d'Harnoncourt stranglehold on power. Tom Braden told me, "He's going to leave as soon as he finds out that the place is really run by Alfred, that to be head of painting and sculpture at the Modern doesn't mean much if Alfred's head of collections."

SZ: It's like being an underling.

ES: Yes, and he did indeed leave to head his own museum.

SZ: Maybe the last thing for today is do a little bit of the same thing on Monroe Wheeler, and then we can talk about how I think we should go from here. One last thing about

Barr. He's been described in a lot of different ways, but I heard you say before that he was always very sweet to you, and I assume that you were not intimidated by him.

ES: No. I ran into Irving Sandler at a party last night and said, "I miss Alfred anyway, but I wish he were alive because I liked to argue with him." I didn't really mean argue, I realized later, but I meant talk to him much more on an equal basis. I wasn't intimidated, but he was very much the teacher to me. I loved my teachers, I adored them, and I liked that relationship very much. So I didn't resent that. I thought it was great, that I was very lucky, but there's a lot of stuff that's going on now in art that I'd love to talk to him about. He had a very open mind, and there's some things going on politics I'd like to discuss with him.

SZ: Because that was a fun thing to do too?

ES: Anything was fun to talk to him about, just anything.

SZ: He was interested in politics?

ES: Yes. Anything, everything. He was primarily interested in the Museum. You know, he and Marga had a problem with her presents to him. She had a very good eye, and she used to give him lovely things for Christmas. They'd go into Museum collections so fast that he would barely have them for a second, so she began to give him old things, like Roman coins. I think the pair that ended up on Walter Kaiser's shirts, that was one of Marga's devices to keep this stuff in the family. When my father died, Alfred sent me ivy. He was terribly sweet. We saw a great deal of Alfred. At the end, of course, I couldn't go after a while to the nursing place. My husband kept up for a while.

SZ: It was too distressing?

ES: It was just so depressing. He had Alzheimer's disease and he was absolutely a

vegetable. We'd watched the whole decline; in fact, Sam had taken him to the hospital for a last-ditch thing that Marga wanted to do. The decline at the end was just too awful. He started out not so bad. He would have lunch with us; our place was not very far from Noble Horizons, but then it got worse and worse and worse. In the beginning Marga was making sure that he had fresh shirts and the best cufflinks, etcetera, but in the end he was dressed in a smock like child and strapped to a chair, being fed. There was so much more he could have done. Of course, both he and René, it was just awful that they ended up the way they did.

SZ: Of course, the way you describe the seat of power for all those years--it was René and Alfred and Monroe. They all left within a year of each other, too.

ES: Yes. Then that terrible business of the troika.

SZ: Monroe Wheeler--just give me a little bit.

ES: Monroe was marvelous. He had Frances Keech, you know, at his beck and call, always. I remember once I was at the hospital and Monroe sent me two books, at different times, different illnesses. One was Japanese poetry, short poems--haiku. It was very nice, small, beautifully bound in Japanese paper; it was a charming book. Another time he sent me Aubrey's Brief Lives, which I had never read, and I was enchanted, absolutely enchanted. I later made references to Frances Keech about it, and it turned out that he'd bought a box of these things at once, and then he sent them out all the time to friends who were sick. Very sweet of him, I thought. He was very nice. I don't know whether Glenway [Wescott] wrote his own stuff for him or not, but anyway, he did a good job, Monroe. Nothing like what's done now with the books, of course, but, then again, the place was smaller and the world was simpler, I guess. Of course, I never saw him at the d'Harnoncourts', or at the Barrs'. That's one reason my husband and I were very lucky, you see, because we were at all those places. We went to Monroe's for dinner and to the Barrs' all the time, and we used to go

occasionally to the d'Harnoncourts'. Their daughter was just about a year younger than my older daughter, and Sarah used to call up a lot, asking what should her child wear to this or that; should she wear a long dress or short dress, that was the question.

SZ: Do you feel that Monroe had a lot of influence?

ES: Nothing like as much power or influence as d'Harnoncourt or Barr, but I think he was probably quite good behind the scenes in both places, and I'm sure that he would not have allowed the Museum to compromise itself in terms of quality or integrity. [TAPE INTERRUPTION] I don't know whether he ever would have made the publishing empire that it's become now, but he could have done it. He really preferred private presses and small editions and wonderfully creative things. I think he was very proud of those special-edition books that he did for the Museum. He probably would have been crushed in the changeover. I think he missed doing exhibitions, and when he did some for the International Council later, he was delighted to do that, he loved doing that, and he was a very good emissary for the Museum. The International Council was a way to get out of the Barr curatorial things, because it was somewhat separate, and people could do things in those exhibitions that they could not do inside the Museum, on the premises. Monroe was a man of wit and honor, I think, and I liked him. I think he had a very good time, and I think that he probably would not have stretched himself if it was going to interfere with that. He loved his life very much.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **MRS. SAMUEL P. (ELIZABETH) SHAW (ES)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **130 EAST 67TH STREET**
NEW YORK CITY

DATE: **OCTOBER 30, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SZ: We were just talking off-tape a little bit more about Sarah Newmeyer and her departure. She left because of this article in the Saturday Evening Post?

ES: That was my assumption. I never discussed it with anybody, and nobody ever mentioned her to me.

SZ: She died in a fire?

ES: In a fire, yes. There was a fire in Sturbridge Village, in a house. She may have been electrocuted because of the fire, something like that. It was one of those terrible accidents. I never knew her, although I would let her in to the Museum free; they would call upstairs and I would say let her in and she'd go up and have tea with somebody she wanted to impress. And why not? I thought she had done some pretty good things. I was amused, for example, by her getting Mrs. Roosevelt to the Museum for the Whistler's Mother exhibition [Whistler: Portrait of the Artist's Mother, 1934]. She had a lot of gumption, a lot of imagination, and helped get art off the social pages and onto the art pages and onto the news pages, which was important and of course still is. In the panel last night and a week ago at the Met, the Art Dealers Association panels, all they talk about is getting a bigger audience, on and on and on, and how to do it. One way you do it, I do think, is by getting off the society pages and off the art pages.

SZ: When you first became director and for the first number of years, how autonomous were you in what you were doing? How did you interact with René or Alfred?

ES: I reported directly to René, and when René eventually hired an associate director or deputy director, whatever we called him--Jim White, who died the other day--René came in to tell me he was hiring this man. He said he was going to do this and this, "But you are going to remain directly responsible to me," which I think is the best way to handle the public information office. I think it's a mistake to have layers of bureaucracy between the people who are running the place. I think it should be like the press secretary to the president, it should be directly responsible to the president and that's it, because of the peculiar set-up of the Museum. There was Monroe with his particular area of responsibility and authority and Alfred with his area. It was a very strange place, but I think as I said the other day, Sam and I became very, very close to Alfred and Marga Barr and saw them all the time outside the Museum, and I saw Alfred, of course, inside the Museum all the time. Alfred put me on all those committees, [on] which Jean Collins, my successor, was not. It was a very important thing to do, I think, in terms of how the place operated.

SZ: So that you always knew everything.

ES: Everything, that's right. I was on the exhibitions committee, the collections committee--all those things. I would never vote, I just sat there, but I learned a tremendous amount and I knew a lot, which meant, therefore, that when I talked to the press, they knew that I knew a lot about what was going on. It didn't mean that influenced these people enormously, because I really didn't, but curators began to try ideas and at lunch we would discuss ideas for shows sometimes years before they were going to happen, so I got to know a lot about that. It was very important, I think, to making the place run well.

SZ: And that was Alfred's view of how it should work?

ES: Alfred's view and René's view. Monroe simply became a friend, I don't know really quite how; I liked him and I think he liked me. I liked books [too], and we had a good time. I respected Monroe, and Glenway. We used to go there for dinner, my husband and I. So it was a much smaller place when I was there, and the department had a different kind of role.

SZ: How much institutional p.r. did you do versus p.r. that was tied directly to shows, do you think, and did that ratio change over the years?

ES: I remember once that [Richard E.] Oldenburg asked me if I could do less with some of the small shows. He said, "This is silly, you're spending too much time on this." Then he said, because he's no fool, you know, "I suppose it's very hard to say to a curator that's a small show, I won't touch it." You can't do that, <u>if</u> you're going to keep any credibility <u>within</u> the organization. I did a lot of stuff, mostly that René asked me to do, that had nothing to do with the press at all, such as establishing the Children's [Art] Carnival in Harlem, meeting with women artists who were mad at the Museum because they weren't being shown--they were mad at all museums because they weren't being shown, they thought, enough--meeting with artists' groups generally, the Art Workers Coalition and all those groups.

SZ: This is all in the late '60s?

ES: Yes. And the blacks--well, the whole carnival thing was of course black, we put that in Harlem. I thought it was interesting that René, who was Austrian, asked me, who was totally Southern in background, to do this, and it worked, I loved it and I think we did a very good job on it, but I was surprised. I don't know whether he knew that I was totally Southern or not. Anyway, it worked. I gave a course at the Fogg [Museum of Art]. There were various things that were done that were outside the limited thing with the

press, but I always thought the press thing was terribly important.

SZ: Tell me about some of the emergencies you had to deal with. I'm thinking particularly of the fire and how that all unraveled, then anything else. Where were you when the fire started?

ES: I was in my office, and I got out through the Whitney. The elevator wasn't working; we pressed the button and nothing happened, but by that time there was a corridor to the Whitney and we went over there, a lot of us did, and got out that way. Not a very dramatic escape, frankly, nothing like Alfred's and the people who were with him in the other building, in the Prentice building. So we got out on 54th Street and walked around to 53rd Street and found that there was a chain of people taking pictures out of the building, which I joined, I think most of us did. After a while, René sent everybody home, but he asked me to stay because the press was hanging around, naturally. The head of the Art Institute of Chicago flew in, nervously, and he was reassured. We moved everything into the Whitney and the Seurat was there, everything was there. Everything was okay; we lost, as you know, from our own collection the [Candido] Portinari. Arthur Drexler had heard somebody say that it had been swept up in debris and taken away. I think René went to the dump to try to find it. Nelson [Rockefeller], of course, was running around with his fireman's cap on. It was awful when they broke the glass. I'll never forget that, it was terribly scary. The firemen broke the glass on the 53rd Street façade, then they put ladders up to rescue people who were in the penthouse, because the smoke was scaring people. They brought down a couple of women on those ladders, over their shoulders. That would have scared me more than anything, to have that happen. The firemen were very good. The first people I saw inside the burning building was an insurance man, who had come in to put rubber sheets over some sculptures. Then there was a Times reporter who was frankly driving me crazy. She wanted a history of the Museum at that moment, and I thought that was not exactly appropriate. A lot of friends came. Aline Saarinen, who was a critic for the Times, came around to say how sorry she was. My husband came around. We

began to get telegrams from all over the world, of course. René was exhausted, and he was upset because the papers made a lot of the fact that a workman was killed. René was upset. He said that a thousand people got out safely, why...? Well, that's natural, it's what the news does.

SZ: But there wasn't much you could do about that.

ES: No, not a thing. The stories eventually got better again. We saved so much, so little damage had been done, and the Museum was very good about the man who was killed, I do think. Nelson took the lead in that, as I recall. He was absolutely marvelous, rushing assurances to the family and so forth. He was new on the job and couldn't get out of the building. We closed for a few weeks and then we reopened. It was a gesture that René thought up--as I recall, it was René--to indicate that we were okay and strong. We had the rest of the [Georges] Seurat show and then we closed again and remodeled and pulled ourselves together. But I thought everybody behaved very well that day, very well. I think a lot of us were scared. I had never been in a big fire before. It's a terribly scary thing, terribly scary.

SZ: Was the fact that the Portinari was disposed of, was that something that came out in the press?

ES: I don't remember. It was not the most important picture in the collection. Portinari was then, and still is, alive. The [Umberto] Boccioni was damaged, but Boccioni was dead, so Jean Volkmer [the Museum's conservator] fixed it up.

SZ: But as a public relations challenge?

ES: René never asked me, and I assume he would not have anyway, to dissemble. We'd had a tragedy, we'd had a terrible thing happen, and all we did was to tell people why it happened and we were obviously terribly, terribly, terribly sorry, but we didn't try to

blame anybody, except ourselves, nor did we beat our breasts or heads very hard because I think it was an understandable mistake. We probably should not have been under construction and open to the public. I'm told that buildings under construction have millions and millions of tiny fires, it happens all the time and it's just taken for granted. The terrible thing here is that we did have the public there. The air ducts were open and the smoke went through the whole building, which terrified everybody.

SZ: In any event, none of the public was injured.

ES: No, just one workman was injured, which was a tragedy, no question about that, and four pictures were destroyed. There was absolutely no attempt to justify or to cover up or to say it wasn't our fault. We assumed that a workman had dropped a cigarette, but it was more complicated than that. So one workman dropped a cigarette; that was not the Museum's fault. On the other hand, maybe we should have had more fire extinguishers or.... I don't know. But we never said it wasn't our fault, so I was never put in the spot of having to justify something.

SZ: Any other emergencies like that that you had to manage?

ES: There was that theft of the van Gogh, which was distressing, and it was distressing partly because both René and Alfred tried to cover it up in the sense that they didn't give the police the name of the Museum; they just gave their own names, which of course was ridiculous.

SZ: Tell me a little bit more about that story.

ES: It was a van Gogh print called Sorrow, and it was taken from the Museum.

