**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

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| **INTERVIEW WITH:** | **IONE ULRICH SUTTON (IS)** |
| **INTERVIEWER:** | **SHARON ZANE (SZ)** |
| **LOCATION:** | **NEW YORK, NEW YORK** |
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**BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

IS: Even Alfred [Barr] didn't know that I had started to paint and draw when I was six years of age....

SZ: We'll get to when you were six in a minute. I want to ask you where and when you were born and a little bit about your family background, anything....

IS: I was born in Ionia, Michigan. That has nothing to do with my being named Ione; it was a coincidence. I'm one of six daughters of Otto M. Ulrich.

SZ: That's German?

IS: Yes. My mother was part-Danish, and they came from Ohio and Illinois. My father taught school originally, but when he moved into Michigan he went into business and gave up teaching and became a postmaster in this town. It was a little town of less than ten thousand, ninety-five hundred or something, but a classic little town, very nice.

SZ: Near Detroit?

IS: No, it's halfway between Lansing and Grand Rapids. It's the county seat.

SZ: The year you were born?

IS: Nineteen-oh-five, July 31st. I was the fifth of six. My father called me boss until I was seven, and then there was a new boss: another baby was born.

SZ: And did he call her boss?

IS: Yes [laughter]. My first demotion. But it was very pleasant. We had a very, very interesting upbringing. My father was considered pretty much the most academic guy in town and the school paid great attention to what he said and did. He had a library of his own and we'd go to school and the teacher would say, "You didn't get that in your school book, where did you get that?" In my father's library. "Well, bring it in tomorrow." I'd say, "I'm not permitted to take my father's books out of the library." Then the school would send a note to him and get the book, and then they'd buy the fifty-two volumes American history and put them in the school library. So he had quite an academic background, and a musical background, too. His family came from Weimar [Germany], so maybe that had something to do with it; it was a musical, cultural town, you see. He played the pipe organ and the violin and the piano. We had a chautauqua that came to town every summer, and they bought four tickets, so two of the children got to go. They went to every performance. I heard [Ernestine] Schumann-Heink and [Enrico] Caruso, all those people at the time that went out on the chautauqua circuit. So I had quite a nice attachment to music, too, and the future generations...we have a lot of generations; at this reunion coming up, there will be four generations, and a great many musicians. I have no children, so my sister's children and grandchildren are important to me. My father said to me, "No daughter of mine is going to be a crackpot artist!" My mother said to me, "Don't worry, I'll fix it. That'll be all right, everything will be fine." But she died when I was eighteen, so I never got "fixed."

SZ: You really wanted to be an artist. Tell me a little bit about that. You were a good draughtsman?

IS: I was always drawing and doing things. There was one woman in town who had graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago. She lived next to the library. I was the greatest user of the library; I knew all the art books. So my mother got this Mrs. McGregor to give me lessons. Before I was fourteen, fifteen years of age, out of these books I had copied a number of...and some of them are quite interesting; my family have them--*Chambers's Light of the World,* and...who's the little girl sitting down, it's called *Hope,* the one playing on the lute? Anyway, these were out of the books. It was very interesting that my father never showed any interest. My mother was very compassionate about it, and when she died, I was running his house for a while. I had a younger sister; I was eighteen....

SZ: The other sisters were older.

IS: Yes, some of them married and away and so forth, but the twelve-year-old and I were there. And he'd come home for lunch and say, "You didn't do quite right by that picture. You've got to work that over those eyes, they're not quite something." I almost dropped dead.... My father! And he'd said, "No daughter of mine is going to be a crackpot artist." It was very interesting. Then I was going to find a way to go to Michigan State University. I wanted to take up architecture. My father was a mathematician, he'd taught mathematics, and I inherited my talent for math from him, not that I particularly like it, but it does happen to be a talent I have, and Michigan State University wouldn't allow me to--I might add, it was Michigan Agricultural College in those days, very small--they wouldn't let girls in the architecture courses.

SZ: And the reason they gave you was exactly that?

IS: Yes. "It's not for girls." Anyway, my father in a couple of years finally got married, and I decided I had to move away.

SZ: So he hadn't had the resources for you to go somewhere else?

IS: No, I was keeping his house for him. I was the one at home with a younger sister who was twelve, thirteen, fourteen years of age, so I hadn't any thought of leaving.

SZ: In other words, if you could have gone to Michigan State or whatever, you could have been home and done that?

IS: No, I was fifty miles away or something from Michigan State, so I'd have to leave and nobody would be running his house. It didn't seem like a responsibility; it seemed like just a natural way for things to progress. But then, when he was going to get married, I decided I had to move, so I went and lived with my eldest sister in Lansing, Michigan, for some years. Then I came to New York when I was....

SZ: So did you work in Lansing?

IS: Yes. I got a job; really, always in finance, with a real estate promoter and so forth.

SZ: I guess that was at a time when you didn't need a college degree to do some of that, right?

IS: I had the talent. At one time some place called up my father and said, "You've got a daughter that's rated the best math student in the high school. Does she want a summer job?" My father said, "I don't know. Ask her." But they'd call the school and the school would say, "She's the one." I took some bookkeeping and some other math courses in high school. I was always so far ahead, they'd give me a week off and let the others catch up. That was just wonderful for me; you know how a kid would adore that. Anyway, I came to New York when I was about twenty-one.

SZ: So that was nineteen-twenty...?

IS: Twenty-six.

SZ: What made you decide to come to New York?

IS: Again, my family is very close-knit, we have a sense of responsibility. I had a sister who was married and living in New York, and she was pregnant and contemplating a divorce. That was really tragedy personified. I have to go back and say that when my father went to college he took a year of theology, and he was a very religious person.

SZ: And therefore you had a very religious upbringing?

IS: [It was] compulsory. But it was all right.... I don't mean it was a hardship, but if on Sunday I didn't go to Sunday school and church, I was too ill to leave the house. Things like that. He was a lay reader in the church, and he kept the organ going. Somebody played the organ, but we'd say, "Daddy, you've got to get over there, get over there. You've got to pump up the organ." He always sat on the end [of the pew] and go around and pump the organ. It was funny. We adored it.... There was a lot of pleasure and a lot of humor around. But we were prohibited from quarreling. I attribute that to a great extent to my grown-up, gentle demeanor and temper. I can get angry, but I do not lose my temper.... We used to have to quarrel in secret, and you know, kids do quarrel. My one sister and I were only eighteen months apart and we politiced the three older ones: if I had two on my side, I'd win, and if she had two on her side, she'd win. "Please ask Mother to do this," and they'd go to Mother and say, "You'd better let her do this"--according to the two out of the three. It was hysterically funny. That's my politics. As a matter of fact, my family don't quarrel at all today; they almost never quarrel, three, four generations. We have no sense of competition.

SZ: It's your family standard.

IS: It was the standard that my parents had set. We had what was called a nursery with five little beds, and my mother would come up just before they went to bed, and

probably we'd been in bed for hours. I went to bed at six; then I had a bedtime at seven, but no argument. But she'd always come up and see that we were tucked in and she'd say, "If anybody's had any quarrel today, you'd better apologize before you go to sleep. If something happened in the night, you'd never forgive yourself." That was the kind of a philosophy from a young age. It was pretty nice, really, and I appreciate it. Now that I'm older, I appreciate it more than I ever did before. So what else do you want? When I first came to New York....

SZ: What was New York like? That was in the middle of the '20s. Was it exciting? It certainly must have been different than Lansing.

IS: It was exciting in that there was a lot of music things going on, and having had that introduction, well, I heard [Ignace Jan] Paderewski and whatever was going on, I was going. I had one particular sister, Irene, who was more interested in music, so I'd always send her the programs, and this sort of carried forward. Now I don't go to anything anymore. I say "anything," once a month or something, but very seldom.

SZ: In other words, you went quite frequently, then.

IS: I saw almost every show around. I went to everything of any importance. [Tape interruption]

SZ: You were just telling me that you went to a lot of music. What about what few galleries there were, and museums?

IS: Oh sure, I went to museums. Also, I won a scholarship at the [National] Academy of Design. When they got to the life class, I gave it up. I didn't particularly like doing that. I wasn't as good in the life class, so I kind of gave that up.

SZ: So you came and you lived with your sister?

IS: Yes.

SZ: In Manhattan?

IS: She had the child. She didn't get a divorce, but he died in a couple of years. I expected to go back, but I never did. My first work in New York was doing some fiduciary work for some lawyers, which means taking care of trusts and splitting up the income. I didn't do anything with the selection or the content of the trusts, but the beneficiaries were my responsibilities.

SZ: That was for a law firm?

IS: A law firm, two law firms. And then one day I heard that there was going to be a job opening at The Museum of Modern Art.

SZ: So by that time it was already open.

IS: Yes, that was '32, and it had opened in '29.

SZ: But you were in New York when it opened, right, if you came in '26.

IS: Yes, I was.

SZ: But there's nothing about that that you remember?

IS: No, no. I never went to the Heckscher Building. I went to the one on 53rd Street, and then when I heard there was a job opening there, I thought: well, I'm going to hotfoot it up there and see if I can get the job, I don't care what it is. Alan Blackburn was the executive director, and this girl had gone on vacation and gotten married out in Ohio or something and had never come back. So I went up and they said I could have the job--this was in July--and I said, "That's fine, I'll be in on Monday." They said, "We

haven't got the money until September," and I said, "That's all right. I'll be in on Monday." "But we can't pay you until September." I said, "That's all right, I'll be in on Monday."

SZ: You just wanted it and that was it.

IS: I wasn't going to let anybody else get that thing. So I worked for three months for nothing. Previously, I was getting paid; in 1932. $3,200 a year by the law firm, and the man said to me, "You can't leave. We'll give you more money." I said, "You can't afford me." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Because I'm working for nothing for three months, and then they're going to pay me $15 a week, $1,560 a year; I'll take a fifty percent drop." Fortunately, I always had a few means.

SZ: I was going to ask you how....

IS: That's that math in me. I bought my first share of stock when I was eighteen years of age. I bought two shares of AT&T for $125 each and paid $20 a month down, and the years went by and I wound up with 915 shares of AT&T over the years.

SZ: So tell me what it was about it. Was it just because it was a museum? Were you particularly fond of modern art at that time?

IS: I wasn't. You see, I didn't understand it [modern art] at all. Everything I had ever been affiliated with was academic, even at the Academy of Design. I went to the Art Students League, too, at one time. So when I went to The Museum of Modern Art I made a deal with myself--I knew nothing about *modern* art, absolutely nothing--that I'd never open my trap about art, because I felt that I was in the wrong seat for The Museum of Modern Art, I was too academic. I had pictures that were academic--I'd always had pictures. But as time went on, it was very interesting. Years later, years later, Alfred used to say, "We forgot to ask the expert layman." Alfred called me the "expert layman." At executive committee meetings I didn't open my mouth about art.

Discussing all the future exhibitions, we'd have books and photographs and I'd go through them and I'd push up the ones I liked. Alfred would always sit next to me at the executive committee meetings, and he'd want to know why I'd put that one up and so forth. He was more interested in what I was looking at, so that's how he turned on to call me the expert layman, which was very nice. But it was only in that group; I don't think a lot of people in the Museum knew that. But one time Jock Whitney was going to buy a [Paul] Signac. Alfred had two Signacs in his office and he called me over--my office was in one corner and his in the other corner, so we never passed by--"Come on in, I want to ask you something. Which one of those two pictures should I tell Jock to buy?" We discussed it at quite some length. I was very touched that he wanted my opinion, naturally.

SZ: Back to when you first went up there. Alan Blackburn was the executive director, and....

IS: I became his assistant.

SZ: Right. He had responsibility for the building and finances and....

IS: Just running the show. I kept the books.

SZ: Tell me a little bit of just what your first impressions were of Alan Blackburn....

IS: When I went there, there were eight people on the staff. The budget was $86,000 a year. We were in the Barber house, on a lease for a dollar a year, which we neglected to pay [laughing]. It was just routine. Philip Johnson had an office there, and Ada Louise [Huxtable] used to come in. I don't think Ada Louise went on the payroll until sometime later; I think she came with Philip and was aiding him.... But Philip and Alan left the Museum for left-wing political reasons.

SZ: Was that a shocking thing to you?

IS: No, it didn't phase me at all. I just thought they were wrong and it had nothing to do with me, and I shrugged my shoulders--that's that placid background I'd had--[and said,] "They can do their thing." Some years later, Philip sat at my desk and he said, "Alfred told me what you said at the trustees meeting"--about his returning to the Museum--and I said, "Well, I'm surprised that he repeated it. Do you want me to repeat it again?" He said, "You know what I would give to wash out those years?" Tears were falling down his cheeks. I said, "Philip, you've just washed it out of my heart." With those tears rolling down when he talked about "those years," it was very, very touching.

SZ: What had you said at that meeting?

IS: We were looking for someone for the architecture department and Philip's name came up. The trustees were inclined to forgive and forget, and they asked me, "What do you think about the staff?" I said, "I'm sure the staff would be enthusiastic," and they all laughed. I said, "He's a talented man. He could be great, and we miss a talent in the architecture department." So, I don't know whether my words had much to do with it or not, but anyway, Philip came back.

SZ: But going back to the first years you were there, there were originally eight staff and then I guess it just kept going.

IS: You see, it was the depths of the Depression--it was '32--and Lizzie Bliss had died, leaving us her collection, and we were supposed to raise $1,000,000 to insure the permanence of the Museum before we could accept the collection. You know all that. Cornelius Bliss, her brother, said if we'd raise $750,000, it would be all right, we'd eventually have the million. So we went to work and we raised $650,000 in about two months. Let me tell you, that early staff was more than dedicated, more than dedicated, including me: I didn't mind staying till ten o'clock at night or something like that. And we raised that money. It still wasn't $750,000, but he, as executor of her

estate, decided he would accept it. In no time at all, it was over the $750,000, but that was our first thing. When I went there, we owned $1,000 of second-hand furniture, not a picture, [and had an] $86,000-a-year expense budget. There was a group of people--I can't tell you how many it was; it was not many--that made pledges for three years, and it came to about $105,000 a year, of which $86,000 was the expense budget. I don't remember what we did with the other, but in those three years there were only two payments of $5,000 that were made--not in the middle of the Depression. That's the roots of the Museum. They had 350 members. Alfred Barr's secretary kept track of all the membership. Then one day I guess I dreamed up, "Why don't we do a membership promotion?" So we sent out a promotion--a very naive promotion, and I'd love to see it today--but we doubled the membership. We got another 350 members.

SZ: You mean it was a direct-mail piece?

IS: Yes. The first time we'd ever done anything like that.

SZ: And where did you get all those names. How did that work in those days?

IS: Just like everything else, you got lists from wherever you could of people interested in art. We had a front desk--there was a man named Mr. [Ernest] Tremp who ran the front desk--and Tremp, he would get the names of visitors and so forth, but we doubled the membership from 350 to 700. Isn't that fascinating? And then, of course, we had that endowment then, after we'd raised the $600,000, and of course it kept growing and growing and growing. I was assistant treasurer/controller/business manager, whatever--a bunch of things--and then some years later they made me treasurer. I guess I've been the only paid treasurer they've ever had. I didn't have a vote on the trustee board. I went to every trustee meeting from the time I went there, practically; I dictated practically all the minutes for years. At one time they had a secretary--she was *the* secretary of the Museum--but they didn't like her minutes, and they asked me if I would go back to doing all the minutes. And I did it. I said I'd

do it only on one condition, that I didn't have to use my secretary, because she was already overcrowded. I was overcrowded, but they'd give me another secretary outside of my office affairs. So they did. She was a marvelous secretary because I'd get interrupted on the phone and I couldn't remember if I was in the present tense or the past tense when I left off and I'd just go on. She'd always put it so it was consistent and I didn't have to even think about it.... We were hard-working. Everybody filled in. If there was an evening opening, the secretaries went down and were at the desk. If there was anything to be filled in, it didn't matter what the job was. I washed dishes for that place, for years. The library was in the penthouse...in the old Barber house. There was a penthouse up there. The trustees met once a month, and one of the guards and I would go up and wash the dishes, because Mrs. Murray Crane would bring tea and we had to have clean dishes. The dishes belonged to the Museum.... The whole small crew was a big family, and they were absolutely dedicated, and they all worked there for near nothing.... I could have made much more money doing anything else. But it was because it was the Museum.

SZ: You said somebody told you there was an opening, so were you connected with somebody else who was there? Because I think a number of people came because they knew Alfred. It was all sort of....

IS: I didn't know Alfred. I didn't know anybody. I can't remember who told me there was going to be an opening there. I said, "I gotta go." So I did.

SZ: The Barber building. Tell me a little bit how it was organized.

IS: It was a fifty-foot building, on two lots.... It was a lovely gray stone, three steps up, a little circular entranceway, with a kind of foyer in the beginning. There was an elevator. You went to the galleries on the first two, three floors by stairway. There were rooms. I don't even think we took down any walls; I don't think so. It didn't belong to us, you see: we had the use of it for a dollar a year. One time we...I don't

know, somebody gave us two lots across the street from the Barber building, 11 West 53rd Street. Things began to hum a bit: we were going to build a building. The trustees decided that it would swap those two lots on the other side of the street for the Barber house, which they did. Then, when it came to doing the design, the entrance of the Museum was built to make a north end of Rockefeller Plaza. The idea was that [the Plaza] would go through [to 53rd Street], but the "21" Club would never allow a street to go through there.

SZ: And that's what happened to that plan.

IS: Yes, that's what happened to that plan, but that's why the entrance was at that particular spot, because *if* the street ever went through, it would be the north end [of the Plaza], which would have been very exciting. Then the Donnell Library came in; that was going to be on one side. It was kind of a real plan, a plotting plan, to have a little cultural center at the top end of Rockefeller Plaza.

SZ: The eight staff people: there was Alfred.... How did you first meet him and what were your impressions?

IS: I don't know. The girl who never showed up, never came back, nobody had any way of showing me anything, so I just went on snooping, looked in all the books, etc. I remember one time I went in to Alfred's secretary, a girl named Alice Mallette, and I said, "What do you do?" She was quite uppity about it: Who was I? [laughing] She told me what she did, including membership, and we finally became very good friends. There was Philip and Ada Louise and an office boy, Billy O'Leary. Then there was somebody else down around the hall; I'm not quite sure who it was, somebody who had to do with industrial design and who was *wanting* to do something for the Museum with industrial design. Then Iris Barry came in and wanted to be the librarian. We made the penthouse into a library and she took a course on library [science]. People came, giving us books. They were happy to: no place to give art books. Then, Jock Whitney was of course interested in films, and Bill Paley came on

the board [and was also] interested in films. They got the Whitney Foundation to give us--I may be telling you what you already know--to give us $2,500 to do a report on how we might set up a film library. Iris and Dick [John E.] Abbott, whom she eventually married, wrote that report. Then I think Paley or Whitney, one or the other, or both, gave space for the film offices to be over in the CBS building on 52nd Street. The film thing just snowballed, it was just marvelous. I was a great friend of Iris's, to the day she died, visited her often in France, told her how to buy a building in France, which she did, and so forth. She was a great person.

SZ: You really loved her.

IS: Terrific, yes, terrific. A real friend.

SZ: And then Sarah Newmeyer came shortly after you got there, right?

IS: It seemed to me she wasn't there for quite a while. I don't know, there was so much happening and it might not have been as long a period as it seemed because there was so much happening, and it was all very exciting. I wasn't married at the time.

SZ: When did you get married?

IS: In '35. I went there in '32 and married in '35. Went on using my name, much to the chagrin of the Suttons, I can tell you.

SZ: That was a fairly unusual thing for a woman to do in those days.

IS: They called it a "Lucy Stoner," as she was the first person that ever did that, maintained her own name.

SZ: Lucy Stoner?

IS: Yes. I'm sure you can look it up someday. That's what they called it. By that time, we were working with only colleges and libraries across the country. We started the Circulating Exhibitions department--that's what really made us national.... There were still very few of us. When I left, there were 180 people on the staff and the expense budget was $1.25 million; and by that time we had the building, a collection and an endowment of five or six million, something like that. I have no idea what it was, but whatever it was, it had grown a lot. I was ex-officio on the finance committee, as treasurer.

SZ: But still, in the time of the '30s, before the building was built, just tell me a little bit what it was like to be there. Obviously, it was fairly intimate.

IS: Yes, everybody knew everybody. It was a family, and you didn't hesitate to offer your help to another department or ask if you could lend a hand. That picture was taken on the steps, in 1938, was the whole staff at that time. What was it, twenty people? Something like that. I came in last, peeking up at the back; you can just see the top of my head. Tom Mabry had taken Alan Blackburn's place.

SZ: So Alan Blackburn was there for maybe two years. Did you get to know him at all?

IS: As well as you could.

SZ: But you got along.

IS: We got along. I get along with everybody. There are very few people that I can't like.

SZ: I want some more pictures of what people were like. Tom Mabry--what was he like as a person?

IS: He was not very forceful. That's why they finally let him go. As a matter of fact, that's when I started stepping in. I didn't realize that I was forceful, but I must have been,

because I sort of fell into that. I had so many titles over the years.

SZ: So he was intimidated?

IS: No, he just rolled with the tide. You have to be inventive in a place like that. You've got to be courageous and inventive. I recommended a great many things for that museum, big things.

SZ: Such as?

IS: Such as building the house that we had next door...onto the main building.... It was a private house that we owned next door and we were using it for storage. During the war Mrs. [Abby Aldrich] Rockefeller and Stephen Clark were doing things for veterans and what-not, and we rented an expensive space on Fifth Avenue. I think we were paying $10,000 a year or something like that; it was a lot of money in those days. After that ceased--that had had some government accreditation because it was for veterans--but after that is when they started art classes. Even I joined a carpentry class [laughing]. And one day I said to the chap running the class--I've forgotten his name--"I've got to go home, I'm going to hack my fingers off." I just had an idea. I just don't dare play with these machines." I went home and I figured out that if we took the rent and the other costs of that building; we could borrow half a million dollars and tear down that building next door and cut through to a new building and put that adjunct on.... The fire well was on that side of the building, so I said, "Oh my goodness, we don't need a new fire hall. We can cut into it." As an aside, it was a little joke around: Philip did the drawings, and of course the gallery floors were fifteen, eighteen feet high, and so they put an extra floor in the new adjunct and... Philip had a sewer pipe going through the middle of the doorway [laughing]. He did the drawings, and he didn't realize it.... It was very funny, very funny. We had a big, big laugh over that one. You couldn't help but like Philip. Philip was always a friendly, out-going, exuberant type of person. I guess he still is today. I haven't seen him for three or four years.... He always called me "Ulrich," never anything but Ulrich. He

went to college with a nephew of mine, a nephew on the Sutton side of the family Philip's age, who was in the same class.... My niece on the Sutton side married the classmate and they had a fiftieth anniversary, so he [her husband] asked him [Philip Johnson], "Do you remember Ione Ulrich?" He said, "For God's sake, do I remember Ulrich. What's she to you?" So he said, "She's my aunt." My husband was eighteen years my senior. They loved it, it was a big joke. This nephew is a year older than I am. Philip's my age.

SZ: I was about to ask you a little bit about Alfred and in those years what his presence felt like, because his presence has been described to me by different people in a lot of different ways, most of it after you all got to the new building. So, in those first, early days....

IS: He was the absent-minded professor. You always knew he was thinking hard, you always felt that. Whatever was on the outside, he had something churning on the inside. It had to do with art, always. Everybody respected him. How could you not? When we had those classes, I went to...the adult classes, and it was a dead secret that I was Miss Ulrich. By that time there was no mention by anybody about Mrs. Sutton. But finally, Alfred said to me--and I didn't know Alfred knew I was in the class--"Abe says you're a good student." I said, "He has to tell you that." I had a portfolio, and he said, "What have you got in there?" I said, "I haven't got anything in there." And he said, "You're not going to be like that." I said, "I'm not going to be like that. I'll show you everything I did." So the portfolio came over and was on the table in my office and I said to Alfred, "Go take a look at it before I take it home, if you wish." He was very complimentary. He said, "This isn't the way I expected you to paint." And I said, "I know. You thought it was going to be mathematical and all cubes and all so and so," and he said, "It's terrific." *Alfred* said that. Isn't that something?

SZ: Yes....

IS: That was when Alfred took to calling me the "expert layman." But as much as I wanted to be an artist...I took a lot of courses with Victor [D'Amico]; he had invitational courses, you know, but it had to be experimental. They were heavenly, absolutely heavenly. The things you could learn from Victor--brilliant, absolutely brilliant, *made* you think, *made* you do your own thing. He'd bring some newspapers in and he'd say, "Now paint something from that." Or he'd say, "Do you remember the loneliest moment in your whole life? Paint your lonely moment." Or he'd play some tapes or music, and he'd say, "Paint that music." I came in late one day and they played the music a second time. I showed him a hot-colored painting and he said, "It's perfect, it looks like the music, it's Mexican music." He absolutely forced you into putting your mind into your painting. I was never going to compete with the artists who were showing at the Museum. There are very few people at the Museum that ever saw anything I ever did, like very few people saw anything that Victor ever did. He kept his painting to himself, too. After the summer class on Long Islnd was out, I sold a painting to a woman who was staying at the Seaspray Inn, where Margareta Akermark was also staying. When she showed it to Margareta, Margareta said, "Who did that?" She said it was signed "Ione." "That wouldn't be Ione Sutton, would it?" "It certainly would." "Nobody has ever seen a picture she ever painted." I have not seen the painting since. I sold it before the paint was dry. I'd *love* to see it. I'd like to know what I think of it. You judge your own work better as time goes by.

**END TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

**BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2**

IS: Does that satisfy you?

SZ: Do you think we're done enough [laughing]?

IS: Beaumont [Newhall] just died. I felt very bad, because it brought on a lot of reminiscences, of Nancy [Newhall] and so forth.... One time I came up with another

idea. We were always showing early films, which would blow up in the case with age, they'd just go into nothing, and we had to put them on paper negatives (lavenders), which was a very, very expensive proposition. The Eastman film museum [George Eastman House] was just put in, so I said, "What are the restrictions on the films that we've got? We can't use them commercially, that I know. Could we do something with the Eastman museum if they don't put it into commercial use? We could give them certain films that we've got and they could give us ready-made lavenders [new negatives] in exchange." It became a great idea, just great. Saved us tons of money. I don't know how long they continued that. Then they moved up to Rochester, New York. I go to Rochester quite often. I had a client there, who just died. And Beaumont had moved up there some years ago.

SZ: I have other names from that time. What about Elodie Courter?

IS: She was the moving light in Circulating Exhibitions. She did a great job, a very lovable character. She had some awfully nice people working with her. I wish I could remember their names, because I remember that she had a whole staff there and they were so devoted to her. I just don't remember. Isn't that awful? It'll probably come to me in the middle of the night. I'll get up and write them down and tell them to you.