SZ: Somebody just walked in and took it?

ES: Yes, they took it off the wall. So d'Harnoncourt and Barr conferred--secretly, I might say; they certainly didn't speak to me--and they reported the theft to the police, which is what you're supposed to do. Not every museum does that, you understand, but they did do it and they did it right away. They were very proper, except they didn't say they were from the Museum; they just said they were from 11 West 53rd, or they gave a home address, some nonsense like that, which took about two seconds to uncover, and then the phone began to ring. It was quite apparent we'd had a theft and they were shame-faced and admitted it, yes, indeed, we'd had a theft. I think about two days later it was returned. There used to be a man selling ice cream outside the front door, and he had it; it was left by his cart. René got a phone call and flew down to the lobby and retrieved this thing.

SZ: Generally, in a situation like that, what would your instinct be?

ES: My instinct would have been to tell everybody everything, because a) I thought the Museum was unassailable, you understand, that I could tell anything and there was nothing bad enough to hurt the Museum--maybe occasional mistakes in judgment, but nothing bad, nothing wicked, nothing wrong. Therefore, honesty was the best policy and we should be very upright and out-front and out-spoken, which is what Alfred wanted to be, really, and so did René, although both had a reputation for being quite devious in certain ways, but they really weren't when you got down to the bottom line, at least in terms of dealing with the press and, I think, with the trustees and their staff they were not devious.

SZ: In this instance, which do you think they were afraid of?

ES: Always, every museum in the world is afraid that if you publicize a theft, you give the idea to the next guy. If they realize how easy it is to do it, they'll do it. That's the trouble. So that's why museums are very cagey about art thefts. They don't want to publicize how it happened or when it happened, which gives an indication of how it could

happen. Then you get involved with when the guards go through the galleries and who knows what.... Those things, I suspect, in most institutions tend to get a little sloppy over the years, and routinized.

SZ: Do you think that was the case here?

ES: It may have been. I don't really know. As I recall, it was in sort of a corridor. Heaven knows.

SZ: Any others?

ES: We were talking about the rivalry between Barr and d'Harnoncourt. One summer, René was abroad and Alfred was the senior staff person around, and I heard from the press that there was a rumor that René had resigned. I rushed out and said, "My God, what do we say, what do we do?" Alfred said, "René would never do that to the Museum. Just say that." Which was wonderful. It was quite true. René would never for a minute have done that to the Museum, but it put it in a wonderful way, I thought. I later told René that story and he was terribly touched.

SZ: I think we did talk a little bit about that relationship before, although I would certainly be happy to talk about it more.

ES: They were a funny pair. I think they respected each other quite a lot, actually, although they used to get mad at each other. They were very different temperamentally. A lot of professional respect, as it were. René had a story about their trip to Russia. René and Alfred and Bill Burden went. They were trying to get some major loans of Russian pictures for a show at the Modern, which they didn't get. They had a pretty good time, I think, and saw a lot. Alfred had been there before; he was there in the '20s. I'm not sure René had ever been, although René had been a lot of places, and Burden had been our ambassador. They'd been around, those guys. But at one point, apparently,

the Russians brought out what René said was a really ghastly landscape painting to be admired by the three of them. They were trying to borrow [Henri] Matisse and stuff like that, and it was your standard social realist landscape, and René said he didn't know what to say, and then Alfred said, "Oh, what is that bird? I didn't know that bird went that far south." Alfred was, of course, a great birdwatcher, and this was just wonderful, René said. They began talking about that and all the awkwardness left. Nobody wanted to be rude to the Russians; they were trying to get along. Alfred got along very well with the Russians actually. Hilton Kramer went over for the Times. There was some great celebration of Russian history; I forget what anniversary it was. Hilton and Alfred and I had tea before Hilton left because Hilton wanted some pointers from Alfred. Alfred gave him names of people to call and see. Hilton had a fairly limited, maybe a ten-day or two-week visa, and he used to stop in the museum every day to try to see the curator and see the [Kasimir] Maleviches and the other stuff that was not on view, and they always said that the curator was out of town. As his visit drew to a close, he went one last time and he said, "I'm terribly sorry, I have to go back to New York, but, really, Alfred Barr is going to be very disappointed." The woman said, "Who?" He said, "Alfred Barr. I bring his greetings to your curator." "Just a minute," she said. "He's just returned." Hilton thought that was wonderful. He was very pleased. But then the time the Guernica was vandalized--there were crises like that, sure.

SZ: That must have been a touchy one.

ES: It was very touchy, but Jean Volkmer was wonderful, you know, absolutely marvelous. She was lunching at the Museum with a conservator from the Brooklyn Museum [Sue Sack] and somebody went and got her right away, and her friend, her colleague, and according to Jean, they just grabbed bottles and rushed down to the gallery. Jean said the first thing she tried worked. I came back from lunch, and as I came in, my friends from the press were racing through the lobby, saying, "Sorry, Liz, that we come only at times like this." I said, "What are you talking about?" So I went up to the gallery and there was Jean working away.

SZ: And the press was watching this?

ES: Yes, but the guy, [Tony] Shafrazzi, had called the press, because it was, theoretically, a protest.

SZ: I understand nothing happened to him.

ES: The judge let him off--said it wasn't important, as I remember--which really bothered me a lot, because I think vandalism is important. I've never wanted to go to his gallery. I've never been to his gallery, although I understand he's very successful.

SZ: You have, clearly, some special relationships with press people, critics--for instance, Hilton Kramer.

ES: A lot of press people were really very close friends. Aline Saarinen was one of my closest friends. Bobby Baker and his wife were very close friends; he was the art editor at Time. Archer Speers and his wife at Newsweek, Tom Hess...there were a lot of people, yes. I enjoyed them very much--I like writers.

SZ: How did you establish those relationships, and keep them?

ES: I guess I just liked them, Sharon. I liked the people, I read, I was interested in the problem of how do you write art criticism, how do you convey something? I got along with them pretty well. John Canaday, whom I didn't always agree with, but I got along with him. Even Emily Genauer. I didn't know [Henry] McBride because he was just about leaving when I came on, but I saw him in action a few times and I thought he was wonderful. Clem Greenberg I knew pretty well.

SZ: Were there any critics who were fairly regularly hostile to the Museum?

ES: Emily was, pretty much, and John was.

SZ: That was a problem for a while, wasn't it?

ES: It really was.

SZ: Tell me about that.

ES: I used to work for the Times, you know. Lester Markel called me up one day and asked me to come over to the Times to discuss this problem.

SZ: Who did, did you say?

ES: Lester Markel. He was editor of the Sunday page.

SZ: To discuss it because...? What had come before that?

ES: John was refusing to go to the Museum to cover anything, and Markel couldn't have that.

SZ: Why was he refusing?

ES: Because he hated the Museum so. I don't know what had happened, but he hated us. I don't know what it was. I always thought that he didn't like New York, as a matter of fact, that that was part of the problem.

SZ: So he was actually not coming to review any of the exhibitions?

ES: He told Markel he didn't want to review any Museum exhibitions, and Markel, quite

rightly, was....

SZ: He [Canaday] was chief critic at the time, wasn't he?

ES: Yes, that's right. So Markel was really trying to find out from me what had happened, if I knew what had happened, because I had worked for the Times and I did know and love the Times and he knew that. I was the only person he knew at the Museum. I had gone from the Times to the Museum. So we had sort of a spar, and I said I didn't know really what was going on, I didn't know why Canaday was so mad. I certainly was not keeping him from coming to the Museum; he and I spoke.

SZ: But did you have a lunch relationship with him the way you might have had with others?

ES: Oh, yes. He inscribed one of his books to me, which almost destroyed d'Harnoncourt; he was very nervous about that. I said John had inscribed the book and René thought I meant dedicated it in print, "To Liz Shaw." But John did fight a lot with the Museum. He didn't really like modern art very much, I don't think. When he was getting on the Met for deaccessioning, he said, "Don't worry, Liz, I don't give a damn what you get rid of." So.

SZ: How did that get resolved?

ES: He came back to covering the Museum.

SZ: Because he was pressured bay the Times to do that?

ES: Yes, he had to. Eventually, he was made restaurant critic. He took me to Lutece one day. He had a sick child, you know, mentally sick, institutionalized, which must have been very difficult.

SZ: Then Hilton Kramer took his place, right?

ES: It got all mixed up there. Hilton was head critic for a while. Grace [Glueck] was up and down, several times. Hilton once said that he was promoted and he hated it. "It reminded me of something terrible and I didn't know what it was, and then I recalled that years before, when I was in high school or college, I had a job one Christmas in the post office. That's what this job is like." I really forget when John Russell came in.... Hilton worked for Arts and then he went to the Times. John Russell worked for the London Times, and then he came over to New York. Grace had worked for [another publication], and then she was moved into, first, an art column.

SZ: What about that column? Grace was always interested in a good story.

ES: I like Grace very much. I still see her, I like her a lot. She's left [the Times], as you know. I never knew Grace to do anything underhanded, ever.

SZ: Didn't she break a story...? She was on the Bates Lowry story, I know that.

ES: I don't know, she could have been. It was one of the worst-kept secrets in the entire world. That was handled oddly by the Museum, I do think. I don't know how they could have done it better, but there must have been a better way to do that than was done.

SZ: In what sense? What was done?

ES: Bates was fired, and I was sent to England, which was kind of insane, you know.

SZ: While that was going on?

ES: Just before he was fired, I was sent to England so that I would not be available to the

press, except that I was sent to England with the International Council, where I was very much available to the press. I couldn't get anybody to talk about the International Council program; all they wanted to talk about was Bates Lowry. Bates Lowry called me up every single night at two o'clock in the morning to complain bitterly. Then I would call [Bill] Paley...oh, it was just a terrible mess, just an awful mess. Bates would call and say he was going to get us all. He was very upset, it was late--it was two o'clock my time, what time was his?--I don't know, but it was ghastly.

SZ: He was telling you that he was going to get the Museum in the press?

ES: Yes. Everybody. He was going to get us all, sliced and diced. He was calling me as part of the Museum establishment, that's all. He was going to tell the press a lot, he was going to expose us to a lot of scandal. Which he never did, and I'm not sure he ever would have. I think he was terribly, terribly upset. I'm not sure enough was done to protect his feelings during that very bad time. He had two young children, and it was very tough; they were reading stuff in the papers, and that's hard, I think. I never thought Bates was terribly good.

SZ: I was going to ask if you saw it coming.

ES: I didn't think he was very good. I don't know why he was hired. In that sense I fault the trustees, and d'Harnoncourt and Barr and the rest of them, for hiring Bates and for hiring John Hightower. Both, I think, were not qualified, and it was very hard on both of them to have that job and then lose it. It was very public, and it was a shame.

SZ: Somebody said it was the staff that did Bates Lowry in. Do you think that's a correct assessment?

ES: No, I don't. It was the trustees. I don't think the staff liked him a tremendous amount; he didn't give very much leadership. I don't know if you've heard anything about it, but he

once fired somebody in front of me and I thought it was the worst thing I'd ever seen in my whole life--in front of a lot of us, not just me. It was just awful. It was like, well, all I can think of is public execution. I just hated it.

SZ: In a fit of pique?

ES: No, he was very self-righteous. By that time, he was so mixed up himself that he didn't.... He'd made a lot of demands and he'd gotten a lot of concessions before he came on board, but he wasn't very well qualified; he didn't have enough experience for that job. The "Save Venice" thing [the Committee for the Rescue of Italian Art] was a nice thing to do, but I don't think it qualified him to be part of a multidepartmental museum with an international reputation and a board of trustees that had been involved with art before Bates was born, practically. That's very tough. But they were very strange about their hiring of a director. Well, they were not used to it; they'd never done it particularly. They hired d'Harnoncourt very slowly over about a three-year period, and he'd already worked for Nelson for years. I saw the resumé that John Hightower submitted, and it was a perfectly honest and totally inadequate resumé. John didn't try to make himself any more than he was. It was just absolutely what he was like. It said exactly what he did, what he thought, what he believed in, and for those same reasons they fired him a year later. I mean, this is just insane. You don't hire somebody and then...it's not fair. Both Bates and John are perfectly decent people. I think Bates has probably fallen on his feet in Washington, where, I gather, he's doing a good job. John's had a harder time, I think. His wife divorced him; he's remarried. The [South Street] Seaport job didn't really work, I guess, and he's had some kind of consultant, exhibition work, now in Connecticut.

SZ: Anything else about Grace Glueck? Any stories you can remember?

ES: Grace is really more of a reporter than a critic, so she would report on things we did. She covered the strike, for example, and I think perfectly honestly. As far as I know,

nobody complained about her coverage. There were some bitter elements in the strike and it was irritating for a lot of people, on both sides. I, myself, went to work every day, crossed the picket line four or five times a day. I guess Blanchette--did I tell you about the coal miners' business and Jay [Rockefeller]? Blanchette was interviewed by Grace, and Blanchette said she didn't approve of the way that strikers were behaving on the picket line, they were screaming--which they were; they were really like kids. Anyway, Blanchette said, "They're as bad as miners." She stopped in my office the next morning, very early, and said she'd already gotten a call from her son Jay, who was governor of West Virginia [LAUGHING]. "Mother, please, don't speak of miners that way." She said, "You know, Liz, it never occurred to me." But Grace covered the recent threatened strike. It was a minor story that was never overblown; it was a sort of small news story as it went along, and then an agreement was reached and there was no strike.