SZ: And the building superintendent, John Ekstrom, remember him?

IS: Yes.

SZ: He was there a long time, I think.

IS: Yes. We had ll those Swedes in there. And the grogs! You know about the grogs? They always had a Christmas party, the Ekstrom staff, and you didn't go unless you were invited. They made grog. It was a very, very cozy type of situation, couldn't have been lovelier.

SZ: What about the '30s, from those days, the exhibitions. What do you remember about those?

IS: I remember that first van Gogh show we had [*Vincent van Gogh,* 1935]. It was in the Barber House, and the line was around the block and up to 54th Street. That was a big, big challenge, how to handle it. We'd never had that kind of an audience before, and it made you think, if you go back into that gap, where America had never seen any of those artists, the Fauves and before the Fauves and so forth, that was the gap that we were in business to fill in, and did, gorgeously. I'm sure you've seen the report that Alfred wrote about the whale? [Note: this is a reference to AHB's report to the trustees, November 1933, in which he described the Museum's Permanent Collection "as a torpedo moving through time."] Alfred used to say, "Ask Ione, her memory is better than the files." He did a thing with the tail of the whale down like this and then the body of the whale. MoMA started out like this and had to fill in the past and come in to where the tail and body meet and then start over with the new and contemporary. It was like from the '80s to the 1920s and '30s, and then what was being done today. I don't remember the content of the report, but it was a terribly important thing; it should be in the files someplace. There are lots of reports in the files that I felt were important, and that was one of them. Then you know about the thing with the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] that got put on and called off.

SZ: Yes, but tell me what you remember about it.

IS: I'll be happy to. It happened about the time that he did the report on the whale. His theory was that when things became classic, they had been weeded out of the body and these were the classic of a certain era or decade or decades, and they should go to the classic museum, and that we should be ferreting out the small percentage of the contemporary that would in fifty or a hundred years become classic.

SZ: Which meant that the Museum was not meant to have a permanent collection.

IS: That's that. This is what changed the whole policy of the Museum. We had...Picasso's *Gertrude Stein,* and...I don't know, maybe eight or ten paintings, I've kind of forgotten what they were, that went to the Metropolitan, and they gave us $100,000 for them--as I recall, it was $100,000; it may have been more, though I don't think it was, [and] I'd be the one to remember, in any event--for us to ferret out the next group. Alfred always said we'd be lucky if ten percent of them survived as classic. That was his theory, that you had to go through what was going on to get ten percent that were going to become the classics. I think he was quite satisfied with that. We did some weird things, you know, the boot-black's chair that Sarah Newmeyer showed to Alfred and he brought it in.

SZ: I think it was Joe Milone's Shoe Shine Stand.

IS: Yes. But Alfred was very amenable to having suggestions from people. I was always having people call me up, "Couldn't I give the Museum one of my paintings" and so forth, and Alfred said to me, "Ione, you know better than that. We're not going to take a painting from an artist, ever." That's too easy. That's not going through the routine.

SZ: Do you remember the *Machine Art* show?

IS: Of course.... I was less interested in that. You've got to remember that I was a terribly busy person. At one time we had to make it a rule that the staff had to see every show, because half the time they couldn't find the time to go down to see it. It had to be a rule. That applied to me sometimes, except, of course, if it applied to painting I was likely to be there when it was being put up.

SZ: What about architecture? Did you come in after the international show [*Modern Architecture: International Exhibition,* 1932]?

IS: Just after it. That's how it happened, how Philip happened to be there.

SZ: And you didn't see that.

IS: I think I saw the show, but...no, I don't think so, but it was there, just as it was closing or something like that, and a big introduction. They had [Arthur] Drexler. That was his department?

SZ: Architecture.

IS: Then it was the other one, the one who showed new garden tools...industrial design.

SZ: Kaufmann, Edgar Kaufmann? Is that who you meant?

IS: Yes. He was very talented. I was sorry to hear that he had died. I was only in his apartment once, and of course it was a revelation, his apartment.

SZ: Because?

IS: Because of his collections and things. He was interested primarily, I think, in Tiffany art, and some Fauve paintings and the like. When you wind up with twenty-some departments, each one has a small beginning, then it grows. I haven't even thought about these for years.

SZ: Monroe Wheeler showed up at some point in the '30s.

IS: Yes, Monroe showed up in '36, '38, something like that, but he, I think, was in the Barber building, the Barber house.... Then Holger Cahill put on the Folk art show [*American Folk Art,* 1938]. He brought Dorothy [Miller] in to help. That was Dorothy's introduction to the Museum. That was the show that was very close to Mrs. [Abby Aldrich] Rockefeller's heart.

SZ: That's one of the things I wanted to ask. In those years, how did you feel Mrs. Rockefeller's presence?

IS: I adored that woman. She and I had more laughs together, we had more fun. I'll tell you a funny little episode that happened down in Williamsburg. I was in Williamsburg and she heard that I was there, and she called up and she said, "Is your husband with you?" I said, "No, unfortunately." "I was going to ask you to lunch, but if I ask just you, it'll make thirteen at the table." She was very superstitious. So she said, "Come over at eleven o'clock and we'll have a nice chat and I'll show you around." So she showed me the house, apologized for its not being a part of the restoration [of Colonial Williamsburg]. She had a collection of folk art. She had those Pennsylvania soft-paste animals in a little room. Mr. Rockefeller [John D. Rockefeller, Sr.] came in and said,... "I didn't know there was anybody here. I've brought the mail"--it was during the war--"I thought maybe there was a letter from one of your sons." Then he said, "Did somebody deliver something?" She said, "I don't know. Why are you asking?" He said, "There's a bicycle at the front door." I said, "That's my bicycle." [laughing] He backed out of the room so fast, and she and I went into utter hysterics. She said, "I've always liked you, but you came on a bicycle!" That's a fun story. Don't you think it's charming?

SZ: Yes, it's a lovely story, it really is.

IS: But when they opened that first folk art thing in Williamsburg, she called me up and said, "Miss *Ool*rich"--she could never say "Miss *Ul*rich," I was always "Miss *Ool*rich"--she said, "I need a girl to catalogue my folk art that's going to go down there, and when it goes down there they will have to have the labels"--I've forgotten who, but I found some girl from New Jersey that she was very happy with and who did a nice job for her and went down to Williamsburg with the collection and the like. She had always had in mind that it would go there, but she felt it ought to be shown here first. That was before they had a folk art museum in New York. It was one of her loves. All the boys she wanted to get interested in art. She never succeeded in getting

Winthrop at all interested, but David was always supportive of his mother and a little shy of his big brother, Nelson. When I retired from the Museum in '52, David wrote me a letter saying, "Ione, I can't imagine going into that door without you being there. I remember coming there as a schoolboy and having lunch with you and Mother in the garden." Pretty cute, isn't it? I still see him once in a while. He doesn't quite place who I am, but that's all right.

SZ: So you did have lunch with Mrs. Rockefeller in the garden.

IS: Yes, very often.

SZ: She came to the Museum frequently?

IS: Yes, she came quite often. She was there a couple times a month, at least. She was around, and she came to trustees meetings, of course.

SZ: Did she have a lot of influence?

IS: I was going to say, she had a subtle influence. There would be proposals, and I always sat facing the building across the street because of the brightness, and I said, "These other ladies have to sit with their back to the light."

SZ: Which building are we in now?

IS: The new one. It was after the Rockefeller apartments had been built over there, and they reflected a lot of light, all those windows. Something came up, there was kind of a hassle about something at a trustees meeting, so she walked out with me and she said, "Now you do believe in facing facts, don't you?" I said, "Yes, and I believe in facing them first, not last." From that day forward, she would not sit at a trustees meeting except next to me, because certain things would be said, and maybe she could tell by looking at my face or something or other it wasn't quite the...and I did

not have a vote. I was very protocol about that. I'd answer any questions and give them any kind of opinion that they would ask me for. Stephen Clark asked me one day when something was voted on, "You didn't say whether you approved of that." I said, "You didn't ask me." And he said, "That's true, we didn't. But I know one thing: you'll watchdog it." He used to call me the watchdog. He'd come to my office and say, "Now, how are our finances doing today?" and I'd say, "Sit down, I'd love to tell you." He'd say, "I don't want to know. Good-bye." They really left it to me, and then when something needed attention, I'd call him up. He was a great support. Beardsley ["Bee"] Ruml: Mrs. Rockefeller wanted him on the board. She felt he was a brilliant man. She said, "He can't afford to give a big contribution, but I'll double my contribution if he'll be on the board," which was quite something! He was a man with ideas galore; maybe seventy-five percent of them were crackpot, but the twenty-five percent were fabulous. He'd get these people all stirred up. He became chairman of the finance committee. One year--this was the first year after Mrs. Rockefeller had died--David had taken her place on the board, and it was the first budget series we had with David at the meeting. We'd meet for days and sometimes we'd have lunch sent in and sometimes people would go out for lunch. Nelson was president, and he said to me, "Well, what kind of a budget are we asking for this year, Ione?" I said, "I haven't got a figure." He said, "What kind of a budget is that?" to which I said, "I can't get myself to even put down what some department heads asked for salaries, when other departments said, 'You will not forget us.'" One is an extreme request and the other says, "Don't forget us." So I said, "I've done nothing about the payroll in the whole thing. The payroll itself, if you want my recommendation is to recommend, with a few exceptions, that you put ten percent across the board." And that was interesting. Nelson went out to lunch, but David came and had lunch with me at the table and asked the most interesting questions. Of course, he was working with the Chase bank at that time and knew all about finances. Bee Ruml was not going to be at the executive committee meeting when it [the budget] was really going to be finalized, so I called him up and said, "Bee, can I quote you? You told me the other day that if you don't take care of your staff you're going to find yourself in the position of a bank president from Texas who came in [to work] and he was the *only* one that

came in." He added, "You can't afford a thing like that." I said, "Have I your permission to quote that at the meeting, that you said that?" and he said yes. When he got back from Boston, he called me up and said, "How did you do?" I said, "Thanks to you, I did fine. I got the ten percent" [laughing]. It was just great, just great. You need that kind of support. I had David's support, too. The question was, Where are you going to get the money? Are you going to raise it? I hated Christmas. I never had any money at the bank at Christmastime. It's nobody's affair that there's no money in the bank to pay the payroll, so I had to get the payroll. I'd go to Chase bank and borrow money for the payroll. All the trustees had given their contributions for the year, and it was Bee who said, "Now, Ione, you go and tell that man that you want to borrow $60,000 or $100,000 at one percent over the money rate, and if he says no, you tell him we're going to sell all our government bonds." So I did tell him. I wouldn't have even thought of doing that, you see. But that gave me strength. Then, of course, come the first week in January I was calling everybody and saying, "Please, can we have your next year's contribution? Please?" I had to balance it out.

SZ: Because that's the way the money ran then?

IS: Everybody had given before December, there was no money to come in.

SZ: And there was no endowment to speak of at that time?

IS: We were using it, but it was on top of the endowment. We were earning fifty, sixty percent of our budget; that was a miracle in the museum world, an absolute miracle. Finally; you just go on. But, we had a lot of income from various sources, in the various departments. We had circulating exhibitions, film fees and the book sales and so forth. We had a big book department. I had seventeen assistants in my division.

SZ: Towards the end?

IS: Sure. When we moved into that building, we could expand our efforts, because we had room to expand and we did. The Museum was publicly very visible now.

SZ: Before we get to that, let's go back to when you all moved out to go to Rockefeller Center for, what, two years?

IS: It was about two years.

SZ: Was that difficult?

IS: It was difficult for me because here I was running all of the affairs for building that building: the money, everything that happened--paying all the bills and so forth. I almost felt I put in every brick myself. And of course we had a comparatively small space in Rockefeller Center, and exhibitions were cut back and we were spending a lot less money on exhibitions than we would normally. But for me, it was a whole other world, because there was that building going up, and all the contracts....

SZ: You said that you attended trustee meetings, although you didn't vote, but was your sense that, when the decision was made to build a building, was that a unanimous decision?

IS: It was a large undertaking. It didn't come about quite like that. What would we have to do in order to have a building? What kind of a building *could* we build? What kind of money did we think we might raise to start a building? It was size and everything, and money and the like. The money situation, of course, came first. Of course, in those days the buildings didn't cost what they cost today. Fortunately. There was also the whole thing of the picture collection, when we finally had money to buy pictures. That was very exciting. I can remember what we paid for some of those pictures. These days, you wouldn't believe it.

SZ: Give me an example.

IS: You know, the [Henri] Rousseau of the gypsy on the ground [*The Sleeping Gypsy,* 1897]? Thirty thousand dollars. I doubt if we ever paid $100,000 for anything; I can't seem to remember that up to '52, we ever paid $100,000 for anything.

SZ: When you went about raising the money to build the building, you were the money person at the Museum at that time. Did you think it was do-able?

IS: I thought it was do-able because those people were so enthusiastic. I had the pitch of the people. I went to all the trustee meetings. I knew who had doubts and who didn't have doubts and the like.

SZ: What are you laughing at?

IS: I really shouldn't say it, but I'll put it in because you can cut it out. When Mrs. Stanley [Helen] Resor was coming on the board, there was some question about should she be on the board because she had a divorce [laughing]. You know, she was president or vice president of that advertising agency, a working woman. I loved Helen Resor, I thought she was divine. I was riding with her in a taxi one day when I was thirty-one years of age, and I said, "Tell me something, do you think when I'm forty I'll know the answers to a lot of these things that I don't know the answers to today?" And she said, "We have a lot of people over fifty and the like," and she was saying that forty was not going to be the deadline or anything. But years later she said to me, "Are you forty?" I said yes. She said, "What did you find out?" "I found out that I was perfectly normal. It's perfectly normal at forty not to know the answers." She said, "I wanted to tell you that that day, but I thought you would be too discouraged."

SZ: It gives you a sense of her, too.

IS: I had a nice relationship with an awful lot of trustees. Betty Parkinson's mother I adored, Zaidee Bliss. I used to say, "If I could only grow old looking like her." She

was so beautiful and along in years, and so gentle. So I'll go, looking like I do, which I don't like...well, it isn't anywhere near as pretty as Zaidee Bliss was.

SZ: Who were the other trustees you liked?

IS: They don't really come to the fore, do they?

SZ: What about Mrs. Crane?

IS: Mrs. Murray Crane.

SZ: One of the founding ladies.

IS: She was like a grown-up doll, always beautifully gowned and in pinks. She was dressed so like a doll. I liked her. I never had much feeling about her. I don't think I ever had any really very personal conversation [with her]. We would talk about the tea she would bring and the like. You know who I liked very much--she was not on the board--was Nelson's wife.

SZ: Tod [Mary Clark Rockefeller].

IS: In my mind she was convinced that she was the homeliest person in kingdom come. She was the first person I knew who had contact lenses. We'd have lunch and she'd have to put her face right down to the plate. When lens came in, she became a new person. I worked for Nelson's governorship campaign. They had a party for all of the people that worked, with husbands and wives. My husband had died by that time. I came in and Nelson said, "You worked for my campaign?" I said, "Did you think I was going to work for that other guy?" [laughing] And they laughed. I met Nelson on the street at Christmastime 1957, and we stopped and had a long conversation. He said, "How's George [George W. Sutton, Jr.]?" and I said, "George is far from well." That's all I said. He died on New Year's Day, and I had the most beautiful letter from

Nelson. He said, "I had no idea when you said that George was far from well that he might be near his end." It was such a beautiful letter.

SZ: You'd known him from...he came in in the early '30s, didn't he? He was sort of fooling around with money, right?

IS: Yes. I was born in 1905, Alfred was born in 1902, Nelson was born in 1908. We were all only in our twenties. I can't imagine ever being in my twenties anymore. But he would come over late in the afternoon. We had offices on the fifth floor and there was a balcony out front, and we'd go sit on the edge of the balcony outside. I remember one time he said he had to call up Tod and tell her he was going to be late. I said, "What's your number?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "It won't be in the telephone book," and he said, "You're darn right it'll be in the telephone book. You think she's going to let those Philadelphia people not know where she is?" So it was in the telephone book [laughing]. I have a lot of funny little things, my pleasures. I loved all those little tidbits.

SZ: That's lovely. That's part of what oral history is supposed to do.

IS: So we would talk about what was coming next. I don't think Nelson was president at that time, but he'd come over very often on his way home and stop in. My husband was a writer and did a lot of things in his office until seven o'clock, something like that, so I had no compunction about getting home. We'd been a two-earning family forever, you see, so he had to give in to my ways and I had to give in to his ways. We went to Nelson's one night for dinner for trustees and officers of the Museum with husbands and wives. George was standing next to the grand piano and David came up to him and said, "I'm David Rockefeller. Who are you?" My husband said, "I'm George W. Sutton, Jr., otherwise known as Mr. Ulrich" [laughing]. Then he said, "Ione knows everybody in the room. Come on, George, I'll make sure you know everybody in the room." Then he took him around, introduced him around, which was very sweet. We, George and I, went to a "Circus Saints and Sinners" dinner. Do you

know what it is? It's a men's gag club, and Dexter Fellows was a man affiliated with the circus who was supposed to have never forgotten a name or a face, and he knew my husband. I was not married to George at that time, so I got introduced to Dexter Fellows as Miss Ulrich. And he said, "Who is this, your father?," as my husband cringed [laughing]. They knew each other, but he had forgotten! So he failed in his reputation.

SZ: How did you feel as the Museum got bigger, as you got further away from the family feeling?

IS: It wasn't as exciting. It was labor. It was really a laborious job. Like this girl who just accosted me a few days ago in the restaurant. She had worked for [Edward] Steichen. I didn't remember her. Her face was vaguely familiar, but I couldn't possibly know all those people.

SZ: So that was already one big difference. But you must have known as that new building was going up that that was going to happen.

IS: Of course, it's been added to so much since.... I didn't feel quite that. [Tape interruption] Bill came to the Museum....

SZ: This is Bill Liebermann.

IS: ...right out of Fogg [Art Museum], where he was a student. I think he was recommended by Sachs, Paul Sachs, a trustee. He [Bill] was working with Alfred in prints; the print department hadn't quite been separated from Painting and Sculpture. He was going to go--Bill was born in Paris, I guess you know that--he was going to Paris, and I blame a lot of us for Bill having had a breakdown. He was going to do a [Amedeo] Modigliani show. Iris gave him a lot of film material to have a meeting with Picasso. Alfred was doing a Matisse book, and he gave him a whole bunch of things to ask on that. The Museum and Nelson both gave him some money to buy some

prints. He was inundated. Monroe went over and [Andrew] Ritchie went over, and he didn't get to first base with getting him back on track....

SZ: He just couldn't work?

IS: He had a breakdown.... Anyway, René [d'Harnoncourt] came to me and said, "Nelson and I have been talking this over. If you'll go and see what you can do for Bill, he'll pay for it." I said, "What makes you think I can do anything that Monroe and Andrew couldn't do?" And he said, "Well, everybody says you were very friendly with him and you liked him and he liked you." I said, "That's true...." He was twenty-six or something like that. Alfred had just made a statement...he'd done something for Alfred, and Alfred had said to him, "That's a dumb thing, how stupid can you be?" Well, that hit the soul of Bill, and he was scared to death of Alfred at that moment. Anyway, I went abroad for three months. I came back just before Christmas; I guess I went in September. I was back and forth with René on the telephone and the like. They had an annual meeting and my report had to be read by somebody else, but, in any event, I found out where Bill was, living with a family friend, Jean Deneau, but he was out of Paris. Jean Deneau was very willing to cooperate, knowing that I came with good feeling, you know, to help. He [Bill Lieberman] had gone down to Ischia, I think, to visit Truman Capote, so I took a week and went into Venice. Ada Louise Huxtable was there, her mother was there, and another girl who worked for the Museum who was in the process of doing a book.... Anyway, we'll come to that later. I'm sure I'll think of it. Anyway, I saw quite a lot of them there, and I said to this girl, "If we see Peggy Guggenheim, don't forget I'm Mrs. Sutton, and not for one minute Miss Ulrich."

SZ: Why?

IS: Because she knew that Bill was down with Capote, and I didn't want him to know that I was over there or had inquired or for what reason, anything. I just didn't want her to carry any news about that down there. We went to a concert, an all-Gershwin thing--

it was the funniest little thing, with eight instruments and the like. Sandy Calder had given me some earrings. They played a couple of encores and Peggy Guggenheim came into the row behind us, and she said to me, "Hmm, Calder earrings. Glad to know somebody else has got Calder earrings." I said, "I'm glad to know that you know they're Calder earrings." She said, "You can't buy them," and I said, "That's right, you can't buy them. He gave them to me." And she said, "I know him, too." Of course she knew him, everybody knew she knew him, but it was one of those things. But she called up the next day...no, I had bought the tickets for this concert, and one of the chaps in our party said he would take us to Ciro's afterward. Then he said to me, "Should I ask her, too?" and I said, "By all means, ask her. It'll be a triumph, in a way." So the four of us were sitting there. Ada Louise went home to her mother because her mother was ill in the hotel, so there was Libby, this chap from Seattle and Peggy Guggenheim and me. She kept looking at me. She knew she'd seen my face or something, so she said to Libby, "Who is Mrs. Sutton?" She said, "She's a New Yorker." She [Peggy] said, "Is she a collector?" "Oh sure, of sorts." "Does she have anything to do with The Museum of Modern Art?" The girl said, "Oh, yes." "What's the relation?" She said, "Oh, strictly personal." She came back and told Alfred that, so Alfred always talked about my strictly personal relationship with the Museum [laughing]. Anyway, she invited us to come to her palazzo. I couldn't go, I was going back to Florence that day--Ada Louise and her mother and I were going back to Florence that day--but she did invite this chap from Seattle. He had a weaving studio and classes, [was] inventing textiles out there, and she showed him all her clothes, and he was absolutely entranced; I knew he would be, because she loved clothes and he was in this school or something and invented fabrics, which was kind of fun. So I never got to see the detachment. What do I mean by the detachment? You'd better shut it off. [Tape interruption]

SZ: But you didn't tell me what ended up happening with Bill.

IS: I came back....

SZ: You were friendly with him before that? You had a decent relationship with him?

IS: Sure, we'd always been friends, and I knew his mother and father, I knew them in Paris. I saw them in Paris one time before this happened. Bertha [Bertha Slattery Lieberman, Bill's mother] had said to me, "What's the matter with Alfred, he doesn't promote Bill," and so forth and so on. I said, "Come on, he's a young boy. He'll get there in time, you don't have to worry about him. He's not thirty years of age yet, and he's very talented and Alfred knows he's talented." She was very bitter. Anyway, two years or something had gone by in the interim before I went there, so I had to go around and try to find out all the things he'd bought, straighten out all his affairs. There was a man named Mr. Petitre who sold him the same portfolio twice, a portfolio of one hundred prints *twice*, and he'd stolen the best one in each, so it was only ninety-nine. I had such a fight with that man. He said, "He owes me for one of those portfolios, $2,000." I said, "No, he doesn't." "Well, somebody at that museum made me sign a paper if I wanted the money paid to South America." I said, "Yes, that's right, and that somebody was me." Then the question was, where were these things? Some were in his former hotel, and I got them out; some were in his mother's apartment in New York.

SZ: And he wasn't even there, you said.

IS: No, Bill was staying at Jean Deneau's apartment. So I called up René to decide about coming home. René sent me a cable: "Nelson says make whatever deal you think best with Bill." Now *that,* from the Rockefellers, was something: a carte blanche deal with Bill. So I went to Bill and said, "Now, Bill, you've got to get back on the beam." He was afraid of Nelson and he was afraid of Alfred, the two persons he had....

SZ: He had let them down.

**END TAPE 1, SIDE 2**

**BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1**

IS: He'd let them down, and he said, "I can never face them again." So I said, "You let me fix that, do what I can." Alfred got mad at me; it was the only time in my life he ever got mad at me that I can think of.... So I took all these prints back: these were for Nelson and these were for the Museum and these were for so-and-so. Most of them were up at his mother's apartment.

SZ: Bill's mother's apartment.

IS: Yes.

SZ: In Paris?

IS: No, in New York. So I called her up. I said, "Bertha, that material of Bill's we really should have." She said, "It's been here two years so what difference could it make? When [Dorothy] Lytle comes back, she can come and get them." She said absolutely no. I said, "No? All that's at stake in this whole thing is your son's career. Now please be cooperative, and if you're not cooperative...." So I hung up the phone. She called back and said, "You'll have to come and get them, nobody but you." I said, "I don't know anything about prints. I'm not going to go and give you an inventory of prints. I'll bring Dorothy Lytle." I took Dorothy up and she did it. She wouldn't take Dorothy's signature for the prints, she "had to" take <u>my</u> signature. I'm weary of how petty people can be. Then she said to me, "Don't you want to see Bill's room?" What would I want to see Bill's room for! It gives you a clue about.... So (back in Paris) I made a deal with Bill. I said, "Now Bill, you've got to come back to work. I'm not going to give you a date. I'm going to give you one week here to think about what day you'll be back, and you won't fail me, you'll be back on that day; but <u>you're</u> going to set the date." So he said May 1st. This was December, so it was quite a ways away. And he was faithful, because he asked my permission to be two days late; so

he knew that I was dead serious. He came back, and I said to Bill, "Bill, would you like me to look for an apartment for you so that you don't have to live with your mother?" Now that took a lot of courage for me to say that. He said no. Dorothy Lytle worked in his division, and so she went down to meet the boat when he came back, and of course Bertha was there. They worked out something else; he finally did have an apartment of his own. Anyway, I had all that material in the print department, and I wrote Nelson and said, "Here's the list of what he's brought for you. There's a Matisse in there that Alfred would like for the Museum's collection instead of for you. If you want to swap it for something else, we'd appreciate it." Nelson told me that Tod liked it and that she'd leave it to the Museum, and Alfred wouldn't speak to me for a week because I wouldn't switch them without telling Nelson. Only time he ever really got mad at me. Anyway, Nelson wrote me a note and said, "That's the most beautiful collection in the world." We had told him that Bill overspent his money by about $700 and to take what prints he wanted and we'd sell off the other and get his $700 back. He sent me a check for the $700 and kept the whole thing. He said, "It's the most exquisite collection. I can't tell you how happy I am with it." So I quickly called up Nelson and said, "Write that note to Bill in Paris." That would mend that one. And it did. Bill wrote me and said, "Only you would know what that letter meant to me." So it comes Christmas and I run into Alfred, and I said, "Please send Bill a Christmas note." And he said, "Why should I? You told me that my letters were sitting there unopened." I said, "That's right, but he's been a sick boy. Please send it." I pestered him with requests. Finally, he wrote a letter, and he said, "You'll have to address the envelope." And I did. Then Bill sent a cable to Marga [Margaret Scolari Barr] and Alfred for Christmas because he got this nice note. So I mended both those fences. I don't think Bill would like to be reminded about a lot of this, but he and I had lunch one day. I didn't go to the Museum after I retired very much. I really retired on account of that episode; that really took the heart out of me. Anyway, Bill and I had lunch with Beth Straus. Nobody knows it; I've practically never said that to anybody, that that's why I retired. There were some other things, but that was the major thing. I thought, I'll be the next one they're going to rescue.