SZ: Since we're talking about this, let me ask you, having come to the Museum a long time before these things popped up during all this unrest, but how did you feel then about the establishment of the professional union [PASTA/MoMA]?

ES: I was sort of against it. Some of us thought that a staff association of the entire staff would have been a good thing. We didn't like the division between department heads and associate curators--that was the dividing line. Some of us really tried to be part of this movement and felt that we were rejected.

SZ: Was that your personal feeling?

ES: Yes. I felt the entire staff association, i.e., company union, would not be a bad thing. I thought that The Museum of Modern Art was never going to have a strong, decent union. It seemed to me that unions worked best in industrial situations. I had belonged to the Newspaper Guild. I was the only person on the staff who had ever belonged to a union. I belonged to one when I worked for the Times. It was not very effective there; a

pretty good salary, but that's about it. At the Museum they wanted a say in policy, that was the big fighting cry, and I thought that that was just never going to happen, and I wasn't sure it should, actually. I thought better communications within the staff would be very worthwhile, but I thought that the assistant and associate curators were never going to get a big say in trustee deliberations. So it seemed to me a waste of energy. I also didn't like the parent union, the Building Services union, whatever it is.

SZ: It's part of the Teamsters, I think.

ES: I don't know. There are four or five unions in the Museum now.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2

ES: There were salary problems, certainly, there were inequalities and the structure of communication and discussion and input inside the Museum was very rocky at best, and had been. The strike happened when John was director. I was in Ireland and he called me up and asked me to come back, which I did.

SZ: That was the first strike.

ES: It would not be fair to say that all the troubles came after d'Harnoncourt and Barr left, because the Museum was picketed by artists and there were lots of problems.

SZ: You mean all along the way.

ES: Yes, lots of controversy. The very second show, which I happened to read the clippings of recently because it was re-created by a gallery downtown, was widely panned. It was considered a joke and a terrible show, etcetera, etcetera.

SZ: The second show held at the Museum?

ES: Yes. The first was the four masters show [Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat and van Gogh, 1929], the second was Americans [Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans, 1929]. Somebody said, "Why is [Lyonel] Feininger in there, for heaven's sake?" It was just awful. I hated it. I was interested in the reason it was re-created, because it was such a failure, this show. Some gallery re-created it and didn't say it had been a failure, they just re-created it. But the Museum has always had some controversy, which is to be expected, I think. The Joe Milone shoe-shine stand.... There's been stuff all along. I think it's generally had a very dedicated staff, and that was sort of a blow, I suppose, to the trustees and to such older staff as was still there.

SZ: A change was occurring, I think. You had people who were working there who were depending on their wages for their livelihood, which, to a great degree, had not been the case, certainly, until after the war.

ES: When I was hired, I was told by somebody, one of those guys, that of course I should not expect to make a living wage. I remember one day I had gotten some small raise, and I went to complain about it to Keppel, who was then the treasurer, and on my way I ripped my stocking, and I said, "Look, Charlie, my entire raise is gone, because I ripped my stocking coming in here." The museum world is a lot of women, you know, and they get less money, we get less money; we have traditionally--should not, but have--and it has been considered a place for dilettantes, people with money.

SZ: In terms of an esprit de corps, what effect do you think the formation of the union had? You certainly saw if for a few years after that all came about.

ES: In my department, absolutely none. I would say in photography, none; architecture and design, none; painting and sculpture, some. Painting and sculpture, I guess, would be

the area that I would say was the most affected by this, where you had some extremely bright people who were really totally frustrated and continued to be angry. Also, that department had a very rough time itself, with a lot of splits, the whole Lieberman fight, whereas the others were going along on a much more even keel.

SZ: But, as you said, one of the effects it did have was that it put somewhat of a wall between the highest manager in a department and his or her staff.

ES: It really did. I don't know how it works now. A lot of us had staff meetings regularly; not desperately formal, but regular meetings where people could talk and exchange ideas and points of view. There used to be a regular department head meeting once a week. I guess that has fallen apart, because I remember Drexler telling me that he was fighting bitterly with Oldenburg to get some thing set up where they could discuss programs. That's when Riva Castleman was appointed deputy director, for this [reason]. Arthur was very pleased at the time, and I guess that's worked out well. There was a period where Dick was meeting with the junior staff to discuss things, because of the various union agreements, which is kind of insane in the sense that he was not meeting with his senior staff.

SZ: When this all came about, was Alfred aware of this, was he still lucid in that regard? What I'm asking you is did he ever say anything to you about that?

ES: The strike?

SZ: And the formation of a union, yes.

ES: No, we ever discussed it. How funny.

SZ: I wonder what you think he....

ES: What would he have thought?

SZ: Yes.

ES: My guess is that he and I would have thought alike about that. When he ran the place, and the parts that he continued to run, there was a pretty lucid committee structure. D'Harnoncourt did even more, I think, with it, but there was a very good committee structure when Alfred ran the collections, and it worked. Then it got too big and then it was split up, so every department had its own. Then you missed the whole point. But you have to have somebody like Alfred as the head of it who can handle a discussion of prints <u>and</u> drawings <u>and</u> photographs <u>and</u> paintings <u>and</u> sculpture, and there wasn't anybody like that, really, who could do it. Each department set up their own trustee committee, their own regular monthly meetings and, theoretically, the director goes to all these things, if he can stand it, and that's pretty hard on him. It's more than one a week. If you pay attention, it's quite exhausting--fascinating, but exhausting.

SZ: Do you think the strikes would have happened had René still been director, or that the union would have been formed? I realize those are two separate questions.

ES: I don't know. There was a lot of unrest in the art world that was certainly spilling over into the museum world when René was still director. René tended to temporize and compromise and talk people out of things. He was a great believer in that. I'm not sure he could have done it with a big, organized group. He worked well on a one-to-one basis. Again, it was simple for a small museum, but not for a big one. One of his ideas was to regularly lunch or dine with each of the department heads, on a one-to-one basis. My gosh, you know, that's a hard way to run a place; if it's big, it's really very hard. René had no office himself; he was the director, and he appointed a deputy director, an associate director, Ted, and he worried about it every minute of the day. Now, Dick has this enormous structure under him, that's between him and the curators, really. So it's a whole different ball game. As you know, some museums have

split, with a curatorial head and an administrative head or a financial head.

SZ: Maybe we should go back to doing things a little bit chronologically, although it just kind of comes the way it comes. As Russell Lynes called them, the "Young Turks," the whole issue of what happened up in Maine [the meeting in 1959 at the Burden residence, of which the International Program was the focus] and how that evolved--I know that you were there and that you were one who played a part in it, so it would be interesting to me to hear the story from you.

ES: Maybe that's a good example of how René would handle a crisis, because that was a crisis on his own staff. We didn't ever talk about forming a union, but we wanted a lot more input and a lot more say, we wanted to be listened to more.

SZ: That was the basis of the crisis?

ES: Yes.

SZ: Had things happened that made you feel that that wasn't happening?

ES: One thing that was happening was the separate drive of the International Program, the international department, which was almost becoming a parallel museum, some of us thought, with its own bunch of curators--this is under Porter McCray--in every field. I remember a show of architecture that Drexler was sort of stunned to see happen because he had nothing to do with it. That becomes difficult, professionally and intellectually and emotionally.

SZ: And with you?

ES: I was supposed to work on the traveling stuff and on the international stuff, and I traveled sometimes with the Council, but it was becoming sort of a separate entity.

SZ: You had somebody else doing that?

ES: No, I did it when I could, but it was much too much to do, really. Arthur, let's say, could not have possibly produced exhibitions for Porter without an additional staff, but Porter was raising his own money through the International Council, and they didn't want to give it to Arthur, they wanted to keep it to themselves. It happens all the time.

SZ: So the overall effect, which really fueled the crisis, was what?

ES: As I recall, we felt that these two museums were building up and none of us had anything to say about either of them, or we were getting to say less and less. I think it was René who dreamed up this idea that the department heads would all go up to Maine for four days and stay with the Burdens and get a touch of the high life--and it was, it was very nice--and see the Rockefellers, David and his wife, and Nelson was there; they all live right there.

SZ: It wasn't to go and hash it out?

ES: Yes, it was to go and hash it out. We had big picnics at lunchtime and dinners, but mornings and afternoons, as I recall, were both...I have some photographs, which I should find....

SZ: Who was there, as you remember?

ES: René, Peggy Burden; her grandchildren, who were crawling all over their grandmother; Arthur; Porter. Emily Stone must have been there. John must have been there.

SZ: John?

ES: Szarkowski. Have you talked to him yet?

SZ: He wasn't there then.

ES: He wasn't?

SZ: No, Steichen was still there. Was Steichen there?

ES: I don't remember. I can't imagine Steichen in that setting.

SZ: Were Seitz and Selz there?

ES: I don't remember, no. It was Ritchie. It was before John; John was there [at the Museum] thirty-five years. When was this thing?

SZ: It was in 1959, and John didn't come until 1962. Ritchie was gone; Ritchie left in '56.

ES: In '56, did he really?

SZ: Yes.

ES: Then we must have had Seitz and Selz. Alfred was there.

SZ: What was Alfred's opinion of what was evolving?

ES: I really don't know. I don't think we talked about it. My impression was that he was on the sidelines, that this was very much René's show.

SZ: Then whatever Porter was doing, that was really out of Alfred's control too.

ES: Sure. Alfred was theoretically director of collections, and that was what he was supposed to be doing, worrying about what was being taken into the Museum collections and what was going out. Certain traveling shows, which Porter had done originally, didn't use a lot of original works; they used a lot of photopanels and stuff like that. Later, the International Council got very involved in major painting and sculpture shows and they borrowed a lot of stuff from the collection. But that was generally done by, let's say, Lieberman or Monroe, somebody on the staff rather than a new employee.

SZ: So finish telling me about this weekend in Maine.

ES: The water was very cold; we went swimming. It was very lavish. The Burdens had quail flown in from Scotland. We talked and we talked and we talked, and it was a very therapeutic session for everybody involved. I'm not sure we solved anything. I think probably that some of the uneasiness about the double thing was eased a lot. I think René listened very carefully, and he understood that was real worry on the part of a lot of his staff. I forget exactly what he did later, but I'm sure he did something. He probably started some new committees.

SZ: And what about Porter's reaction to it? I think it was Russell Lynes who said that he was attacked, openly.

ES: I don't know. Porter, of course, left the Museum a while ago, and I could never tell whether he was anti-Museum or anti-Rockefellers. He seemed to be a little bit of each.

SZ: Did something change as a result of this meeting?

ES: I don't recall any specific thing that came about because of this meeting. I do recall there was an easing of tensions and that things got better. I, myself, could discern

René's fine hand in this, because this is what he was best at in a lot of ways, in figuring things out, calming down, propping up this person here and this person there, and a lot of it behind the scenes. René was a great believer in the perception of reality, what you thought was reality was important. He once did a great chart, it was hammered out at some long meeting, a huge chart which hung behind his desk in his office. It was out of date, obviously, after about a month. It was shows, horizontally and vertically, and it gave you a good idea of what was being shown in every department at the same time, which was a perfectly sensible thing to do. In fact, the new head of the Walker talked about this at the Met, as if she'd invented this. But that's alright; people reinvent the wheel all the time, it's fine. But that's what René did. Furthermore, René didn't change it. He said it didn't matter; it was the idea that was important, that there was an attempt to balance the program both ways. So this out-of-date chart hung there for years, but it was a symbol.

SZ: And Porter's departure?

ES: He went to work for the JDR Fund.

SZ: What would you say about the International Program's relation to the Museum after Porter left? How would you compare it?

ES: In a lot of ways it became more integrated with the curatorial staff and the regular curatorial staff did more of the shows. It was no longer such a separate thing. The International Council continued to have an office that was separate, but they didn't have parallel things with the Museum. It was for fifteen years run by Joanne Stern, a trustee, who was very careful about the sensibilities of everybody, and very good about it, very smart. Then, during the last rebuilding, the Council was really spun off, blocks away. I was really surprised it was so far away, the Council offices. It became more and more concerned with raising money and dreaming up ways to make those annual meetings exciting so those people would continue to give money. The Program

became more and more the domain of a pro on the staff, which was Waldo Rasmussen, in consultation with the curators and Museum staff.

SZ: Maybe the last thing I'll ask you about today is, I guess shortly after the fire, the thirtieth-anniversary drive was undertaken. It was a twenty-five-million-dollar campaign, which I guess at that time was a huge amount. Then, leading up to the expansion, whatever you remember about that. Did you have a lot of interaction with the [expansion] committee? Did you write their literature for them?

ES: Not their literature, no. I handled the press for public activities for them. The fund drives for the Modern in those days were really so heavily supported by the Rockefellers, that it was important to broaden the base of support and get other people in. It wasn't nearly as tough as it's going to be ten years from now, I would say, because I don't think the younger generation of the Rockefellers is as interested as the brothers were, who were very interested and committed. Even though there were other interests, medicine or something else, they were still a part of it. Their mother [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller] had been a founder, you see; that was terribly important, and that's all gone. So., I don't know if the Museum can pull off this next fund drive that they're talking about.

SZ: How did you handle the opening, that 1964 opening, where you had the First Lady [Lady Bird Johnson] there.