SZ: Why?

IS: Because I came back and here was three months of mail, stuff like this [indicating a stack two feet high] sitting on my desk. I said to Sarah Rubinstein [Mrs. Sutton's assistant], "Is that pile according to what the subject is? I'm never going to read that three months of mail, and you're going to have to pull out for me what's pertinent to whatever comes up." I felt that I was going to have to...I just couldn't face it. I was going to say something else in there. Oh, we had lunch with Beth Straus, and Bill and I got to laughing at something. We did quite a few things in Paris togther, went to various restaurants and museums and so forth; he was with me the day I bought the Jacques Villon self-portrait that I just gave to the Museum recently. He took me out and introduced me to Villon, and Villon and I became great friends after that. We had the same birthday, thirty years' difference in age. My fiftieth birthday was his eightieth birthday. I gave the Museum some of the correspondence that I had with him. Anyway, we were laughing about something, and then he turned to Beth Staus and he said, "You know, Ione came to Paris and rescued me when I had a breakdown, and we did some things while she was there and we were just laughing about it." I said, "Bill, you just proved to me that you're well. If you can talk about it, you're OK, A-OK." I was so pleased that that had happened. It's one of those things.

SZ: Would you like to stop for today and I'll come back another time? Have you had enough?

IS: Yes, think up your questions, and if I ever think of something....

**END TAPE 2, SIDE 1**

**SIDE 2, BLANK**

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEW WITH:** IONE ULRICH SUTTON (IS)

**INTERVIEWER:** SHARON ZANE (SZ)

**LOCATION:** NEW YORK, NEW YORK

**DATE:** MAY 4, 1993

**BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1**

SZ: Continue what you were just going to say now.

IS: Some of the trustees were pretty cunning. Does the name Henry Allen Moe come to your attention?

SZ: Yes, but I don't know very much about him.

IS: He was the Guggenheim Foundation. Mrs. Solomon Guggenheim was on the board, and he was kind of her representative or something or other. He was on the executive committee when we were doing the budget, and he'd veto this and veto this, and look at me as if I was going to cry and fall through the floor. But I didn't take it personally. Then he said to me, "You know, I'm really a very kindly man." [laughing]

SZ: And was he?

IS: He was, of course, but so unhappy that he was vetoing all these things, and I wasn't unhappy at all. I was glad it wasn't me vetoing, you know what I'm saying, because everybody wanted what they wanted in the budget. It's just like the federal government, everybody wants what they want, and to hell with the other departments. Excuse my language [laughing]....

SZ: And some of the other trustees?

IS: I was trying to think who they were. I thought of something this morning at breakfast and now it's slipped my mind. Maybe it'll come back. Ask me a question.

SZ: ...I wanted to ask you about what was then the new building and its opening and anything that you remember about that.

IS: Oh, boy, I can remember something and show you something. I'm going to put this in, and then you decide what to take out. We had some negatives [people] in the Museum. We had people that picketed the Museum for unions, we had staff members that went along with the pickets, and don't forget, we were a small operation, and we didn't think we were ever going to have to cope with unions at that point. Fortunately, I'm not au courant with how you deal with unions, so I called on the Rockefeller offices, a man named Victor Borella, who, I think, was president of the Rockefeller building, whatever. I came to know him extremely well because he married the secretary of the Governor of Michigan and I had known her. I don't know how, out of Dartmouth, he happened to catch up with Lucille Wilson, but he did. Then I asked Victor, "What do you do about this, how do you negotiate this?" I had to. The first one was the projectionist. We had two projectionists, and the projectionists' [union] 206, I think it was, came in and picketed us because we only had two, and we had to have three, or something. They had signs, "Rockefellers will not deal with the unions," "these rich people will not deal with the unions" and the like. Well, they said

to these two projectionists, who were sort of like family--we knew them well, and they pitched in and did whatever was necessary to do--the union said to them, "The only thing is, if you ever lose your job here, you'll never get another projectionist job in your life: you'll be blacklisted." So they came to me, "Have we got our jobs for life?" And I said, "I can't say. I think it's ninety-nine percent sure, but I can't guarantee you your job for life. If the Museum folded up, you'd be out of luck. So you have to decide." The Museum finally agreed we'd have a third projectionist and we'd work out the hours for spelling each other, which was one of their objections, that they didn't have enough relief. Anyway, we finally made the deal. Yes, they could put in a third projectionist, only on the basis that the two we had they would not replace under any circumstances for as long as we wanted them. That was the nearest we could come to guaranteeing them their jobs. And they finally stayed and eventually retired and so forth. But that was the kind of thing...you had to lean on somebody. It was kind of over my head. Then we had an employee, who shall be nameless, who was also very friendly with a chap who was the head bookkeeper. She was prone to say "that staff and those rich people." She was complaining that we didn't give this person the right vacation or money or they didn't have a day off because somebody else had a day off. I can't tell you how she knew all of this, unless it was the chap that she was very friendly with. And she was always on my back. I'd go through whatever the routine was, see what it is, how it was. In any event...(I'm going to put this in, you can edit it), just to tell you what kind of agonies I went through. One of the executives said, "She's an angel." I was handling personnel most of the time. We didn't have a personnel [director] and I wanted a personnel director so I could get [these responsibilities] off my back, you know, how you grow up and you just go on automatically doing.... And he said, "She is an angel. She's going to be a wonderful personnel director."

SZ: This is the same person that you had had this other difficulty with?

IS: Yes. So I'm stretching my eyebrows, because I didn't agree with it, because I had two sides of the coin. Nelson called me over one time, kept me waiting a few minutes

and apologized, and said, "Now I'll get to the point." I said, "No, don't you get to the point. You let *me* get to the point. You're upset that I didn't give this over to so-and-so, personnel, but if you will recall, you said to me, `*try* so-and-so'--you didn't *tell* me to do it. If you'd told me outright to do it, I would have done it, without any question. Now I'm going to say something, and when I go out this door, I'm going to deny ever having said it." And I told him the facts of life, about the interference from her and so forth. And he said, "I owe you an apology." And I said, "No, not at all. You owe yourself an apology. You should have said *do,* not *try.* I've been here thirteen, fourteen years, and I've decided this minute that I'm going to take a three-month vacation and you're going to decide if you need me and I'm going to decide if I need you." He didn't know I already had a European ticket in my pocket. Anyway, we come up into an executive committee meeting, just before he takes off for his vacation (it happened to be my birthday, July 31st) and he said, "We've decided"--I don't know who the *we* was--"we've decided not to use her for personnel, so we'll start over." We hired an outside person. But that was an agony. Now, the chap that she was friendly with in my office, when I came back from Europe I found he had stolen money from the Museum. He didn't have a telephone, because it was a "monopoly," and we couldn't get in touch with him and he didn't show up.

SZ: You mean that was a political statement?

IS: Yes. And that was prompted by her. Anyway, I was so upset. The auditors were to come in, and he didn't show. And he knew they were to come in and he knew what they were going to find. So I went over to Nelson and I told him about that. He shook his head and he said, "Ione, it has happened here in our own offices, and you're going to have to decide whether you're going to prosecute him or not prosecute him." I said, "*Me?*" He said, "You and you alone." Those were awful responsibilities, you know. Anyway, he was bonded, so we got paid by the insurance company. Then he came in and he said he didn't have any money--he came from Mississippi or someplace--and I said, "Pawn your watch," and he said, "I've already pawned it. I've pawned my overcoat, and I haven't any money." So I personally gave him all of ten

bucks out of my pocket, my personal pocket. If you don't think you could cry yourself to sleep.... We didn't prosecute him, but I said to him, "You just remember one thing: you're never going to be able to be bonded again in your whole life, and you owe this money to this insurance company. You can go bankrupt six times, you still owe this money to the insurance company. You go out that door downstairs and you *never* cross that doorsill again." I said, "And you're lucky." Practically nobody in the Museum knew about this except the top people. Staff didn't know. I said to my assistant, "Tell me one thing. If that girl ever says whatever happened to Al"--because she knew about what was happening to everybody, about their vacations and their days off--and she never peeped. That told me something. Because they were friends. We'll forget all that now.

SZ: Did she stay there a long time afterwards?

IS: She did, and she finally got thrown out. Nelson couldn't stand her.

SZ: After this, you mean?

IS: I don't know. Even before that. She would go out and pick up with the pickets and she'd get in the elevator and didn't have any stockings on and her feet were dirty. I can't tell you, it was just.... She'd go up and speak to him, and he'd turn away. "Get her out of here."

SZ: So he was a very real presence in the Museum.

IS: He was with me. And to the day he died, if we saw each other, we were still good friends. I was very embarrassed one time, after some event when he was Vice President and everybody was around, he saw me coming and threw down somebody's hand and came over, gave me a smacker. I thought, "Oh my God, they're going to think I'm one of his girlfriends." [laughing] Might as well say it. I was embarrassed as could be, in front of a great mass of people. No, I adored him. His

personal life had nothing to do with me. When he married Happy, I knew Happy's ex-mother-in-law; she was a friend of Mrs. Rockefeller's, Nelson's mother. They'd known each other for years. I could say something else, but I guess I won't. It's personal opinion.

SZ: You're certainly welcome to do that.

IS: No, it has to do with people's personal lives, and I don't like to get mixed up.

SZ: Then I was going to ask you another thing I had on my list which I felt we didn't talk enough about.... I wanted to know a little bit about Monroe Wheeler, and how you sensed his presence and how his role gradually grew.

IS: Monroe Wheeler was a very talented man, particularly in the publications field. He really knew what he was doing. We had this girl, Frances Pernas, who really put the books together. She became head of publications production. She was divine, knew how to do everything. She was more important to him than his secretary and so forth. He was on the executive committee, very active. When I went off to Europe for three months and it was announced at this meeting that I was going, just announced by Nelson, he said, "What's going to happen to your office?" I said, "That negative is going to be out of the way. Nobody's to say no." I said, "I think I'm in this Museum to say no." I was the restrainer, theoretically. I said, "Certain things won't happen, but the routine will be just great." You want to take this machine off for a minute and I'll show you something.

SZ: I see there that you're holding an original of the mock invitation that was done in 1939 at the same time as the Museum reopened. I know it caused a big furor, got somebody fired. Just tell me whatever you remember about that.

IS: Do you want me to read it to you?

SZ: Yes.

IS: The symbol at the top is the Socony flying red horse, and it says, "The Empress of Blandings and Mr. Charles Boyer request the honor of Mr. and Mrs. Sutton's presence at the semi-public opening of the new Museum of Standard Oil, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, New York, Wednesday, May 10th, from 9 until 1 o'clock. Better dresses, fifth floor. R.S.V.P. This card will admit two persons or one person and two dogs or...."

SZ: How did you receive that?

IS: It says on the cover, "Oil that glitters is not gold." I was in the Museum on a Saturday afternoon, probably the week before the opening, and--shall I name the person?

SZ: Yes, because it's a matter of record.

IS: Frances Collins was addressing all these envelopes, and she showed it to me. I said, "Frances, how can your conscience let you do that?" [Tape interruption]

SZ: You said to her, "How could your conscience let you do this?"

IS: I said, "You forget who really supports this Museum." And she said, "What a stuffed shirt you are. Where's your sense of humor?" I said, "It doesn't go that far. Ever." That was the end of that. Of course, I got this.

SZ: They were all mailed out?

IS: They were mailed out, yes. Look, here's the envelope.

SZ: And they were mailed out to...?

IS: God knows who. I don't know who made up the list.

SZ: And how did you feel when you opened it? You'd already seen it.

IS: I'd seen it.

SZ: What were some other reactions that you knew of?

IS: From other people?

SZ: Yes.

IS: Well, it wasn't discussed very much. It may have caused a furor, but it wasn't discussed with me very much. I showed it to my husband, and he just shook his head.

SZ: And she was fired, right?

IS: I'll tell you the rest of the story. I had said to her, "You better be sure the Rockefellers don't see that." Anyway, as far as I knew, they weren't going to see it. It was nothing to do with me. However, Lincoln Kirstein came in, saw her in the hall, gave her a smacker, and said, "This is the kiss of death, if you but knew." And he told Nelson, showed it to him. So she probably sent it to Lincoln. That was a good-bye. I never talked to anybody on the staff about it, I never talked to anybody, not Alfred or anybody.

SZ: You just think she thought it was...?

IS: She thought it was funny. But you see, there are people in this world that, when you come to anything to do with the division of money, and I mean money, not even social positions or something, they have got to be their enemy. I'll add something to

that, a little aside. I've forgotten what the conversation was, but Nelson said to me one day.... [Tape interruption] Whatever the conversation was that I was having with Nelson, he said to me, probably at around the same time, "Ione, don't think I don't know what it's like to be hated all your life because you've got money." That permeated my thinking. It hadn't occurred to me that that was an effect. And, of course, we're in that same situation politically right now. We haven't meshed in. We've got the rich against the poor. Even the President's going to nail the rich for taxes. Of course, the people that really, really do the job is the great multitude of the middle class, that's the multitude. All right, we've finished with that, haven't we?

SZ: That brings to mind something, which is, was there a real mix of people on the staff of the Museum at that time?

IS: Yes, but they didn't particularly take sides. You couldn't say "this belongs to this troop or this belonged to this troop," they all went on and did their job, and as far as I was concerned, I feel where the negatives were coming in....