ES: That was marvelous. Did I tell the story about Bill Paley and that opening? One day René stopped by and said that Paley had called and he wanted us to come over to his office, which was just across the street. René said, "I think it's probably about television coverage for the opening, so I want you to come with me." I didn't think it was about that, but, anyway, I was happy to see Paley. We got there and Paley said, "I've been thinking about our plans for the reopening and I think a lot of it is just great. We have the First Lady coming, we have this and we have that. But we forgot one thing:

we forgot the artists." And we had. This elaborate committee, with a lot of staffing, and we just totally forgot. I think it was just brilliant of Paley to bring this up. So something was inserted in the program and we invited a whole lot of artists. It was a great evening, I thought, and it worked very well. It was nice that we'd gotten the Whitney building. That was very touch-and-go. Alfred thought we'd never get it; he thought the Whitneys were too proud, they'd never sell it to us. But René was more confident; he thought they might, and they did. I came back one day to the Museum from lunch, and I knew that Mrs. Roosevelt, who was the [widow] of our President, was coming to the Museum. I came back and the guards said, "She's in the Whitney." I said, "She's supposed to be in our Museum, being photographed by McCall's." So I rushed in, and I figured that she'd met so many people that she would never know, so I said, "Mrs. Roosevelt, how nice to see you again." She said, "How do you do, nice to see you." I said, "I thought you were going to be in our Museum, in the Modern." She said, "Aren't I?" You really couldn't tell, because they just flowed together, those buildings. The Whitney had built theirs after ours. But it was a great break to get it.

SZ: So you took her from there?

ES: I took her to be photographed, then I took her to the Picasso show, which happened to be on view. She was absolutely fascinated. She liked all the very tough things, all the hard things. I was interested. Later, I had the great pleasure of telling young Franklin--he was older than I--but he didn't know about this visit and he adored his mother, so he loved to hear about it. It was fun.

SZ: She liked all the Cubist stuff?

ES: No, things that were very hard, like the Picasso Guitar with nails sticking out. She thought that was very interesting.

SZ: Did you have a lot of dealings with Paley?

ES: Yes. Paley was very, very active. He was chairman of the board for a lot of the time. Of course, he loved art, and he was around a lot. Arthur Tortellot told me that after Babe [Barbara Paley] died that he would have liked to have been around much more, if we'd asked him. I don't know how well Dick ever knew him, actually. Paley was a great showman and he liked a lot of aspects of the Museum. He was interested in all the things we did, I think. His daughter Hilary's just been made a trustee.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **MRS. SAMUEL P. (ELIZABETH) SHAW (ES)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **130 EAST 67TH STREET NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: **NOVEMBER 5, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SZ: I want to ask you if you want to repeat what you just told me off-tape, which is interesting. I think I used the term "Young Turks" last time, which I think Russell Lynes had also used.

ES: Did Russell use it?

SZ: Yes, but it was in quotes.

ES: I think Alfred was the first one to use the phrase "Young Turks" to describe the staff members who were concerned about the internal organization of the place. I will look for those photographs, by the way.

SZ: You told me a little bit about your friendship with Alfred Barr. Did that mean you had a fairly direct line of communication with him in all these daily occurrences?

ES: Yes, I saw a great deal of him.

SZ: Overall, did you have a sense of who was in charge?

ES: I thought it was really a triumvirate. There had been Monroe in publications, which is a

very important part of the place. D'Harnoncourt was the top administrator, and with an enormous influence because of personality and training and background; he was one of the great installers of all time, and everybody on the staff admired him for that. He was one of the great exhibition installers, and very generous in helping younger colleagues. I think I mentioned that he used to go down at six o'clock at night, when most people had left, when the guards had left, if a new staff member was installing, say, his first major show, d'Harnoncourt would wander down at six o'clock and casually make a few suggestions. Nobody was there to see that this was happening. The curator didn't feel he was being upstaged or being told what to do. He made it better, he always did, and the curator got the credit, which was okay with René. Barr was, in a way, the spiritual head--the Father, Son and Holy Ghost is what my husband Sam used to call him. Alfred had been the founding director, and he knew all the history, had been through a lot of the stuff before, because there were recurring problems with artists, with the public, with trustees and with the staff. Then there were other people with varying degrees of authority within the place, Ritchie, for example, who was head of painting and sculpture for a long time; not terribly long, I guess, but for a while. Somebody once said, "Ritchie will leave the minute he discovers how little power he has," because those three did dominate. They had a lot of influence with the trustees, Monroe less than the other two, but, nevertheless, he played a very important role.

SZ: And the power of the trustees within that mix?

ES: It was primarily the Rockefellers, of course, but Paley was always very powerful and very involved. Henry Allen Moe was a force.

SZ: He's someone that is not mentioned often.

ES: Henry Allen?

SZ: Yes.

ES: He was a professional. He ran the Guggenheim Foundation. He was admired, and he had a force....

SZ: Did you have certain trustees who were particularly interested in your department?

ES: No. Nelson was sort of interested, I think. I think he had a clearer idea of what I was supposed to do than most of them because he was much more aware of the press; he was a public figure then and was concerned about the press. He also was interested in getting the Museum involved in television. I think that when I first came there, my salary was paid by a grant from Nelson for television, actually, because he wanted to get us in that field, which was, of course, very smart of him. There was no question we had to start working with the television people.

SZ: Was he a real presence for you?

ES: Not particularly. Some trustees became personal friends, younger trustees like Joanne Stern, Lily Auchincloss, Beth Straus, Barbara Jakobson, people like that. Blanchette Rockefeller, who spent so much time at the Museum, you were bound to get to know her pretty well because she was there a great deal.

SZ: What was she like?

ES: Wonderful. Very conscientious. And Eliza Parkinson [Cobb], who had been very active on the Junior Council when it was first called the [Junior] Advisory Committee. She became a personal friend, and, later, her son, Johnny, who's a trustee. But I think the staff was pretty good about lobbying; I mean, we didn't. I'm sure that René and Monroe and Alfred did, but the rest of the staff was pretty good about it, even though most of the curators had trustees that served on their independent committees, and they became close and supporters. Philip Johnson, of course, was a very influential person,

and he became a good friend, and Jim Soby. Both Soby and Philip Johnson were widely admired for their professional skills and knowledge.

SZ: Was upper echelon staff afraid of the trustees?

ES: No.

SZ: That was not the relationship.

ES: No. There were quite a few committees that trustees and staff on them; they all did, I think. I never felt there was any fear. I think they had mutual respect. I think that Dorothy Miller, for example, was very helpful to Mrs. Simon Guggenheim, acted as an advisor. Most of the painting and sculpture people did, and I suppose the print people did, too, and maybe photography somewhat, because they were all collectable things; you couldn't exactly collect film, or architecture, either.

SZ: Since you mentioned Andrew Ritchie, and I guess that, in fact, that's what did happen, isn't it, that he did not stay terribly long.

ES: Yes, I think that he just didn't have the kind of power that he wanted and certainly got in his next job. He went to New Haven to the Yale Art Gallery, I guess, as the director. He did major exhibitions at the Museum.

SZ: You worked with him when he did.

ES: Yes. He and his wife were good friends of ours and we used to see them outside the Museum. He was a very nice man. He did that wonderful Constable show.

SZ: What was it like when Selz and Seitz took over?

ES: Bill Seitz, who is dead, I thought was terribly nice. We used to see a good deal of him and his wife. He, of course, had gotten his doctorate at Princeton, partly through the intervention of Alfred. [TAPE INTERRUPTION]

SZ: I guess I'm trying to get a sense of how it was from your perspective. It must have always been different, working for different people.

ES: Sure, it was. I became a little disillusioned about Peter Selz when I read an article he wrote, I think it was in the Partisan Review, and I realized as I read it that, if you simply substituted the name of one style of art for another, it wouldn't change at all. He never described what he was talking about. He just attacked...I forget what it was, but let's say he attacked Pop; if you just put the words Abstract Expressionism instead of Pop, it would still read. That kind of thing.

SZ: Was he well thought of?

ES: Not that I knew particularly. I think Seitz had more friends on the staff, and around town. Bill was sort of endearing. Selz, who I guess is still alive, was more abrasive, more arrogant, more sure of himself. Seitz had been a painter, and he had an enormous respect and liking for painters. Peter was more likely to put people down and Bill was more likely to build them up. I don't know where Selz is now.

SZ: Do you know what the circumstances were of his leaving the Museum?

ES: He was offered a better job someplace. I do remember that, with René's assent, he stayed on four or five months more than he wanted to, or more than the original plan, in order to qualify for some kind of pension rights, and René said it would be silly for him to leave in, say, January, if by staying until May he would be entitled to something. So he stayed.

SZ: I think Lynes alluded to some other situation that invited....

ES: His dismissal?

SZ: His resignation. He doesn't say what it is.

ES: Maybe [the book] will jog my memory. There were only two references to him in it.

SZ: I think it would be the latter of the two.

ES: It just says "Selz and Seitz had left." Seitz left because of a misunderstanding, according to Dorothy Miller. Something was said by René in a meeting that he misunderstood, and, the next day, he accepted a job at Brandeis. It was a very sad thing that we lost him. [Lynes in the book] goes on to say, "Into this vacuum [Walter] Bareiss stepped."

SZ: It must have been the other reference, because there was something else. Was the situation much the same as it was with Andrew Ritchie?

ES: I can't find a reference to Selz on this page. Here it is. No, it's just a reference to the [Alberto] Giacometti book.

SZ: I must have read something somewhere else.

ES: I remember for one show Peter wrote a catalogue that I thought was unintelligible. I xeroxed a long article that...Louise Bourgeois's husband [Robert Goldwater] had written that I thought was much better on the artist and gave that to people. Goldwater was a brilliant writer. Seitz's wife was very nervous; she may have been partly responsible for his leaving. She was very nervous and very dependent on him, as you sometimes see in childless marriages, the enormous dependence that the husband

and wife have on each other; you see it in other marriages too.

SZ: The nature of the misunderstanding?

ES: I don't know what that was, I really don't. The relationship between Selz and Seitz was never very clear; it wasn't clear to me. They both did shows, they both were about the same age, they both were about the same background, and their names were so similar [LAUGHING].

SZ: And Alfred was still a presence?

ES: Yes, very much so. I have no idea how Alfred got along with Selz. He always liked Seitz, I know.

SZ: Would he have been the one to have brought Selz in?

ES: Alfred might have brought Seitz in, because he had helped him get his doctorate, because Alfred went to Princeton. I don't know where Selz came from. I remember when Seitz told me he was leaving. He didn't say anything about a misunderstanding or anything like that. He asked me to have tea with him one day, and he said, "I've got something to tell you. I'm leaving." I said, "That's terrible, you shouldn't do that; betraying us, that's awful." He seemed very cheery, very pleased with his decision. But I think it must have been hard for men of that generation to work in the shadow of d'Harnoncourt, Barr and Wheeler. None of them were any good at bringing along anyone who would succeed them.

SZ: Bill Rubin was a presence towards the end of Alfred's tenure.

ES: He was indeed.

SZ: Tell me about Bill Rubin.

ES: He was a brilliant student scholar of modern art. He was persuasive and an extraordinarily astute man. We were doing a television show one day in the galleries--it was on Picasso--and the television producer said, "Mr. Rubin, I'm just going to ask you a few questions and you just talk, be comfortable, and we'll cut in the studio down to size." "No," Bill said. "How long is this going to be on the air?" "Well, about thirty seconds." "I'll speak for thirty seconds," Bill said, and he did, with a beginning, a middle and an end.

SZ: What was his presence like initially?

ES: It was all murky as to who was going to run the collections. You had Bill Lieberman there, who wanted to do that. At one point there was some chatter about Leo Steinberg coming in, but he didn't. Rubin had, of course, a very good academic background. He had no museum background, as I recall, except he'd once gone to the Museum school, the art school, which he used to talk about a lot. I used to work there at night, for money. I suppose in a way it was easier with no museum background to come in to this place that was run by three men who also had had no previous museum training because there wasn't any in America, really, to have. I thought that Bill settled right in, happily. He could be very domineering, he could be very charming; he could be whatever he wanted to be, really. He was interviewed about Picasso by Time magazine. They'd sent a photographer with the interviewer who had sort of clowned around, and he'd gotten Bill to clown around. A friend of mine at Time called up and said, "You'd better do something. They're going to use one of these clowning photographs that was taken of Bill." So I told Bill, and the explosion was absolutely instantaneous. I'd never seen anybody so mad. He was just outraged. He said, "Get that person on the phone." So I did, handed the phone to Bill, very nervously, because he was so mad he was swearing and shouting and screaming. Well, the voice changed instantly, under total control. He had a very reasonable, sweet conversation

with this man, who of course changed the photograph (they had lots of photographs). Bill said it would be very damaging to the Museum if that photograph ran, that Picasso has a clipping service--this is all true, he did; he followed the clippings very carefully--and he'll think he was made fun of. The man said, "Alright, I won't do it. I don't want to ruin the Museum." Bill said, "We'll never get another gift from Picasso." Very, very, very good, very well done.

SZ: So there were these two sides to him.

ES: Yes. He fought with Marga Barr, who felt that he was trying to undo Alfred's work with the collection, that he was fooling around with it too much. But I don't know....

SZ: In what ways, do you know?

ES: We sold things, which had been done anyway, for many years, always, though I thought he followed the Museum practice. It was always harder to deaccession than to acquired under Bill. I remember one meeting when the vote was in his favor--he was arguing in favor of selling something to buy something else that he felt we needed to fill in a hole--and the vote was very close but it was in his favor, and he said, "That's too close, I'm not going to do it." I thought that was very statesmanlike. It may have come up for another vote the next vote, I don't remember, but still.... It was smart of him, really. Too close a vote can cause more trouble than it's worth, really, on anything.

SZ: But certainly he was a different man with a different view of what ought to be done.

ES: Times had changed. The Museum's expectations were different. One of the things that Alfred had done, as other museum directors had done, I think, was to keep in mind always the promised gift or the gift that might be promised and buy around it. Sometimes he got very badly caught, because you didn't get the gift and you had missed opportunities to get similar things. I remember one day Alfred stopped by my

office on the way to his office in the morning. He had gone on an errand, he'd gone to see somebody first, before he came to the office, and a vaguely promised gift had materialized and he'd gotten. He said, "You know, I've been trying to get this for twenty years." He was so happy. It was by a Latin American artist, as I recall.

SZ: Do you think that Marga Barr's feeling was shared by trustees and/or staff people?

ES: I really don't know. Alicia Legg worked closely with that department and with Bill, and she remained very close to Marga, and to Soby. She did some of the chronologies and stuff like that for that last book of Alfred's. I think there's always a sort of feeling, a perfectly natural feeling, that they're unravelling all that's been done. I think it took a lot of perspective to figure out whether it was an addition or a subtraction. I would assume, for example, that somebody, someday, will look at the design collection and say, "What happened to Art Deco?" Between Art Nouveau and the Bauhaus there was a stop along the way. The De Stijl chair is now being ripped off in Dutchess County for fifty dollars apiece--the wooden chair, not painted; otherwise, it's identical.

SZ: Do you have any?

ES: Yes, somebody gave us two.

SZ: We can just go back and finish this. The whole Rubin-Lieberman thing....

ES: That was very complicated. Stuff is missing, I know, from my files. I found that very unsettling. I don't know who promised what to whom and who did what about it. I know Lieberman wanted very much to run painting and sculpture, and when he was very young, Alfred had encouraged him to think that he could succeed him as head of collections, or whatever title Alfred had, as director. I don't know, but it didn't work out that way. Then Rubin was brought in and they became bitter, bitter enemies. When Lieberman was offered the job at the Met, Oldenburg tried to keep him at the Modern.

The story is that he offered him everything in the place except Rubin's head, and that's what Lieberman really wanted. Actually, he got a very good deal at the Met.

SZ: Rubin already had the position.

ES: Yes, but they fought over it, over things like borrowing from each other's departments. It was just ridiculous. Bill then had the print department and then prints and drawings. Then Riva Castleman became head of prints.

SZ: And he became head of drawings, until he left.

ES: Yes. Hightower made her head of prints. He might have stayed had he been given prints and drawings.

SZ: If the two departments had remained one department.

ES: Yes.

SZ: Were you surprised at the way that power struggle played itself out?

ES: No, because Bill Lieberman a) was really suffering from bad writer's block around that period, which cut his effectiveness enormously, because he used to write extremely well. Maybe he's writing well again, I haven't read anything lately. Bill Lieberman had gone to Europe and had stayed much longer than expected, and he came back with a lot of stuff that he hadn't been authorized to bring--a Giacometti, a [Jean] Dubuffet collage. I couldn't figure out whether it was the Museum's or whether it was his. I always suspected that it was fuzzy in most people's minds. I recall that Alfred was upset. Of course, Alfred always thought that you didn't have any personal possessions.

SZ: Although he did have a few.

ES: A very few. Marga had a very good eye. She would give him something nice, like lovely cufflinks, and he would promptly give them to the Museum collection if they were Art Nouveau. So she began to give him Roman coins and things like that [LAUGHING].

SZ: Then he couldn't give them away [to the Museum].

ES: Exactly. Alfred had very little, really.

SZ: Are you saying that you think Alfred had something to say about the ultimate outcome of the Lieberman-Rubin struggle?

ES: I think probably Alfred had more confidence in Rubin, whose scholarship was simply never overcome by his private life in any manner, shape or form. If he went abroad for a long time, he'd write a book and came back with it. I think he used his friendship with artists always for the benefit of the Museum. Lieberman was much more gregarious, much more social, much more a man-about-town in a lot of ways. He is seen regularly with Margaret Hillson, that sort of thing. I don't think that René would have taken a stand on anything like that without consulting Alfred. They wouldn't necessarily have a big power lunch in front of everybody, but they would get together somehow, someplace.

SZ: Because you were there for several years of Bill Rubin's tenure, did you see the Museum change?

ES: Under Bill?

SZ: Yes.

ES: Yes, sure. He was a very different kind of a taskmaster than Alfred had ever been, or that any of those men in painting and sculpture had ever been. I never saw Andrew lose his temper or swear or yell at people, or even tease them like Bill could do occasionally. In a way, Bill Rubin was maybe a little hurtful. Bill kept marrying his students.

SZ: How was he for you to work with?

ES: Very up and down. I'm not accustomed--wasn't then, anyway--to being sworn at a lot, but I got used to him after a while. Everybody did. Sometimes, of course, the press really did not want to see Bill and sometimes they wanted to see him very much. It depended on what he was up to and what was happening. Bill took a great interest in the press, an intelligent interest. I thought for a while he was too influenced by Hilton Kramer. He'd say, "Why doesn't the Museum put on a [André] Masson show?" And it would come up regularly in the [exhibition committee] meetings. Nobody wanted a Masson show, but Bill was very persuasive; he'd push, push, push, so we finally had a Masson show, which Kramer panned. Kramer said, as I recall, "I don't think Masson stands up to a full retrospective. He's too weak an artist." So the joke around the Museum was, well, <u>now</u> we know why we didn't have a Masson show sooner: he's no good. [Rubin] was influenced by people like Kramer, who was intelligent and wasn't as mad at everybody then as he is now.

SZ: Was Rubin good with the press?

ES: Excellent, absolutely excellent. Everybody that I knew liked him, because he was intelligent and he had a good sense of what was a good story, and he was perfectly willing to talk in an interesting way about the artist or the art. Bill's very verbal and he's very, very articulate. He can talk about pictures and works of art. So could Alfred. René once said that when he was really moved he just whistled, but René, of course, didn't have the command of the English language that both others had. I think that one

difference was that Alfred had an extremely loyal staff, and that all broke up. When the Seitz and the Selz and the Lieberman and the Rubin [confrontations] were all happening, it began to fracture and people didn't have tunnel vision about their bosses. Of course, it went along with a lot of other things that were happening at the Museum at the same time.

SZ: Like what?

ES: The strike and unionization and all that business.

SZ: Did I ask you last time if you thought it was a mistake, the formation of the union?

ES: We talked about it a little bit, I think. I don't know what's happened. I know one thing that happened which was too bad--I think it's been corrected now--which is that at one point you had office workers organized, the curators not, and the administration dealing with the younger, lower staff members and totally ignoring the department heads, which was just terrible, you know.

SZ: It's been suggested that that was very divisive.

ES: I think it was.

SZ: If you're talking about the fracturing of this once-happy family, then....

ES: I think it was very divisive. A lot of us wanted to try a staff association that everybody would belong to. Arthur and I both wanted that. We thought that could be very useful, and we were not interested in getting on the board of trustees. That's so crazy; that's not the way you get any influence, to have one person [representing the staff on the board of trustees]. It's like a union member on the board of General Motors: it's not going to change the course of history. But there was a big meeting and everybody

voted and they voted to have a union that was limited to...I think associate curator was the highest office. Then the trustees lined up with the staff that was not on strike. As you know, all museums have a lot of unions; they always have. The guards, for example, have been organized for many years. I remember one strike of the guards when I think I suggested that the staff man the galleries, and we did, so we stayed open; we couldn't open everything, but we stayed mostly open. For a while I worked at the cashier desk downstairs and Dick Oldenburg and I guarded a gallery for a couple of days. We were terrible guards, by the way, just awful. We kept looking at the pictures rather than at the people, which is really what you should do. The strike was eventually over. I have a lot of good friends among the guards, and they never seemed to be angry that I was not only crossing the picket line, but scabbing, I think you would call it.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 2

ES: But they are more professional union people, I think, in a way.

SZ: Than the union people that you had to deal with during the strike.

ES: That's right, who were interested not just in bread-and-butter issues, which I think can be helped to be solved by unions, but also interested in policy and in matters of control and direction.

SZ: It was the second strike of the professional union at the Modern that was particularly bitter, is that not right? It was the longer of the two. It was under Dick Oldenburg.

ES: Yes. I guess I remember the first one, under John Hightower, more clearly. Maybe they've merged in my mind. When was the second one?

SZ: In '73.

ES: That's probably the one that I'm thinking of. I was abroad on vacation when the first one started. John called and asked me to come back, which I did, but it was over quite soon after that.

SZ: Yes, it was. I'll ask you about this first since we're in the same time period. We talked just a little bit last time about some of the artists' protests and then the Children's Art Carnival, which I think was one thing that the Museum did, sending it up to Harlem, in reaction to some of the unrest that was being experienced. Is there anything else you can remember from that time? You told me one story off-tape about the picketers in one of the artists' protests yelling specifically at you for some reason.

ES: Yes. Setting up the carnival in Harlem was really a two-pronged thing I thought later. René asked me to talk to people around town, in Harlem, to see what we could do in response to the demands or requests that we get more involved in the community, that we do something for the community. At the same time, we had just closed that school, and what I had not realized--and Paley pointed it out to me--was that closing the school was bound to irritate people because they looked upon it as a good thing that the Museum did, and even though we had a lot of reasons for closing it, including the fact that ninety percent of the kids came from private schools and were getting lots of art anyway, unlike when it started. Things had changed a good deal, and we needed the space very badly.

SZ: Where was it located?

ES: It was all over the place. For a while it was in rented quarters on Fifth Avenue, and then later it was where the restaurant is now. That was a lot of space. So I talked to more than a hundred organizations of various kinds, and city organizations, to see what The

Museum of Modern Art could do, and everybody agreed on a school for children. Victor D'Amico wanted to do it. I had known a woman named Betty Blayton Taylor who was running a Headstart program in Harlem. She was an artist. Her father was a surgeon. She went to the University of Syracuse. A very nice, very attractive woman. I introduced her to Victor; I thought she would be good to run this thing, and she was wonderful. She still does run it, and I guess it's been an enormous success. It's now very much on its own. The Museum has nothing to do with it at all.

SZ: That happened how soon after?

ES: I think it happened gradually. At first there was quite a lot of money coming from the Rockefellers. Victor was very much involved at first. It started out in quarters rented from the Harlem School of the Arts, and then it got its own place and its own board of trustees. It began to get its financing independently, from city and state sources and from some corporations. I've been on the board of that a couple of times.

SZ: Let me go back and ask you about Arthur Drexler, with whom you had a fairly close relationship.

ES: Yes, I adored Arthur.

SZ: How that relationship developed and how you saw his place in the Museum and whatever else.

ES: He wanted to be director, you know, and he wrote a long dissertation, which Sam helped him get published. Sam gave him the name of a legal printer--they work all night, you know, and it's unbelievably fast and good--so that Arthur could get his proposal printed in enough copies so that he could distribute it. He wanted very much to be director. That's, of course, when the whole business of homosexuality surfaced. Some people thought we couldn't have a director who was homosexual.

SZ: It surfaced among trustees?

ES: He told people, Arthur did. I think only a few people actually knew the man that Arthur lived with. He used to come to our house in town and he used to come up to the country for the weekend. Sam and I both knew him, we knew him very well and liked him. I was stunned to realize much later that hardly anybody had ever met him or heard his name.

SZ: Arthur did that because?

ES: He thought he should. He thought he was getting ahead of somebody who was going to tell. I have no idea. It was harder then. There were many more people in the closet than now. It's always been sort of a worry at the Museum. René once told me he was very pleased that nobody had ever used their sexual preference at the Museum to hurt the Museum in any way or for personal gain, and I think that's true.

SZ: When Arthur decided that he really wanted to be director....

ES: He told people. He said, "I want you to know I'm a homosexual."

SZ: He did that because he didn't want it coming up as a...?

ES: Yes, I suppose. Arthur had a very sure ethical sense. He may have thought that it was only fair, even though I would say it had not influenced his curatorial decisions ever, in any manner, shape or form.

SZ: Go back and tell me what this treatise was that he wrote.

ES: You've never seen that?

SZ: No.

ES: I wondered what happened to it? I wonder what happened to my copy? It was to create a structure at the Museum and to set forth long-term goals, etcetera. It was a big statement of what he would do as director.

SZ: Can you remember, generally, what kinds of things he felt he could do or he would change, his vision of what he wanted for the institution?

ES: It was very much that he was going to continue what we had. Arthur was a strong believer in very high standards and in the kind of exploration the Museum had always made. One of his biggest shows was the Beaux-Arts show [The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 1975], which was going back, but for a reason. Arthur was very good about recognizing the importance of certain ideas even though he didn't himself wholeheartedly embrace them. He worked like hell on the [Robert] Venturi book, which about ten people edited, one after another, and then he finally did a lot of it himself, because he thought it should be published. He should get credit for that, by the way. It has been a very influential book, as Vince Scully said it would be. But I remember Arthur agonizing over that. He pioneered in the study storage area for the Museum, now, of course, commonplace in museums around the world. He wrote beautifully himself, just beautifully.

SZ: To whom did he distribute this treatise?