SZ: It's been said that for a long time that the only people who could afford to work at the Museum were people who came from the upper class, or the upper middle class.

IS: That's very hard for me to say. I had certain little phobias. If the girls graduated from Smith, I preferred them to the girls that graduated from up the Hudson.

SZ: Vassar?

IS: Vassar.

SZ: And why was that?

IS: When I approached somebody on it one day, she said, "What do you think we go to Vassar for? We go to Vassar to go to debutante balls and know how to act at teas

and how to catch the right person." In a sense, that was there, and you knew it. The girls from Smith were hard workers, bright, energetic, and the girls from Vassar wanted to sashay, if you know what I mean. That permeated the thinking. Maybe that's what somebody was referring to when they say it was the upper class. That wasn't entirely true. We had people from all over the United States, various colleges and so forth.

SZ: What they really meant is that people who worked at the Museum didn't have to live on what they were bringing in as salary.

IS: Well, that could be, but if they felt they wanted to work there and they worked for less money, that was a choice they made--like me. I went there for thirty dollars a week and worked for three months for nothing. Fortunately, I could afford it. This is another thing that I have in here, from the National Gallery. This always amused me...

SZ: Nineteen-forty-one.

IS: ...because I'd never seen this thing, a hand-addressed...in other words, you couldn't make one up. They'd recognize the handwriting or something. Isn't that amusing? I was known as Mrs. George Sutton, although I was Miss Ulrich at the Museum.

SZ: But that was the correct social practice.

IS: I guess.

SZ: How was the opening in 1939? What do you remember about it?

IS: I remember that we were, of course, all in a tizzy, because there was so much to do and every office had to be in perfect order and all the protocols had to be followed. I don't remember much about it, to tell you the truth. I didn't find the better dresses on the fifth floor [laughing]. But the offices were open, too, you know. The whole

Museum was open. Sarah Newmeyer's office had "publicity director" on it, and somebody would go and take the "pub" off--it was just "illicit director" [laughing]. She'd get so mad, because then she'd get it put back on and then somebody else would come and pull off the letters. It was amusing. She was a character, out of this world. We had a [Pavel] Tchelitchew show, and Tchelitchew was telling her what to do publicity-wise, she never did anything right, and he was screaming at her and so forth. But, of course, he got all over the papers. She was terrifically good at P.R. In the final analysis, he was so pleased that he went out and had John Fredericks make a hat for her in kelly green--did you ever hear that story?--as a present, which she wore to the opening of the Tchelitchew show. But sometime after that, it was in the middle of the war and blackout, so Frances Hawkins and she and I used to do things together. One night, late at night, nine o'clock or something like that, we were on the street and wanted to cross the street, and there wasn't a vehicle in sight. I said, "Come on, let's cross the street." "No, no, wait for the light to change"--that was Sarah. Then I said, "Come on Sarah, there's nothing...." "I'm not going to be killed in this hat!" [laughing] Another time, the three of us were in Peck and Peck, looking at blouses, and Sarah was playing with a big frou-frou thing, and Frances said to her, "Oh, Sarah, you're not interested in that blouse. It makes you look like a French whore." So she went up and bought the blouse [laughing]. You can cut these things out.

SZ: No. So she was fun.

IS: Yes, she was fun. She had a mania for hats and shoes. You couldn't help but like her.

SZ: Why did she leave?

IS: I don't really know why she left, I really don't remember. She got the job up at that folk art museum up the Hudson [Sturbridge Village].... She got that job, and that's where she got killed. It was very sad. They had a flood and her house got flooded

and she took the electrician in, turned the switch on and they both got blown away. Very sad. She used to say, "I'm as beautiful as Greta Garbo, I'm the most beautiful...." When she died, they had one of her early pictures in the newspaper, and she *was* beautiful in her younger years--not in her older years, but in her younger years she was beautiful. But she had no lack of vanity.

SZ: Do you remember the Packard report?

IS: Yes. I hadn't thought about that. I don't remember much about it.

SZ: I think Nelson commissioned it.

IS: Yes, he did. What was Packard's first name?

SZ: Artemas.

IS: Artemas Packard. And who worked on that...I want to say Farnsworth. His brother was the pastor of the Presbyterian church up the river. What was his named? Lived up in Connecticut. I used to ride on the train with him now and then. We lived in Connecticut at the time.

SZ: So you used to commute in every day?

IS: We used to commute during the week. We had an apartment in town and we'd go to the country on Friday and come back on Monday. Same way with Sidney Janis. He was on the train when he was a shirtmaker....

SZ: Let's talk a little bit about how the Museum was organized--because you were a member of the coordinating committee--how that worked, and also, I guess, what that eventually meant for Alfred and how everything sort of rearranged and changed as time went on.

IS: The coordinating committee came about quite by accident. There were things to be discussed and people got together. They'd say, "Let's ask Ione in on this or ask so-and-so in on this and see what Alfred thinks." Suddenly, it was this little nucleus that met kind of informally. That became the coordinating committee.

SZ: But then there were minutes...

IS: Oh, yes, we finally did minutes. It became more formal, and instead of my discussing with you and then with you and then with you....

SZ: You'd come to this group meeting.

IS: Yes.

SZ: Within the Museum staff, the administration, who were the people who had either real responsibility, who had the power at that time?

IS: Of course, there was Alfred, and Monroe, and, well, eventually, René, and Andrew Ritchie--but you see, they were all the production side, in a sense--and the executive director and me. Dick Abbott, at one time, and before him, I don't think we had a coordinating committee when Tom Mabry was there. That may have been when it sort of inaugurated, but it wasn't called the coordinating committee. And Nelson often came to those meetings. He always came in July, because they went away for the month of August and always we had an agenda for everything that was pending.

SZ: And he had a strong...?

IS: Susie Cable worked for the Museum in the secretary's office, but she had also been a great friend of Stephen Clark and family--I think Stephen Clark's wife was her godmother, if I'm not mistaken--and she knew Nelson very well and she used to

make up the agenda. She called us up, "Now, Ione, we're putting on the agenda so-and-so. That'll be one of your problems," and then go on around, and always, everybody who was on the agenda for anything knew in advance. Very nicely run; very nicely. No surprises. Of course, I got in on most everything because everything goes back to how many dollars have we got, and you had three places for every dollar, so it was a question of deciding where best it was going to be. I think of all of this and all that I struggled with, when my real love was the paintings, and I almost got ostracized for the paintings. Not really, but I was in on when it was being discussed for the future, but we had to make it a rule one time, that everybody on the staff had to see the exhibition. Sometimes we wouldn't find time to see the exhibition. [Tape interruption] Next question.

SZ: Actually, you were in the middle of something.

IS: What was I in the middle of ?

SZ: We were talking about the coordinating committee. I had asked you who...so originally, it was you--well, not *originally* originally--but it was you, Dick Abbott, and Alfred, and Monroe.

IS: Monroe came from quite a ways back, as I recall. Monroe may have wound up in Publications, but he was kind of Exhibitions *and* Publications, originally. I don't really know the sequence, or you can look in the catalogue, so you maybe can tell.

SZ: I think the coordinating committee, named as such, was formed in 1940.

IS: Yes. Well, it would be the year after we moved into the new building, so that sounds about right.

SZ: Because the new building made a big difference, didn't it, in the way people interacted?

IS: We weren't as closely seated near each other anymore. We had a whole floor and people were on the other side or this side or something or other. We were separated.

SZ: What were the war years like at the Museum--the Second World War?

IS: The war years, yes. There were some very interesting things there. People went abroad, and the idea of the negation of art in Germany and various parts of Europe, a lot of things moved to Paris. Actually, I think the war years demoted Paris and New York became the art center of the world. I think it was the war and negations that brought that about. Our trustees and so forth were sponsoring artists into the U.S.--I'm sure you've come up against some of that. We brought Jimmy Ernst, Max Ernst's son, and he became office boy. We gave him a job. In those days, you had to have a sponsor and you had to have a job. And, of course, at times we liked to show the works of those people that were negated. We still could raise money pretty well. It didn't sort of put us backward. Of course, I personally enjoyed those years, the Depression years. It brought people together. People made their pleasures instead of going out here, there and someplace else. I think the friendships became much deeper. You didn't have any money, so you did things together, you invented things to do. I think it had many, many good aspects monetarily. It was after we got the Bliss collection that people started giving us paintings, because they felt we had a permanence and it was all right. And, of course, that fiasco with the Metropolitan Museum made so many trustees so angry that we were passing things on to the Metropolitan, and they [donors] said, "If we wanted the Metropolitan to have our paintings, we would have given them to the Metropolitan. We didn't give them to The Museum of Modern Art to pass on to the Metropolitan." I, myself, was very pro that passing on. The theory was so sound. Please look up that report that Alfred did called "The Whale." [See Note, p. 19.] I don't know where the old files of the Museum are.

SZ: A lot of them are in the archives.

IS: They are? Where are the archives kept?

SZ: It's up off the library.

IS: Is the library in the same old place where it used to be? It's probably ten times as big.

SZ: It's pretty big. It's nice, it's very nice.

IS: The library in those days, too, was a different kind of a library. It was full of materials you couldn't get anyplace else. Almost every artist that had been shown, even though they were only in their twenties or something. You could call up [Bernard] Karpel and he could find things for you that you couldn't find anyplace else.

SZ: So it was a real resource.

IS: Yes. I don't know if they do that with contemporary artists today, but you see, we were dedicated to the contemporary at that time, the unknowns.

SZ: I wanted to go back to that other thing you said. Whose idea was that? Where did that come from, the idea that we should pass things on to the Met?

IS: Alfred. It wasn't on to the Met. He wrote this thing, that the Museum's original duty to the public was to show what had not been shown for the last fifty years or a hundred years, and then, where are you going to go after you've caught up with yourself? That's where the tail joined the body of the whale. I thought it was an excellent concept.

SZ: But you're saying that there were many trustees who....

IS: The people that gave you things were the objectioning people, because they kept saying, "If we wanted them to have it, we would have given it to them." That's why Conger Goodyear's paintings went, to Buffalo [to the Albright-Knox Gallery], with others. I think the whole thing came from that. You can figure out whose other collection went away that we didn't get that we really wanted very badly. So then the concept had to change. It was the trustees' own idea to invalidate it. The world is becoming a vast repository, very vast. You get a little surfeited with it, if you're interested. I, myself, just don't go to certain things because, how much can I assimilate?

SZ: But it wasn't that way back then?

IS: No, there weren't that many museums. You didn't have anything. The Museum was unique, came in and brought the last fifty or a hundred years, starting with 1850 or thereabouts, that was the beginning of what we were trying to do, the Fauves and so forth.

**END TAPE 3, SIDE 1**

**BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 2**

SZ: When I was asking about the war, I was wondering whether you remember some of the parties in the garden that were there for the servicemen?

IS: Indeed, I do. That was quite a great effort. The servicemen came, and we were making up the list of very wealthy young ladies to come, so that the boys wouldn't get the wrong idea. It was beautifully run, marvelous. I went to many of them. The concept of some of these boys...there was a chap from New Zealand one time who said he was a sheepraiser, so he said, "I've got to go see the sheep ranches in Texas. I'm going on Friday and coming back on Sunday." I said, "You won't have time to see anything. It's a long, long way." He had no concept of the size of this

country. He was going to fly out and fly back in two days and see the sheep ranches. But the parties were very successful. I'm sure they did a lot for the boys. Otherwise, they'd roam in the streets, not knowing anything about anything. Sometimes we did not have the exhibitions open, and sometimes we did.

SZ: One last question I'll ask you for today, and I'll have to come back one more time, if that's all right.

IS: It's all right, but it may have to wait a bit, because I'm going to Jersey on Friday, won't be back till Monday. This time I'm not going to my house; I'm going out there to a wedding, family. I'm making preparations for a family reunion. I have no children, but I have forty-some nieces, nephews and so forth. We'll inaugurate the beginning of that over at this wedding.

SZ: I was going to ask you if you had a sense before Alfred was, I guess, fired is really the right word, even if that was for just a short amount of time, if you had a sense that he was in trouble and if you knew what was happening.

IS: I knew that he was at odds with a lot of the trustees, particularly, I would say, in the [area of the] collection. Well, trustees were on the acquisitions committee and they didn't always agree with Alfred. I think Alfred was pretty unbendable. I remember I said to Mrs. Rockefeller one time, "Alfred's like the British Empire: never won a battle, but never lost a war." She said, "That's absolutely perfect." She said, "I must remember that." That was at that time. I wasn't too concerned. I didn't ever think they would depose Alfred, I really did not think they ever would. That must have meant that I was devoted to what his concepts were. I never said that before, but it must mean [that], because I was as chagrined as anybody. We had a Christmas party one time, the staff, and everybody drew a name and they were to give a fifty-cent Christmas present--nobody knew who drew the name. Alfred got a ten-cent-store box of paint and some watercolor paper. You know who drew his name?

SZ: You did.

IS: He was hysterical. He thought it was so funny that somebody would give him paints. "Alfred, did you ever paint a picture?" It was interesting, wasn't it? I don't know if he ever did. Never found out. But he was so amused. Did you ever see anything that he ever did? René gave me one of his drawings one time.

SZ: He was a great doodler, I understand.

IS: Well, yes. All the trustees were doodlers. I used to go around after a trustees' meeting and pick up all the doodles. I'd put the name on them and give them to Victor D'Amico, because he wanted to interpret them. Henry Allen Moe wrote "ham" in about fifty different ways--"ham, ham, ham, ham, ham--Henry Allen Moe." I don't remember. I remember Wally Harrison's things. I gave them all to Victor, because he kind of wanted to analyze them, like handwriting or something like that. It was amusing. I don't know what he did with his notes or anything. He never sort of pursued it, I guess. But he used to say, "Did you pick up any doodlings today?" Bunch of characters, weren't they?

SZ: I guess that's right.

IS: I think the greatest compliment I could ever have in my life is if you could call me a "character." Being a character means you've got something of your own that you put forth, doesn't it?

SZ: Yes.

IS: So I think it's a big compliment. I learned more about art from Victor D'Amico than anybody in this world. He was really fabulous.... But he came from the blank paper out. In fact, the woman that went to visit Winston Churchill one time...he was in his driveway, and he was mixing a little bit of blue and a little bit of blue, and somebody

came up and said, "Winston, what are you doing?" He said, "I'm trying to match that sky up there." He said, "That's not the way...you put paint on and paint on, and if you don't like it, you put some more white or some more something." He said, "I was never afraid of a blank canvas again." It's true, a blank canvas can really haunt you. What am I going to do? I want to do that. Can I do that or can't I do that? Then you do it, and it never comes out the way you expect it to. Nobody's ever quite satisfied with what they put down.

SZ: I guess that's a good place to stop.

IS: You think of your questions in the meantime.

SZ: Thank you.

**END TAPE 3, SIDE 2**

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEW WITH:** **IONE ULRICH SUTTON (IS)**

**INTERVIEWER:** **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

**LOCATION:** **NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

**DATE:** **MAY 20, 1993**

**BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 1**

SZ: I have a list here of functions over which you had responsibility at some point. Tell me if this is right: finances, building administration, membership promotion, publicity and committee work.

IS: The Museum was small. You did everything, including washing dishes, and so the departments came about by pressures of the need for somebody for that particular thing. I was initially hired to be the assistant to the executive director--lots of little things--then I was controller--I became controller and business manager, and assistant treasurer, then treasurer and business manager. It was the expansion. I handled personnel for years. That was where I had some little difficulties, as I told you. I did not think it was appropriate for somebody who was business manager or something to handle personnel, too. But they had nobody to do it, so you did it. I was okay at it, no great problems or anything, so it just sort of went on and on. Eventually, we had a personnel department, and very good people. I wanted somebody else's opinion, staff opinion, when I went with the trustees about personnel and so forth, I wanted another opinion. You can't say your own opinion is *it*. You're very glad to have another one, and maybe you've got two or three versions and you need a testing ground. Eventually we had other personnel--you know all the debacles down there. Eventually we had Membership--you know all the departments. At that time they were pooled all into one hand, and that is how it came about. Actually, what *really* was the basis was the finance department, from day one; it was

very small at the time, and then it grew like Topsy; it became more and more important. As I said, we once had $1,000 of second-hand furniture and paid a dollar-a-year rent, $86,000 for an expense budget and not a picture that belonged to us. So you start from that. There wasn't much to do in those days.

SZ: In those early days. But, really, I guess after the Second World War, that changed a lot.

IS: Oh, yes. During the war we took on new emphasis, various emphases, particularly trying to help artists get into the country and one thing and another, to find a sponsor for this artist that was being shown out of Germany or something like that. Jimmy Ernst was one of them, and he became an office boy.

SZ: Tell me about, in terms of finances in the Museum, a little bit more about what it was that you did and the kinds of things that you looked after. And then I want to know about the trustees' involvement in that or in all aspects of the Museum, as you saw it.

IS: The real turn-around in the finances came when we went out, and I think it was in '33, to get the Bliss collection. We had to raise a million dollars--eventually, it was cut down to $600,000--and that became a whole new thing for the Museum, this money-raising. We had trustees and committee members, and believe me, they all worked hard. I was in on everything because I was *the* staff member...I wish I had a dime for every committee meeting I went to, because I covered practically every committee meeting, except acquisitions. I had nothing to do with the choice of art--until Alfred started calling me the expert layman.

SZ: I guess what I wanted to know more about is how tightly did the trustees watch finances at the Museum?

IS: As a whole, they didn't, but, you see, they'd have a finance committee chairman, which became Bee Ruml, when we had a few dollars. He was great, as I told you; he

was a great help. He was on the other end of the phone for the questions you had. I remember Stephen Clark when he was chairman, he came into my office and said, "Tell me, Miss Ulrich, how are our finances today?" I said, "Mr. Clark, I'll be happy to tell you." He'd say, "I'm not going to sit down," and walk out the door. At another time, something went on at a trustees' meeting and something got approved, and he walked out with me and he said, "They didn't ask you. Do you approve of that?" I said, "Don't ask me now, it's too late." He said, "But you'll watchdog it." So that was the feeling they had about it: if I didn't think it was right, I'd bring up something. Usually I did, to one or two trustees, and it would get resolved between us and maybe it would have to be a bigger group, depending on the magnitude of the problem. But having raised that first money, that first $600,000, it put a sort of new stimulus into the whole place. Lizzie Bliss was very correct that she wanted her collection to be in a place that had a sense of permanence, and that first endowment gave it a sense of permanence. Also, it gave that same sense of permanence in the mind of all the committee people, the trustees, everything. We now had our feet on the ground. That was the big, big push. It was only $600,000, but the fact that we could raise $600,000 in six weeks was fantastic, in the middle of the Depression. Then we had the Bliss collection, and as that came into the Museum, other people started feeding in pictures. So she was the real crux of the situation. She had died three years or four years before, and she had a vision. I'm sure it was her brother, Cornelius Bliss, who put that in her mind. He was a lawyer, wasn't he?... [Tape interruption]

SZ: I had seen something in the records, I guess it was after the war, where there were telephones and telephone bills. You kept track of all that staff, right?

IS: I had a staff of seventeen. I had an assistant and a secretary and two or three bookkeepers and a payroll girl and two to four people working on publications--we had set up systems, I had set up systems for them--the things that had to be done daily. We had an accounts payable girl and an accounts receivable girl. They all had their own little pieces, and then it was brought together by the head bookkeeper.

SZ: Tell me a little bit more about René d'Harnoncourt, and how his coming into the directorship changed the institution, as you saw it.

IS: I don't know that it changed it so much. It maybe put a little bit more strength in it. Of course, there was Alfred doing lots of things, like I was doing lots of things, small publications--whatever. René came in as director of the Indian art exhibition [*Indian Art of the United States*, 1941], which was a tremendous success, very imaginative, and the trustees were so happy and so pleased. The idea of doing an original American thing was very pleasing to the trustees. I don't think there's ever been an Indian art exhibit of any magnitude that I can think of. Can you think of any? And, of course, it hasn't been repeated, and I don't know that it should. I, myself, have wanted to see a list of how many thousands of tribes there were and are and where they fitted into each other and the like, where their culture fitted in. It's never been done, really. But we know they're there and we know the Hopis and we know the Utes and the Navahos. The Navahos made rugs and sand pictures on the floor at the time. Did I tell you this story about the publicity director and the Indians?

SZ: I don't think so.

IS: I'd put this in, because it's very amusing. Sarah [Newmeyer] was great. She really got a lot of return for the Museum, was very imaginative. So the head Navaho Indian came, named Charlie Turquoise, and they were doing sand painting and so forth, and she wanted his picture to put in the paper. He wasn't going to have his picture taken. He was like some of the ancient tribes; they don't like their pictures taken. I don't really know. Anyway, finally, he consented to have his picture taken if she'd have her picture taken. So she had her picture taken. She was a hat creature and she had on one with tulips on it. It was a lovely picture. Some year or two later, Mr. Gordon, who ran something or other at his reservation, said to the man who published the Indian art book, "When you're out this way, stop in." So he went into the reservation and asked for Charlie Turquoise and Mr. Gordon, and the woman at

the entrance said, "Go on into that second hut down there, that belongs to the medicine man, and take a look around." And the first thing he walks into is Sarah Newmeyer's picture in this hut, with the tulips on her hat. I really thought it was what he had wanted. He must have had a little crush on Sarah, don't you think? [laughing]

SZ: So she was lively.

IS: You couldn't help but like her. She was odd, and I say this as a compliment, she was an honest-to-God character, and I think being a character is a compliment. You're on your own in some way or other, your thinking or doing. It was great. You could write a book about Sarah.

SZ: You were talking a little bit about René and what his management style was like.

IS: While he was doing the Indian exhibition or when he did it or immediately afterwards they offered him the job of directorship, and he took it. It was great. Everybody liked him, this giant, and he would readily tell you his history. I'm sure you know it, don't you? How he came and worked for the Interior Department in New Mexico and some antique dealer or something or other. Anyway, he was thrilled to be in the Museum, and he had a good way with people, bringing the best out of them, and, of course, his best had to do with what the exhibitions were more than anything else. As director, business director, it wasn't the attitude of taking all power, the finances or anything like that. That was really kind of left to me to be the initiator in that field, as much as anything. I remember Steichen coming to me one day. He had a show coming up and he wanted some extra money; we had a budget for every show. He came in and said--I was great friends with him--"Could I have some extra money to do something or other," and I said, "Sure, you can have some extra money, but you've got to take it out of something else. What are you going to give up in your department for that?" "Oh, I have to do that?" I said, "I have no reserve to draw on, otherwise. If you think this is more important, figure it out." So he dropped his idea, whatever it was, because we didn't have any loose change around that we could

switch from this to this. We never had an emergency sum in the budget, and we almost never, never, never, that I could think of, did go back and ask for more money added to the budget. If we needed more money, we might ask for a subsidy from an individual or little foundation or something like that. We'd have to go out and raise supplemental money, which I'm not against. I thought it made people realize that just because you work for the Rockefellers, so to speak, you hadn't a bottomless till. I sat at a table in the garden one day and two women at the next table were discussing the Museum and so forth, and I was hearing their conversation, and this one woman said to the other one, "Well, you know, the thing about this museum, if they run short of money, Mrs. Rockefeller writes a check," and I apologized for interrupting their conversation and said, "I'm treasurer of this museum. I've got news for you: don't believe a word of it."

SZ: So it wasn't true?

IS: It was not true, but every now and then David would put up a little money for this. It was always a sum, and they always got a report back, right down to the penny as to what had happened. One time I sent somebody back a check for $35.64 and they laughed like anything, said it wouldn't buy his taxi for a day. Nevertheless, it helps for the future to be scrupulous about the past. It's easier to get money. I'll never forget--they had supplemental offices in the Rockefeller offices that kept track of all their various interests and charities. I got to know dozens of people over in that office. One day somebody called up and said, "What's this something housing authority. One of the boys gave the Museum $2500 for an exhibition, and David has just given a hundred dollars to the same authority. What's that all about? We never let them give unbeknownst to the family to the same thing." I said, "That happens to be very simple. We had an exhibition about housing and how bad it was; and we had a poverty-stricken kitchen in the house in the exhibition, but the hundred dollars that David gave was the membership"--which I consider entirely different. I presume they accepted that, but I tell you that just to tell you how you did not draw on the Rockefellers. They knew everything that was going on.

SZ: And yet, did you have a sense that it wasn't a Rockefeller institution?

IS: The family had "offices" in here. Sure.

SZ: No, I don't mean that. I mean the Modern. You said you didn't draw on the Rockefellers, but it's been said that the Museum is really, and one doesn't necessarily mean just in terms of monetary support, that it's really a family....

IS: I can refute that by saying that, when the Museum was first founded and the Rockefellers lived in the house behind the Museum. We used to have a lot of meetings over there, and John D. Rockefeller, Sr. objected to our having Museum of Modern Art meetings in that house. He objected to the Museum. He did not like the Museum; he thought it was a crackpot idea, in the middle of the Depression or whatever it was. He didn't like the Museum. That's why I told you, when he appeared, I was always Mrs. Sutton. When he wasn't there, I was Miss Ulrich. But he came to be the biggest single contributor. That's how he turned around. It was very exciting, in a way; very exciting. I would meet him on the street, particularly when they were building those buildings across the street, and there were people looking in (sidewalk superintendents). Almost every morning John D. was there looking in, and he would say good morning to me. I don't know whether he really knew who I was or not, but I used to see him almost every morning when we were doing that. He arranged the swap of that land from the south side to the north side, and they gave us all their personal property on the backside of the Museum, and bought those buildings where the Whitney went in. That was an interesting thing. That I should probably tell you about, too. When the Whitney Museum was down on 8th Street, we were in that house on 53rd Street, and we used to be picketed, complained about, because we didn't do enough for American art. By the same token, we didn't do more for American art because the Whitney was dedicated to American art, and it would be like we were maybe prying into their field. One of the Whitney girls--what was her name?--was on the board [Joan Whitney Payson]. Her name wasn't Whitney

anymore, but she was related to the Whitneys, the son. Then, when we had those buildings on 54th Street and the Whitney wanted to move--did anybody ever tell you about that deal?--we loaned them the land or gave them the use of the land, without a dime in payment. They were to build the Whitney there and pay for it, but, if they ever sold the Whitney, The Museum of Modern Art had the first right to buy it, or if it got sold to somebody else, the Museum would be reimbursed to the land. But the Museum would have a say in whatever happened to those buildings. I thought it was a gorgeous idea. Very little money changed hands. Don't you think that was a good idea? And then, when they did the cut-through, that was even better, wasn't it?... And, of course, they sometimes show those old movies in-between there in that little space, which is very nice. But you see, there was a lot of business that went on, and, of course, they went on doing that sort of thing years later when they added to the building on the other side of the garden, on the Fifth Avenue side of the garden, and then when they sold the air rights and so forth. I approve of that, because I don't think that you can go invading people's pockets forever for culture. There has to be a balance in the world, and if you can find a way to earn some of your cultural keep, it's better. We, for years, were the one museum in the world that raised, by earning, the majority of our budget. We were sixty percent earned, and something like that is considered a miracle, anything over fifty percent, because practically nobody else had ever had fifty percent earned. I don't think the people minded having to pay when it went to support the Museum. They got their attendance and their admissions to the Museum, so they didn't mind, and it wasn't world-shaking and the memberships went up. That was very good. Circulating exhibitions made a lot of money and the film department made money. It would never be self-sustaining, but, nevertheless, it was on the way.