ES: His trustees. There was probably a search committee of some sort.

SZ: And he came before the search committee?

ES: He proposed himself.

SZ: What kind of a director do you think he would have made?

ES: I don't know. I think he might have been a brilliant behind-the-scenes manipulator or something like that. He didn't get along with Alfred at all. I could never understand why, they were very much alike. They never knew each other.

SZ: In what ways were they alike?

ES: Scholarly, independent--fiercely--very good eye, enormous interest in the Museum as an institution, a belief in it.

SZ: But at the time you were a proponent of his [becoming director]?

ES: Yes, I thought he would be very good. He was good at everything. He never knew Alfred at all well, and René started out without much confidence, really, in Arthur. I told you something about his being named head of the department. He was acting director of the department for months and months and months, and he was frantic to be named director. So every few weeks he would ask me to go to René and say, "René, I really feel I should announce this appointment." So I would do this, and René would say terrible things, which I then couldn't tell Arthur, you see. He may have even said things like, "He's never going to be director, Liz, don't be ridiculous." Then one day I did my usual trip in, preparing to recast whatever René said into some form that I thought would be acceptable to Arthur, and René said, "I thought we already had announced that he was director." I don't know, I think Oldenburg's been a good director, actually.

SZ: How did Arthur take it when he wasn't made director of the Museum?

ES: He didn't really want to leave the Museum, so he didn't make an issue of it.

SZ: What about his relationship with Oldenburg?

ES: That was about the same as it had always been. Oldenburg had been head of publications, and Arthur was one of the best writers the Museum had ever had, and one of the latest. Every book was so late, it was just awful, and very expensive for the Museum because the biggest sale of the book was when the show was on. It was very upsetting to the membership department, because in those days members got books free, depending on their classification of membership, and if the book didn't appear and they had signed up to become a member because they expected four books, and you'd told them which four books and then one of them didn't come out within that entire calendar year, it was a little difficult. Also, it was hard to keep a publisher interested for that same reason: the books never came out. We changed publishers a lot. In the last expansion of the building Dick used to call in Arthur to discuss the gallery installation. This was probably because Rubin was doing it, really, and Oldenburg was nervous about some of it, I think with good reason. So he would call in Arthur and Arthur would then be set against Rubin, really, trying to get some changes out of him..., on the collection floors primarily. Arthur said Dick would call him in and they would meet in the partially finished galleries, and they'd talk and then Rubin would be called and then Oldenburg would leave, disappear, which I think was probably very wise of him, whereas if he'd stayed he would have inevitably have been put in some awkward position [since] these were two directors that he had to work with.

SZ: Ultimately you think Arthur did not get that directorship because...? It wasn't his homosexuality, or was it?

ES: No, no, I don't think so. Sharon, it's very hard to know what the trustees and what the search committee was up to, frankly. Look at the people they did choose. I saw John Hightower's resume, which I can promise you had nothing to do with Arthur's. It was a very small, little thing, perfectly honest, perfectly candid. He had a multicultural view of art. He once said in front of a famous television commentator, and I was very

embarrassed, that it was as much a work of art to take a turkey out of the oven as to paint a picture. The television person said, "Okay, Liz, I will never tell anybody he said this." John was a very nice man, very engaging, very attractive, very sweet, but he was really sort of gobbled up. He'd worked for Nelson, and he'd done a very good job on the New York State Council on the Arts. Nelson thought he was highly qualified, and nobody really looked. That's one reason he was so upset when he was asked to leave, because he had not done anything he hadn't said he'd do. Then Bates Lowry was another real mistake, another very nice man who hadn't the slightest qualification for that job and was lost in it, absolutely lost. Oldenburg did have qualifications. He'd worked for the place for a long time and he knew what it was like and how difficult it was. He'd worked for all departments because being head of publications he'd been involved with everybody.

SZ: How do you think he's survived so long?

ES: Oldenburg? He's a great conciliator. We always thought he'd be wonderful as head of the National Endowment or something like that. In fact, I wish he were, because he'd be very good, I think. He's very good as an administrator, which, I must say, the Museum is not accustomed to having. He's in awe of Rubin--was--which is not hard to be, because he makes his presence so known. I think that Oldenburg has been particularly good with the trustees and with outside organizations like the National Endowment [for the Arts] and the [New York] State Council and all that sort of thing, he's been very good with them. And foundations. I read an interview with Philip Johnson the other day, in the <u>Art Journal</u>, and he was saying he thought it was good to have younger people come along and shake the place up, and that's what was happening at the Modern and he thought that was a healthy thing. He's probably right, but of course Philip speaks not as a staff member but as an outsider, so it's easier for him. I thought it was very hard for Monroe and René and Alfred to accept the idea that young people were coming along and did want to shake things up, one way or another.

SZ: You did mention the fact that neither of them made any real preparations [for a successor].

ES: No, they didn't. Not at all. René finally hired an assistant. He just died the other day--Jim White. Perfectly nice man, but totally unqualified it seemed to me. The only thing I can remember René saying about what qualified him is that the Met had also offered him a job. I went with René one weekend, a Saturday, to Jim's apartment. I forget what we were working on, something. René was appalled when he saw it. He had no idea what this man's taste was, what his take on things was, and it was eons removed from The Museum of Modern Art. He knew that he could not be comfortable in the place. Funny. I don't know why they couldn't do better, I really don't. There was a woman, the head of publications years ago, Frances Pernas, a very nice woman, she once hired an assistant because he had a very nice smile. She told me that. He was later killed. He was lured by a bad man from a bar and killed. Of course, [Richard] Koch was a good administrator, he really was.

SZ: Was he popular?

ES: I think so.

SZ: You liked working with him?

ES: Yes. Yes, I did. Then they hired that other man...Ed Saxe.

SZ: You were still there when he was hired?

ES: Yes.

SZ: You left what year?

ES: Seventy-seven. I left in June of '77. I had already taken the job at Christie's, then we went abroad for the summer and I went to Christie's in the fall.

SZ: Why did you leave after all those years?

ES: We were about to start another fundraising campaign and another expansion, and people were beginning to leave. René was killed, Alfred had Alzheimer's disease. A lot of my friends were gone, or going, and I didn't like the idea of another drive, frankly.

SZ: Because?

ES: It takes over everything, and I'd done it before. The Christie's job seemed fun because the place was very small then. They had just started the auction sales; they'd had just one sale in the spring and they were gearing up for their first full season. I thought it would be fun because it reminded me of the way the Museum had been before I went there, when everybody did everything and it was very tiny and everybody knew everybody. That's what it was like, and it was great fun. Of course, [Christie's] began to expand. I did do all kinds of stuff I'd never thought of doing, because you had to do whatever had to be done.

SZ: You mean the Christie's job.

ES: Yes. I traveled quite a lot, and I had a very good time. We went there last night, a party for the [Burton] Tremaine collection, which the Museum never thought of getting because the Tremaines had put so many restrictions on the gift. Alfred didn't want to take it. But they have some marvelous things.

SZ: So you weren't sorry to leave the Museum.

ES: Not when I did, no. A little, of course. We continued to see Marga Barr a lot, and John

Szarkowski--people we were really good friends with there. Not so much Arthur, but John a lot.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: MRS. SAMUEL P. (ELIZABETH) SHAW (ES)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

LOCATION: 130 EAST 67TH STREET
NEW YORK CITY

DATE: NOVEMBER 20, 1991

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 1

SZ: Before I left the last time I mentioned that one of the things I thought maybe you could expound on a bit was the relationship between the staff and trustees.

ES: The time when I was at the Museum there was a great deal of respect on the part of the staff for the trustees. Many of them were founding members of the place and had been around for a long time, had extremely good personal collections of modern art and knew a great deal about the subject at a time you could not get a degree. They could not have gotten an undergraduate or a graduate degree in modern art, for example. I found Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's diary...she kept a handwritten journal, that's what it really was, about the founding of the Museum. She'd gone to an enormous amount of time and trouble to do this, and one had to respect her knowledge and her interest in the place. This may have changed. Some of them I know that are on the board now, including some much younger ones who came on the board while I was there, are very knowledgeable, I think; certainly the new president is widely respected, Agnes [Gund]. But it was unusual in that many members of the board had demonstrated an expertise far beyond what the average staff person could have. It was very strange, and it reflected a moment in history.

SZ: Just by virtue of how it was put together.

ES: Yes, that's right.

SZ: Where did you find that diary?

ES: There was a closet across the hall from my office where we kept a lot of archival material, because there was no other place to keep it, really, and I found it there. It was a big notebook.

SZ: I've seen it. It's in the archives now. It must have been quite a discovery.

ES: I was pleased, yes. But as I think I told you before, when I first joined the Museum staff I was given the desk of the first publicity director, which had never been cleared out. Things were taken a little casually. Then, of course, in terms of archival materials, the fire disrupted a lot of the staff. Everything was moved, you see, and unless it was very carefully labeled, we never saw it again. Everything was cleared out.

SZ: There was never a move to collect things and go through them?

ES: We tried to, but you had to know what you had, for one thing, to know what you'd lost.

SZ: I know that they have all those books you kept of clips.

ES: They were being kept before I went there. We had a very nice, very elderly lady who clipped. I remember one day finding her neatly pasting into a book notices of a file clerk's marriage, which may have been of great interest to her parents, but I did not think it was of great interest to posterity or to the Museum. She was spending hours doing this very neatly, very carefully, and we stopped that and just kept clippings that were about the Museum and its policies and program. I always thought the trustees were particularly hardworking at the Modern. I've been on boards since then myself, and it is, of course, the committee work that's really very tiring and demanding, and

most of the board members at the Modern are on many, many committees. I think most of them have a genuine love for the place and its mission, as they saw it and I saw it, as a mission--certainly the Rockefellers, who dominated the place, had founded it and kept it going. During every single fund drive, their contributions were absolutely crucial. It was paternal, of course, but it was very generous and it was knowledgeable, the Rockefellers in the Museum. It was very much colored, I think, for both Nelson and David by their enormous love for their mother, who, after all, had founded the place with a little help. I think they were genuinely concerned about it, and it's too bad that there's nobody in the current generation of cousins that really cares about art as much; they're more interested in social problems and economic problems and other very important things. But it is too bad.

SZ: Did you always feel that they, the Rockefellers, were approachable there, that they were an integrated part of the institution?

ES: Yes. That was just their natural manner. They were all very open and very funny and "hiya, fella." Of course, when Nelson was running for governor, he became <u>extremely</u> approachable [LAUGHING]. He'd handshake his way through the entire place on his way upstairs, he'd shake every guard's hand and "Hiya, fella." Blanchette, who inherited the role, as it were, was very approachable, though she was a Hooker, not a Rockefeller. When Dave Scherman photographed the Museum for a story in <u>Holiday</u> magazine, he photographed Blanchette, and he was absolutely <u>thrilled</u>. He came sort of reeling back to my office and said, "Liz, she photographs like a million dollars." I remember Nelson at one meeting; it was budget time and I think a trustee was supposed to sit in on every session, and he was sitting in on the one that I testified in. That's a very tedious job. I remember I complained bitterly about salaries and he pointed out that actually my budget for the coming year had less in salaries than the year before, that we were going backwards. You mentioned the various art movements, the New York School....

SZ: Let's just go back once more to the staff-trustee relationship, because I think you've really described a lot of what it was like earlier, and then, as the institution grew and developed, there must have been changes, and certainly some of it was exemplified when one of the strikes occurred and Mrs. Rockefeller was out on the street--I don't know if you were there for that--when some of the pickets were going by.

ES: She used to go through the picket line regularly. She had an office in the Museum. She said to the press, to Grace Glueck, that she thought the pickets were behaving badly, like miners. The next thing she knew, her son Jay was on the phone. "Mother, do not use the word 'miners' in that sense." I was there then. I was there for that strike and also for the strike of the guards; I forget when that was. There was an amusing story in today's paper about the guards, because when the guards went on strike this other time, we all just took over and became guards. I shared a floor with Dick Oldenburg. We were terrible guards; all we did was look at the pictures and we never looked at the people. I think the guards are not supposed to look at the [Ad] Reinhardts but look at the people. In the old, old days I guess most of the guards were painters; they were not exactly professional guards. Sol LeWitt worked there for a long time. I remember once that a bad rainstorm in the night had flooded one of the galleries, a sculpture gallery, and one of the guards, first thing on duty in the morning, noticed it and he quickly got pails and swept things up. He was an artist. Alfred was so grateful that we had artists for guards because they were so quick to fix everything up.

SZ: The guards even now, some of the longer-term guards, they're very dedicated. Do you know José, who was in the lobby this morning?

ES: Yes. Is Leonardo still there, Leonardo LaGrande?

SZ: He's finally gone.

ES: He did go. I loved him.

SZ: I loved him, too. I don't know what the story was with him.

ES: He used to photograph for me. He was very good, and he would take his picture over to the AP. One day I found a wonderful letter on my desk from him, that I had restored his faith in white people, which is very touching. Another reason I liked the trustees was because I saw them at work on a lot of committees. Every now and then there'd be a special call for a special ad hoc committee to reevaluate the Museum or something. I remember one was held in Paley's house, and then the famous one at the Burdens'. I think René rather liked being involved with the staff.

SZ: Did you always feel that the trustees were running the Museum, making policy, or was it the directors and the trustees were more of a rubber stamp?