SZ: What was the department you had the most trouble with?

IS: That's a big question [laughing]. I want to say there were no troubles, but, of course, it's not true. Everybody had to sow their own seed for their own department and fight for it, and there was a time when we were going to have to shift offices and make

space and the like. One department didn't like the idea that they were going to have to share their space, and the director of the department was away and the assistant was there, and she was giving us a real hard time. So Nelson came to my office and he said, "If she gets in your way, fire her." I said, "Now, come on, that's not my way. You've got to take me on my batting average." That would not be my way. I have given her up until Monday evening at six o'clock to come up with a better idea, and if she can come up with a better idea, I hope we're smart enough to recognize it. I don't think there's one chance in a hundred she will." He laughed and said, "Don't worry about your batting average. Do it your own way." That I liked, that I felt was good support, don't you think so?

SZ: Absolutely.

IS: We were always having a little trouble with the downstairs people, the carpenters and electricians and so forth, but I think that was never out of hand....

SZ: You may think this is an odd question, but, where did you have lunch, what did you do for lunch in those days, what was the neighborhood like?

IS: We had a lot of fun. In the really early days, down the street was that club for novice actors and actresses. What was it called?

SZ: The Rehearsal Club.

IS: They made us all members of the Rehearsal Club, so we could go down and have lunch at the Rehearsal Club. And we loved it. We got to know those girls, those youngsters.

SZ: Who's "we"? Who did you have lunch with?

IS: I had lunch with almost anybody, everybody in the Museum. Department heads, and

once in a while a trustee, would come down and we always had lunch in the garden. I don't know who I lunched with. I used to lunch with Steichen a lot. He was fun. He said to me one day, "You know, when I die, I can leave money to somebody, but I can't leave my experience or my brain." There was a sadness to him, because he wanted to leave his talents. But isn't that true of everybody? I very seldom lunched with Alfred, but, once in a while, I lunched with Alfred. Alfred was not one to go out to lunch very often, I don't think. I don't know if he had his lunch sent in or not.

SZ: I was going to ask, what would you do, if you ate in? Would you bring something or you'd have something sent in?

IS: We brought things here and we'd go to somebody's office and we'd have them. Maybe we'd go up to the library, you know, that penthouse.

SZ: Once you had that new building, there was....

IS: Yes, we could lunch in. But we really kind of encouraged people to go out. People got too immersed. As I told you, we had to make a rule that they had to see the exhibition. They'd get to immersed and needed a break. If somebody was having a little difficulty with somebody, we'd encourage them to go out to lunch together. We had a little row in my department, between three girls, and one of them said, "You can't work with so-and-so. You know you can't work with that girl." I said, "No, I don't know that. She's got a lot of talent. Are you suggesting I get rid of her to keep you? I'm not going to." So I gave that girl some tea tickets, and to ask the girl to tea and tell her that she said to me nobody could work with her, spill it out, tell her, "Now, come on, tell me why you can't work with me." Pretty soon she came back and put the tea tickets on my desk and said, "She won't go." It was really a fight over somebody else that was leaving. So I called her in and said, "Why didn't you go to tea?" She said, "You don't think she's going to change?" I said, "I have no idea, but I know one thing: you're not. So as of Friday, you are through." You would have to be tough. She was stunned. And then they were going to have a tea party up there on

Friday, and when the payroll was delivered in, I said to the payroll girl, "Give me the envelopes for those two girls that were leaving." The fight was over.... So I went out, and I delivered them their pay and had them sign the slips and took them. I said, "Now, you have one half-hour to leave, and you're not coming back over the doorsill. You no longer belong here." "We're having a tea party at five o'clock!" I said, "No, you're not. I'm sorry, you're not having a tea party. There are no rows and taking sides in this place. You just have to go." Boy, they were stunned. But how can you handle a thing like that? You can't go taking sides.

SZ: And that wasn't a hard thing for you to handle?

IS: I was upset, of course I was upset, terribly upset. You don't need a row in your department among girls that just don't happen to like each other.... I was dispensing of a girl one day and I called her in and I said, "I'm sorry to tell you that in the next three weeks, you can have as much time off as you like to look for a new job. Then you come to me and tell me you're resigning." She went out and said to this one girl, "Thanks to you, I just got fired." I went out and spilled my beans with them. I said, "You didn't get fired. Why are you saying that? I was trying to be kind, so that you would never have to use that word, and so you could use me for a reference. I even told you what *not* to put on your new resume. I told you, do this, you're good at this, you're good at this, but don't put that down." So, there you are. It was tough, lots of toughness.

SZ: And you didn't like it.

IS: No. So you can't blame me for wanting to have to leave, can you?

SZ: You mean when you left? Now tell me about how you left and when you left.

IS: I left after I went to Europe for the rescue of Bill [Lieberman]. I told you I came back and there was three months' of work.

SZ: I didn't realize that that was the timing of it. I see....

IS: I came back and I had so much to catch up on and so forth, I said, "I'm going to be the next one they're going to rescue. I'm leaving." My husband was furious. He thought I just ate up that job and could think of nothing else, and it was more or less true, but it was eating me up too much.

SZ: So he wasn't furious that you quit?

IS: He liked my connection with the Museum. He felt it had a certain prestige, and, let's face it, it did. I was a career woman before they ever invented the word "career." Don't you think so?

SZ: Yes, I do. How did you feel when you left?

IS: As a matter of fact, I'll show you something, I put it out there to show you. I was a new person once I'd made the decision. I relaxed, my anger subsided, I wasn't going to have to face it forever, and René said, "Gee, why can't you run that job like that?" I said, "René, I couldn't, I just felt I couldn't. I'm relaxed because now I'm running to the end of the line." I felt myself it would be nice to have that nice, relaxed feeling and do the job, but, you know, there were going to be other things that would turn up that were going to be just as wild and difficult and so forth, and you were never going to get away from that. An executive job is tough....

SZ: You told me last time, I think, it was 1952 or '53 that you left?

IS: Fifty-two, but they put me on a year's leave of absence first. That was their idea. I said to Nelson, "I don't think I'm coming back...."

SZ: What is this?

IS: That was the going-away party.

SZ: It says, "We hope that these will hang where they will be a reminder of our deep affection for you, both as a friend and a colleague. The emptiness that you leave behind will be a constant reminder to us."

IS: Look at the signatures on it.

SZ: I see all the names.

IS: I don't know how many there were. That was the whole staff.

SZ: I see some names I recognize. Alicia Legg--you knew her?

IS: Sure.

SZ: And Jean Volkmer.

IS: I loved Jean. She had a great effect on my life, and I'll tell you later.

SZ: Bernard Karpel. Frances Keech.

IS: Is she still around?

SZ: Yes, she is.

IS: She's aged. Like Ione.

SZ: Not like Ione. This is lovely. Greta Daniel. Lovely. You still have it. Pearl Moeller. A lot of these names I do not recognize.

IS: There are no trustees on there.

SZ: No, not that I can see.

IS: But I had a whole bunch of letters from trustees, which are just as touching.

SZ: Sarah Rubinstein. She did something in finance, did she not?

IS: She was my assistant, and she was the girl that they were saying they just couldn't work with.

SZ: But she stayed after you.

IS: She wanted to leave because I was leaving, and I said, "Sarah, don't leave. You've made your spot here, and you know there's no prejudice against being Jewish or anything of the sort, and don't go out in that bitter world again and start over." The personnel director was going to give her, I don't know, a five-dollar-a-week raise, and I said, "Please don't insult her. Give her nothing now, and when you raise her, raise her $1,000 a year, not less. Don't put her on a weekly basis. When Charlie Keppel comes in to take my place, she'll be the key to him. She's been my assistant for years." So she stayed. I saw her just the other day.

SZ: What I neglected to read here, they gave you two lithographs when you left. They gave you a Picasso lithograph and a cross. How nice.

IS: It was a big party. Nelson sent me orchids from here to here. They were absolutely gorgeous....

SZ: I do want to ask you about what you did afterwards, but you were going to tell me about Jean Volkmer.

IS: I don't think this belongs in this thing, but I'm going to ask you to edit this tape. I was born with malrotation of the intestinal tract, and I was thirty-nine years of age before I had a day without pain. But I was born with it, so it was normal. I used to think, Oh, God, wouldn't it be nice to be hit by a taxi cab, or fall down stairs. Jean Volkmer would go down the hall, tripping toes, and she'd whistle, and I thought, My God, if she can do that, *I* can do that. It was a show. I was sure that everybody was putting on a show.... And that was the influence that Jean Volkmer had on me. If she could be like that, why couldn't I be like that? As I say, I was thirty-nine years of age before I had a day without pain; I had three major operations. The trustees were very nice when I was in the hospital. I got flowers from all of them and so forth. They couldn't have been nicer. Not that it had anything to do with them, but they wanted me back, I guess.... I told you that René gave me one of his drawings? There is a picture of René's drawing that he gave me. It's called *The Songbirds,* but it's in that sort of original Matisse thing, about ten lines.

SZ: It's quite nice.

IS: It is lovely, yes. This is by Bob Osborn, Elodie's [Elodie Courter's] husband. This is in the country. I'm in the process of cutting down this collection.... That print you see there Bill Lieberman and Jean Deneau gave to me for Christmas in 1952, after I'd been over there [in Europe]....

**END TAPE 4, SIDE 1**

**BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 2**

SZ: I wanted you, if you would, to tell me, after you left the Modern what you did. Because you didn't stop working.

IS: First of all, I went to Europe for a year, practically a year--I went in September and

came back in June. My poor husband came and joined me for Christmas or something like that, but I said, "I have got to get the webs out of my head," and I did not feel better until, along about...I went to Morocco for January, for the cold weather, and came back to Naples and ran into some friends from Detroit, and from then on, the three of us spent our time together. And I started feeling much better. I said, "Gee, now I know why I quit." But it took me six or eight months to get that pressure off of my back. Then I wanted to do what Jean Volkmer did, trip down the street, sing, so forth. It was quite interesting. Even when I was very young, I would never tell my mother about how I felt, never. I was fine. I didn't want to be deprived. I had five sisters and they did certain things, and if it was going to kill me, I was going to do the same things, although at times, when I got very depressed--we lived on a lake in the summertime, we had a round-bottomed boat and my father's fishing boat (a flat-bottomed boat) and my mother's canoe--I'd go out and take my father's flat-bottomed boat and go across the lake and beach it and sew for my dolls. I was ten, twelve years of age, and I had a whole mess of little dolls, and I made clothes [for them], and if I wanted anything from my little girlfriends, I made hats for their dolls, if I wanted anything for the boys that I knew, I'd make them kites, because I could make gorgeous kites. But if I were to fly my kite, I had to be taken care of, and I needed the boys to take care of me. I wasn't allowed without them, and we'd have to go down to the railroad tracks where the wires wouldn't interfere with the kite.

SZ: What you mean is that you really got back some of that....

IS: Spirit, yes. Then a friend and I invented a thing called jungle rugs, which was a tiger and a leopard, about five feet long, in the form of a sleeping bag, with the shoulders open and the head stuffed for a pillow, and the kids could sleep on gramma's bed or play in it on the floor or look at TV, and FAO Schwarz put us in business. We made the front page of the *World Telegram* when the toy fair was on--It was Toy of the Year. Dorothy Stevens and I did it. It was called Stevens Industries; it was called that because her husband had a corporation that had a loss in it, so we took the corporation--he gave us his loss in his corporation. We never really made any

money, but I always have said, and I still say, that you have every experience for a reason. So one thing happens--what did that happen for? There was some reason I needed to learn something from that.... All I learned from that was: never go into merchandising. Never get in what they call the rag business or anything to do with it. But, I tell you, we learned a lot. FAO Schwarz wanted 500 of these and we'd only had one made by the corner upholsterer. We'd never made one. So we had to find a way to make them. I don't know about cutting three or four hundred at a time, with these big pins and cutters around and how to lay out the...I can't tell you, I don't know why I had to have that experience. We finally had it made up in Pennsylvania and it was shipped from Pennsylvania. It was a nice experience, an experience, but I didn't enjoy it, and we didn't make any money.

SZ: And then you went from that to investment advising?

IS: No, I had in the meantime...I've done over eight houses in my lifetime. Very interesting, and one was written up. You see, I was a frustrated artist. When I wanted to go to college, they didn't let girls in the architecture courses. So, when I came to New York, I took a lot of courses, mostly in architecture, never for credit. I don't know if I have a college education or not; it's no matter. The point is, I wanted it for *my* knowledge. I'm now down to one house. Everybody used to tease me, "She can't live if she doesn't have two houses." I always had one I was living in and one I was working on. Now I'm having, as I told you, a family reunion in July. We've got thirty-some people coming. Then I'm going to put the house on the market. I don't know whether I am going to live here or move to Maryland. I'd like to move to Anapolis, if I could find one of those condos where you have a house and a garden, and there's somebody to take care of everything.

**END SIDE 2, TAPE 4**

**END INTERVIEW**