ES: I thought the trustees were very powerful. After all, they had fired Barr very much on their own. When d'Harnoncourt was made a trustee, he told me afterwards that he didn't know until after he'd been named director that he was not going to be on the board of trustees. He was eventually on the board, but he was furious because it meant he had no say, for one thing, in policy, and also, he said, no say in who else was going to be on the board. I don't know how he solved that problem. René managed to solve most problems; he solved that one, maybe with the help of Nelson, I suppose, who was a great supporter and friend of René's, with their great love of Mexico, for one thing. Then, of course, we were very aware of how powerful the trustees were in terms of money, because in those days, as I remember, in the annual report we didn't even break out corporate support or government support. Most of our money came from our trustees and from admissions and rental fees for exhibitions and sale of books, memberships. That was another country. It was good, I think, about the time I was there that the Museum already had a history of being defended and attacked by artists and by collectors and by the public and by the press, and they weathered it and survived and grew. A friend of mine who works at the Morgan Library said it was a

terrible shock for staff when they opened their expanded building because they'd never been reviewed by the press before and they'd never been criticized. He said it was very hard for them to take that, though they got stunning reviews, actually. They weren't used to critics looking over their shoulder, even if they liked what they saw. But the Modern has a different history. Abstract artists had picketed the Museum, the Museum was criticized when I was there for not showing enough women's work or work by black artists. The very second show the Museum put on, the American show [Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans, 1929], was widely criticized in the press. They hated it. Even sympathetic critics like Henry McBride were very disappointed; hadn't heard of some of the artists, for one thing. So when I was there it was good. It was neither too thick-skinned nor too thin-skinned; you expected some controversy.

SZ: So when it happened the flack wasn't too great?

ES: No, nobody panicked. The only time I ever saw d'Harnoncourt really upset over the press was when the press reported that one man had died in the fire. He just said that he wished they didn't have to do that. He wished they would empathize all the things that had been saved; eventually they did, actually, but you couldn't blame anybody for reporting the human casualty.

SZ: That was during d'Harnoncourt's directorship. What about during Dick's for the time you were there?

ES: Dick came into a much shakier institution with a very bad track record just behind him, which he overcame, thank God--all those changes of directorships and a certain amount of deterioration of morale because there had been so many changes and sort of a lack of direction. Because Dick had worked with almost every department as head of publications, he was in a good spot to pull it off.

SZ: Negative reviews in the press--how did they affect him?

ES: He was pretty philosophical about that. He did once ask me if I could spend much less time on small exhibitions that he said aren't as important. I was complaining because I was probably trying to get more staff. He said, "Why don't you just cut out things like Projects." "Come on, Dick," I said. He said, "Of course I realize that's silly, you can't do that. The curators wouldn't stand for it." Dick's a very sophisticated man. He understands that the press is not the Museum's mouthpiece. Of course, he didn't interchange with the press as much as Barr had. Barr did a lot. He wrote letters all the time to the press and he talked to the press all the time and he argued.

SZ: So when there was something in the paper that he didn't like...?

ES: He'd write a letter.

SZ: Or call someone up?

ES: Yes, but he was a great letter writer. He loved to write letters, and he wrote a lot of angry letters. I wonder what happened to those? Did you ever read Robert Briffault's book Reasons for Anger? He used to write angry letters, too, apparently, and somebody said, "Why do you get so mad?" He said, "Well, I'll tell you," and he wrote a book about why he got so angry about so many things. I remember when Emily Genauer retired Alfred wrote her a letter, and I was stunned, because as far as I knew, he just fought with her regularly, all the time. He said, "Oh, no, I rather enjoyed fighting with her. I'm sorry she's retired."

SZ: It was the exchange that he enjoyed?

ES: I think he did enjoy it, yes. I think he had more fun, really, arguing with people like Tom Hess. Tom once wrote him a private letter, which I suppose is around someplace, a handwritten letter, saying, "I hope you don't take seriously or personally these attacks

I've been running in ARTnews about the Museum. I don't mean you at all."

SZ: Did he take those things personally?

ES: Alfred took loyalty very seriously, and so did his wife, Marga, and people whom they felt were personally disloyal to them or disloyal to the Museum or to modern art, that was the way to earn enmity that would never be forgiven. Sometimes it was hard to know just when or how someone had been crossed. When Alfred was fired...I wasn't around then, but I gathered from Marga that was a time of great crise and people who stopped seeing him never much saw him again. People who were loyal during that period remained very close and forever friends, pretty much. Of course, René had a different take on everything, but it wasn't his only career. He was all set to go on to a whole new career, or actually, a replay of one of his first careers, when he retired. He was going to do big shows, particularly on American Indian art, and send them to Europe. There was a lot of excited talk about that, because he would have been absolutely wonderful at that. He had the European's fascination with American Indian art. Of course, for Alfred it was his whole life; except for a year or two of teaching at Wellesley, it was all he ever did.

SZ: So, what else do we have on there?

ES: Modern art movements, the Museum and the New York School.... I always thought the Museum was particularly lucky in having Alfred Barr, because he didn't get frozen in time, even after he'd really begun losing his memory and was nothing like what he had been. He used to go to the Whitney and give impromptu gallery talks about extremely recent, difficult art. He was very good on the collections committee, when he was in his prime, arguing in favor of extremely difficult art and new art and hard art that just didn't look at all like the old masters of modern art. That was hard, because most people get stuck. I'm stuck; I don't really like a lot of what's going on right now. I was thrilled to read The New Yorker this week, by the way. I thought it was a very good piece by

Adam Gopnik.

SZ: He's stuck, too.

ES: Well, yes. I didn't think he ever would get stuck, but.... [LAUGHING] He even says you have to have a point of view before you can really be multicultural, to know what you're being multicultural about. But you see, people like Stephen Clark had gotten stuck in the early part of the century and didn't like the Museum going on and he left a lot of things to Yale and I guess some to the Met. There was always a concern about the collector and the benefactor. That was really why a decision was made to set up a permanent collection. I don't know what happened to that decision. The last I heard, there were six secret pictures in it and nobody knew what they were except Alfred and, presumably, the owners, one of whom, I think, was Bill Burden, though that was just a guess. I know that one reason Alfred did that was that collectors were getting nervous thinking that the Museum would always be selling things, that their work would not stay in the Museum, it would be sold. So he thought he'd set up a core permanent collection that would not be sold. What did happen to that idea, does anybody know?

SZ: It would seem that, essentially, the collection is the collection.

ES: Well, it's always been harder to sell than to acquire--very hard to sell, actually. One reason that Aggie Gund is probably a very good choice as president is that she's been collecting currently. She gets a lot of recent work and she likes it and she discriminates, and that's good. Gopnik criticized [Robert] Storr's show because he liked the people in the cellar, where he put the older people. He called it the cellar--in the basement. The Museum was criticized for <u>not</u> liking the New York School soon enough. I wasn't there then. By the time I got there, they were already fully embracing the New York School and Alfred was going down to the club on 8th Street. I felt very proud of the fact that they'd bought [Jackson] Pollock's <u>Number One</u>, etcetera. Those were all people I knew.

SZ: That you knew as artists?

ES: Yes, and as people. I used to go out to Long Island. Just before I started to work at the Museum I went to a party downtown at somebody's loft, and I was accosted by a young man--older than I, but a youngish man--who jabbed me with his finger. Somebody said I was going to work for the Museum, and I got a real talking-to from him about the Museum. It was [Willem] de Kooning, it turned out [LAUGHING].

SZ: Telling you not to go there?

ES: Just to be careful and that the Museum sometimes hurt artists, but you know, he didn't say it with any real anger at all. It was strange, as if the artists liked to talk about it the way you might talk about a parent or someone you really loved but that you wanted to criticize and felt free to criticize.

SZ: So art was something that you always liked?

ES: Yes, absolutely.

SZ: And contemporary art?

ES: I loved contemporary art. That was directly related to the Museum, because I studied art at Smith, and Jere Abbott gave us our glimpse of modern art. He was so good and I got so excited about it. All the history had been put in a fast-forward movement--five thousand slides a minute, that kind of thing--whereas with Abbott we spent a lot of time on each picture, a hour on a Cézanne. It was very good.

SZ: Did you ever collect it?

ES: I used to buy little things. I used to go to [Leo] Castelli's a lot at lunchtime, but I didn't have any money. I never paid more than seventy-five dollars for anything, but I can say I made some money on some of those when I sold them much later. Then, of course, I forget the other things I didn't make any money on. I've lost things, even.

SZ: I'm sure it's very hard to find a bottom line underneath it.

ES: Well, one shouldn't bother. I felt very attached to the Museum collection. I remember once talking to Anne Jones, who was head of the Junior Council at that time and I was their staff advisor, and I said something about "our" new [Joan] Miró. She said, "Liz, I didn't know you had a Miró." And, of course, I didn't; the Museum had one that we'd just gotten--"we" had gotten, you see, that was the thing. There wasn't any money anyway and Sam and I had five children we were sending to school, but living with such wonderful stuff and so much of it was pretty big competition. In those days we could have pictures from storage in our office. That was pretty nice.

SZ: What did you have up?

ES: I had a [Adolphe] Gottlieb, I had a Picasso--different times--and that was all changed.

SZ: You would go down and pick them out?

ES: Yes.

SZ: The book that you're looking at now, Good Old Modern by Russell Lynes, was something that you had something to do with.

ES: Russell used my office in the Museum and we became very good friends. His brother had been very closely associated with the Museum, George Platt Lynes, and Russell and Mildred had always been involved in the place. His friend Mike Bessie...either

Mike suggested it or Russell suggested it, that he write a history of the Museum. There wasn't any history of the Museum.

SZ: And how did the Museum feel about this history being written? This is not an authorized history, is it?

ES: No. As Russell says, this account of the brief history of The Museum of Modern Art in New York is unofficial, unsubsidized and unauthorized, and he thanks a million people. I thought that he did a very good job. Dorothy Miller worked very hard with him in helping him avoid errors, but the Museum itself, I thought, was quite snotty about it.

SZ: That being the trustees?

ES: It was more the staff, in a funny way. I could never understand it. I should ask Dick. Hightower was fired in '72 and Oldenburg was then acting director and then six months later was made director, so this was published while he was director. Dick in certain ways is very modest. It's a funny combination of things. He may have thought that it was too much blowing our own horn; he may have thought it was improper for us to display and sell a book that we hadn't written. In those days the bookstore was much smaller and it wasn't selling anything like the range of stuff it sells today, nothing like it, with lots of books from other publishers and writers and critics and scholars and all the rest of it, and he may have felt that in the bookstore as it was then it would have been too conspicuous, the one book by an outside publisher and outside author. But I found it very useful, and recently, Dick's assistant told me that she was buying up copies right and left because she found it very useful to give to new staff members. I felt that it was probably a better portrait of the early days than the later days, because Russell had been really involved in the early days, with his brother, and I think he drifted away from it a good deal. He'd been writing also about the nineteenth century in his books, which I enjoy, and he was involved in a lot of projects, the McDowell colony, the American Academy in Rome, for example, and he wasn't around the Museum so much.

SZ: It may have to do with whom he talked and how forthcoming they were. As I certainly know from what I do, someone who's no longer associated with a particular institution will be more forthcoming. It's hard to write current history.

ES: Very. I suspect that Russell was considered by a lot of people around the Museum as a lightweight rather than as a serious scholar. I think he did write to entertain and his books are entertaining and he writes with extraordinary grace, but I found the books very rewarding as I have come to find out more about nineteenth-century art and New York in the nineteenth century. But, you know, the high and low taste thing, whatever he called it, which was funny....

SZ: What about the gossip factor?

ES: Yes, a lot of gossip, though never unkind. There again, this was almost twenty years ago. Did you read People magazine on the life of our new Associate Justice of the Supreme Court? [Clarence H. Thomas] Not to be believed. Russell would never have stooped to that. I was always a little sorry and a little embarrassed that the Museum wasn't....

SZ: More welcoming to the book?

ES: Yes.

SZ: What did that do to his relationship with the Museum?

ES: There hadn't been much [of a relationship] anyway, really. We saw a lot of him. We went to his funeral the other day, Sam and I. They used to come for dinner and we would go there for dinner. On occasion I would have lunch with him. Sam bought some of his photographs; he liked them. There's one of Alfred that's beautiful; it's reproduced

in the book.

SZ: Did he talk to anybody who would talk to him? Did he discriminate among people, or did a lot of people refuse to talk to him?

ES: No, people didn't refuse to talk to him. I don't think so. He did a lot of research and got into a lot of archival material. He talked to a great many people, many of whom he'd always known. I think maybe some of the older trustees who knew the most were uneasy about the idea of an unauthorized biography of an institution. There's a question, I think. What do you do? You cooperate or not cooperate, and if you don't, you run the risk that there won't be a book or the book won't be any good, it won't be as good as it should be if you don't cooperate. If you do cooperate and make it a better book, you're putting off, probably, the next book for another five years or ten years. So it's a tough one to call. In fact, that whole subject interests me a lot. It's too bad, really, that there's just not some good, scholarly writing about the Museum.

END TAPE 4, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 2

SZ: There was the attempt with the Sam Hunter book, I think, to do that.

ES: I suppose, yes; and [the book by Irving] Sandler, because that was about Alfred. I think on that he ran smack into Marga after a bit.

SZ: Maybe what I'll do is throw out some names and maybe you can think of a story about them or just say what comes to your mind. I know we talked about Monroe Wheeler and we talked about René and Alfred and Arthur. Let me try some of the department heads. How about [Edward] Steichen?

ES: Steichen was marvelous. Steichen used to give the press office the worst publicity prints I've had from any department. He gave us their third or fourth rejects, I think. But he was a very sweet man and very good fun. I told him once that we were starting a garden, my first garden, and was there a book I could read. He said no and he laughed, and the next day I found on my desk a guide to wildflowers from Steichen, which was the best possible thing to read. He was very enthusiastic about his shows. And, of course, The Family of Man. He told me once he worried a little bit from time to time. You remember the photograph of the couple lying in the grass, embracing each other. He said, "You realize that man is wearing a wedding ring. I always worry a little bit about that picture."

SZ: As if that were impossible?

ES: He assumed that it was an American soldier who was in England during the war. It's probably not his wife, he thought. Steichen adored his own wife, his second wife, and asked me to put the notice in the paper, which I did, when she died. He didn't know what to do; he had her cremated and he didn't know what to do with the ashes. He was going to throw them into the pond; they lived in this beautiful house with a great, big, wonderful pond with a lot of water lilies on it, and he was going to throw the ashes in there, but then he worried about a bird coming down and taking them, eating them. I don't know if they would eat ashes, but anyway, it worried him a lot. For a long time they sat on the piano, as I remember. And, of course, he married Joanna, who was around the Museum a lot. We used to go out there because we had a house in Connecticut at that time, and we used to go over there for dinner. I could never talk to him about his past; we talked only about the immediate time. He was very self-confident about himself and his own history. I gather he was largely responsible for getting [Beaumont] Newhall out, which is too bad, because Newhall was a perfectly good historian, and Steichen was not an historian at all. Steichen was a great public coup for the Museum, I think....

SZ: And what about John Szarkowski?

ES: John's a good, close friend of both of ours. We both think he's a wonderful man. He was a great populist, you know. He writes beautifully and is extremely thoughtful. I think he's superb. I always felt Oldenburg relied on him quite heavily and I hope he's alright without him.

SZ: Relied on him in what way?

ES: In all kinds of odd ways--that is, not odd, but I think he relied on John's judgment about Museum matters and policies and I think he would consult him privately from time to time, which Dick did anyway. Dick did ask people for advice and support. I know when the new galleries were being built this last time, he used to get Arthur in there to help him--help him deal with Rubin, really, because Rubin was sort of taking over the element of designing the galleries. Dick has a very good eye, so he worried about that and would call Arthur down and put the two of them together and leave them in the gallery [LAUGHING]. He was right, of course, really. Arthur complained bitterly, but I thought Dick was absolutely right. They were much more likely to listen to each other without Dick there; they'd be busy making points otherwise, you know. But I think that we haven't seen John [since he retired], but I'm sure he'll have a good time writing and lecturing, and he may even go back to photography.

SZ: I think that's what he said he was going to do.

ES: Really?

SZ: Yes.

ES: I've got a wonderful picture of his he gave me years ago.

SZ: So you had a good working relationship with him.

ES: Oh, yes. John and Jill and their children are very good friends of ours, and my daughter taught at Brearley at that very difficult time in Nina's life when their little boy died. My daughter worked very hard on that; she liked Nina a lot and felt very sorry for her, very worried about her. She also helped Jill, who was in a very bad way. She couldn't get the child down to be picked up by the bus.

SZ: Why?

ES: I don't know. Linda finally said, "Mrs. Szarkowski, I'm sorry, we can't hold up this bus for one child." Jill is very fair-minded. What she needed was somebody to snap her out of her preoccupation. Nevertheless, I think it helped her. I hope it did. Nina now seems absolutely fine.

SZ: I think I've asked you about everybody except for Riva Castleman.

ES: We knew Riva NOT at all well. Jean Collins sent me a picture taken at the opening of John's last show. I was talking to John and she was right next to us.... I never knew Riva at all well and we were never close at all. I think we had lunch once in the thirty-some-odd years I was there. I asked her if she could go to lunch with me, because I thought that was the way you were supposed to behave and I was rather embarrassed I had never lunched with her. We sat down and she said, "Now what do you want?," which should have put me off. I always thought her shows were good and I think she's done a good job as whatever she is for the curatorial departments. I know Arthur was very pleased that Dick selected her for that.

SZ: She's a deputy director for curatorial affairs and also still director of prints.

ES: I did not feel any particular closeness. How's Bernice Rose? She's still there?

SZ: Yes.

ES: I just reviewed the [Alexander] Calder show at the Whitney [Museum of American Art].

SZ: You reviewed it for...?

ES: Maine Antique Digest, which is what I review for now. It does a pretty good job, but in the details and press material it's as if the Lipmans [Jean and Howard] and the Whitney had invented Calder, practically speaking, which, of course, is far from the truth. Not only did the Modern give him his first shows and buy him his first things, but he showed all over the world and had commissions all over the world.

SZ: But the Whitney has had a couple of major....

ES: Yes. There was a big show just before he died and they bought the Circus, but they didn't buy til very late, you see, well after he was an international star, and I think the Lipmanns are responsible for that, because they love his work. But the press material has him being picked up by [Gertrud] Whitney at the Whitney School when he was at the Art Students League and encouraged, but that's not quite the way it was working. They did encourage him, but it was the Modern who really gave him his first push, bought his first things, commissioned things. Of course, he was brilliant. When I think of that Circus in Paris, because the Parisians loved circuses and all the artists did--he got to know everybody that way. He was a good friend of the Sobys. We had lunch one Sunday with Sandy and Luisa [Calder] at the Sobys in New Canaan. It was terribly good fun. I read someplace that Calder once in a café in Paris in the '20s tried to rearrange all the tables. But I remember dinner at the guest house in his honor. It must have been celebrating the Museum's Calder show, when he gave all those things to the Museum. So we gave a dinner in his honor and before the dinner he rearranged all the placecards; he reseated the dinner, which, of course, had probably taken Emily

Stone five hours in consultation with Alfred and Dorothy and everybody to carefully do, balance, balance, balance. He was perfectly cheerful about it, as I remember, sort of lumbering about.

SZ: Emily Stone--that's not a name that comes up very often.

ES: Emily Woodruff, her name was at that time. I was appalled that nobody from the Museum was at her funeral, because she worked there for a long, long time, after everybody had left or gone or died. She worked there for a long time.

SZ: What was she like?

ES: She was a sort of a distant cousin of Sam's from Boston. I think she was really very good, very dedicated. I think it wasn't easy for her in a lot of ways.

SZ: Why is that?

ES: She didn't understand, for example, how important dealers were to the Museum. They had to be included, should be included, at dinner parties, and how they were fun and knew a lot and were extremely attractive people, and better than a lot of other people in terms of being an asset to a Museum dinner party. Ditto the press; she didn't understand about that.

SZ: Was she responsible for the guest lists?

ES: You had to make suggestions, each department did, and she would complain. I think Alfred persuaded her that dealers were important. I think I persuaded her that at least some press were highly respectable and important.

SZ: Which dealers were frequent?

ES: At the Museum parties?

SZ: Yes.

ES: It was done on a real basis of connection with the artist. So Leo [Castelli] would be there occasionally, Curt [Valentin] or whoever.

SZ: Someone told me--I don't remember if it was you, because it was a while ago--that Curt was a real fixture at the Museum; he would come and go, and really sort of hang out.

ES: Probably. He had, I think, a long affair with Jane Sabersky, who worked for the Museum. Then, he met somebody else, and Jane was furious and she threw his watch against the wall. She was so mad she broke his watch and then she threatened to charge things to him all over New York City. This was totally unlike Jane. She was a good friend of ours. She just sort of lost her mind.

SZ: What did she do there?

ES: She was in the circulating exhibitions department. Jane was English and Polish, I think. She was a good friend of the King of Holland; she used to borrow all my clothes every time he came to New York. Johnny Meyers, for example, was around a lot. Dorothy and Alfred went to galleries all the time, every Saturday. It was much harder for Bill Rubin, of course, to go, and Alicia [Legg]. The galleries were closer to the Museum then. I used to go on my lunch hour; as I said, it was easy. Leo was just a few blocks away.

SZ: It was on 77th Street.

ES: Yes, but it's a long cry from....

SZ: Soho.

ES: Yes, I think.

SZ: Did you tell me last time why you left when you did?

ES: I was offered another job.... I was intrigued with the idea of Christie's. It was small and I would have a chance to set up a press office and watch it grow, which was terribly good fun, it really was. They were a very amusing bunch of people. Also, I liked the idea of dipping into Chinese art and stuff like that. We had a Christie's dinner last night, as a matter of fact, for all Christie's people, present and ex-.

SZ: Let me ask you what one of the best times you had in those years was. I won't ask you what the best time was.

ES: One of the best times.

SZ: Yes.

ES: What I really liked best was the collections committee. That was the most fun. I thought it was pretty special to sit and have these things brought before your eyes, my God. I liked a cocktail party we gave for [Alexandr] Solzhenitsyn, in the penthouse, to meet artists. I thought that if we could just...as I recall, he wanted to come to the Museum just because he wanted to meet Steichen, but I thought some of the artists could meet him and then they could follow things if they wanted to. That was fun to do. The automobile shows were good fun. We had a parade once, with people in cars.... The exhibition houses were marvelous, in the garden--[Marcel] Breuer, [Gregory] Ain, the Japanese house. I think one of the things that was so wonderful, particularly in the

press office, Sharon, was that we worked for everybody, and the enormous variety of what the Museum was doing. The whole thing was exciting. Nothing was ever recycled. In the print department, for example, there is a lot of recycling of exhibitions, and Bill Lieberman found twenty different ways to show the same thing. It became very apparent because some pictures would have five or six labels from different shows in which they'd been used. Portraits by Artists, German Expressionism, Early German Art--the list goes on and on. Whereas, looking at the list of exhibitions for any given year [1955], and these are just the highlights, really: Two Graphic Designers, Latin-American Architecture [Since 1945], Vestments by Matisse--that was just so beautiful. Modern Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India--that was a wonderful show, with all of those terrific related events that we did, Ravi Shankar and that wonderful dancer. Anne Resor arranged those things for the Junior Council. Her father was head of J. Walter Thompson and they had a big office in India, so she had very good connections, and she arranged these wonderful three programs in the auditorium while the show was on. It was very good fun. I think the Museum had a wonderful sense of showmanship. Everybody there did--that is, the troika, Barr, d'Harnoncourt and Monroe Wheeler, were all extremely good at that. They were all scholars and all very good, solid, in their fields. They had a terribly good sense of what would work, even the titles of the shows themselves were carefully thought out and worked on. Sometimes Monroe, who was very good at that, would make twenty or thirty titles and then he'd pick out the best one. René was, of course, such a brilliant installation man. The works of art didn't get lost in all this, they were enhanced by it, or at least more people came, wanted to see the things.

SZ: Do you think a lot of that has been lost today?

ES: I think some of it's been lost, yes.

SZ: Would you say that the Museum has a great sense of showmanship?

ES: I think some of it has been lost, partly because in d'Harnoncourt there was an extraordinary installation man, really extraordinary, and in Drexler you had a man who was extremely good in the design field, and I have the feeling that nothing much has happened in that department since he left. Arthur had brilliant ideas. Then their wonderful survey of Textiles U.S.A., that was a very good competition; all kinds of wonderful things came out of that. Buildings for Business and Government, that was very good. Architecture Worth Saving, Architecture and Imagery, The Package--that was wonderful, with the egg on the [catalogue] cover, the perfect package. The Homage to New York--that was the [Jean] Tinguely thing in the garden that exploded--that was very much pushed by Barr. He thought it would be a great thing to do. I was a little bit nervous because we were in the middle of a fundraising drive. He thought it was a great thing to do and he wrote a long poem for Vogue magazine. I liked him, though; he was a very interesting man. Fifteen Polish Painters--I bought that Polish thing in the other room out of that show, a collage.

SZ: You saw an artist in that show you liked and so you went and bought something?

ES: Yes. It's a lovely piece. It's a very delicate collage and I love it. It traveled forever and I finally got it back. I probably didn't have to pay very much for it. It was about two hundred dollars and I thought it was a lot of money, way over my budget of seventy-five dollars. Then some years later, there was an exhibition of this man's work, along with some other Poles, at the Polish embassy or something like that. It was terrible. It espoused Abstract Expressionism and he was not a good Ab Ex artist. I remember once on the collections committee Alfred talked at great length about a very small work, six by four inches, of some banners by a Philadelphia artist--I forget his name, I'm very sorry to say--but it was very emblematic, like an emblem, very powerful, though very, very small. Alfred talked at length about how it was powerful though small and how he liked that. About a year later, I got a newspaper clipping about this artist at work on his latest work; we got [the clipping] because it said he had a work in the Museum collection. There he was on a scaffolding, a huge ladder, doing

the same thing, but only a scale about five thousand times bigger. Success.

SZ: Powerful and large.

ES: Yes. A show called Stairs that actually was a circulating show. Porter McCray did that. I think I found a mistake in that Hunter book. Should I tell somebody? It's probably a typo. I'll doublecheck it. I was fooling with these years in connection with the Calder thing....

SZ: You were there for the Stein collection, right [Four Americans in Paris: The Collections of Gertrude Stein and Her Family, 1970]?

ES: Yes. That was wonderful. I couldn't find those photographs. I'll come across them at some point and send them over.

END TAPE 4, SIDE 2

END INTERVIEW