THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **ELOISE RICCIARDELLI (ER)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **MATTAPOISETT, MASSACHUSETTS**

DATE: **JULY 17, 1994**

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: I'll start the way I always do: Tell me where and when you were born and just a little bit about your background.

ER: I was born in New Jersey, in Bound Brook, in 1929, and then with the family, which was my mother, father and brother and sister, we left for Brazil when I was three years old. I actually lived there for thirteen years. We came back to this country, but after 1939, because of the war, we weren't able to come back again until '46.

SZ: You went back to visit?

ER: Yes, just short periods.

SZ: What were you doing in Brazil, then?

ER: My father was actually chairman of the board of Johnson & Johnson down there.

SZ: Did you enjoy those years?

ER: Very, very much, and I've kept up with my best friend from there. A group "Barulho Brasileiro" meets every three years. In '95 we're going to meet on the Cape. It's very amusing, because hundreds of people come that went to the same schools and to

meet their friends and colleagues. A lot of them live here, but a lot still live in South America.

SZ: So you still have the language?

ER: Yes. I had to refresh it when I went back to Brazil for the Museum a couple of times. Actually, I was invited to Brazil by the Brazilians. I hadn't used my Portuguese in forty years or so, so I hired a private teacher of my own in New York. My Portuguese was pretty good after I started working with him; we did it through songs and reading, not grammar, but by conversation, so that when I got to Brazil I was able to manage on my own. On the second trip to Brazil I gave a series of ten lectures in Portuguese on museum documentation. That was fun, because everyone was so pleased that I did it in Portuguese. Even though I made some mistakes in the language, I'm sure they preferred the mistakes to a translator.

SZ: I'm sure that's true.

ER: So that was lots of fun.

SZ: When you were down there, what was it like? It was Depression time here.

ER: It's a totally different life. We had servants--people did in those days. We had gardeners and laundrywomen. It was a very, very different thing. We used to go to Argentina; we went to Uruguay--we actually lived in Uruguay for a year. My father loved to climb mountains, and he used to climb in the Andes every summer. I did it only one summer, with my brother and sister. He did serious climbing, like Aconcagua, which is the highest peak down there. But I went just one summer climbing. It was fun. My sister, who's not athletic, hated it. She would get so far and then sit down and refuse to move, and I thought she was very brave to do that--gutsy [laughter]. But my mother felt we had to come back to this country. She wanted us educated in this country, and her mother was dying. After World War II, it was

practically impossible to get here, so finally, my father managed to get us on a ship that still had all its guns on it. I think there were twelve passengers. They put the men all together in what had been the infirmary, and they put six of us, women and children, in what had been the gunnery crew's cabin. It took us almost a month to come up in that ship, but it was very relaxed. It was the end of the war, the crew was relaxed, they'd cook you anything you wanted if you would ask the cook to make you a dessert or something like that. They were so happy they were going back to the States. It was a wonderful trip, a wonderful experience. We ended up coming into New Orleans. So that was a very interesting experience.

SZ: And you came to the United States permanently?

ER: Actually, we really didn't know it, but I guess so. I hadn't thought of it either way, that we were just now going to the States after having lived in South America, that's all. So we came up here and then never went back again. My father then got involved in other business down there, but I never went back. I went to school.

SZ: So you were seventeen when you came up?

ER: Sixteen, I guess. Yes, sixteen.

SZ: Had you finished high school?

ER: No. They sent me to boarding school in Northampton, Massachusetts. It was Mary Burnham. My sister and I went there. Then I went to Stephens College, which is in Columbia, Missouri.... I had no idea what I wanted [to study]. I took a lot of English and art history, but I really had no real goals. Some people know--"I want to be a dentist or a doctor"--I had no idea what I wanted. After college I did go back to South America and then decided it wasn't the life for me anymore and came back.

SZ: So your father stayed in South America?

ER: Yes. My mother and father were divorced, so my father stayed down there. He stayed many, many years. Then he had a business of his own in the Amazon, with natural drugs, which he loved; it kept him very occupied down there. I went down, but it just wasn't the life for me. I wanted my independence and if I'd lived down there I wouldn't have had it.

SZ: Because of the culture?

ER: Yes. Then, women couldn't go out and get a job. Frances--my aunt, Frances Pernas--was working at the Museum [of Modern Art]....

SZ: So you went to Stephens and you finished. You studied, as you said, English, but it didn't really....

ER: Just subjects I liked, but with no goal in mind. Then when I came back and had to get a job, Frances said why didn't I apply at the Museum, since she was working there.

SZ: This was about what year?

ER: Early '50s, let's put it. Probably '50, but I can't remember any of these dates.

SZ: I can find it.

ER: The Museum will have it, in the personnel records.

SZ: So Frances was your aunt.

ER: Yes, my mother's sister, so she suggested that I apply in personnel there. They had an opening for a receptionist, so I took it. After being a receptionist on the fourth floor at that time--the Museum was very different, because I don't think we even had...the "21" building might have been there, but the east wing hadn't been built.

SZ: You were a receptionist on the fourth floor of the main building?

ER: Yes, of the main building, for the offices on that floor--Film department, and I don't remember what the other departments were. I'd do a little bit of typing for a couple of people. It was much more casual, and the pressure that you see today in the Museum did not exist. We even had time to go to have tea in the afternoon. The staff would meet and go to the Penthouse restaurant and have tea in the afternoon. Those days are long gone. People do go to the staff lounge, but it was a much more casual thing then.

SZ: Tell me a little bit more about what it was like when you first came to work there.

ER: First of all, the Museum was much smaller--you'll have to check how many people worked there--so you really knew the staff in quite a few of the departments quite well.... I also worked on Saturdays to make a little extra money, in the school. They had that school in the "21" building, and I used to work there on Saturdays--I think I made ten dollars extra by working on Saturdays--but you got so you knew everybody, so there was always a way of doing extra work. Knowing people, you also made good friends, because you also had time to socialize with them after work. There wasn't the busyness at the Museum. You were busy, but you weren't overwhelmed the way I was later on when I was in the Registrar's department. I switched after about six months as Receptionist to work for Margareta Akermark in the Film department, and through meeting people and knowing everybody and doing a little bit of work for this person and a little work for that person.... Richard Griffith was then the head of that department, and what I did was very simple: I booked films. People wrote in from all over, and you booked films. I got to see every movie

the Museum had. We got passes for movie theatres because we worked with the Film department, and Joanne Godbout Koch worked in the department, and we'd go to the movies. Every night, practically, there was a movie to go to, because when you get involved in films, all you do is look at movies.

SZ: So you started to get interested in what was there, I mean more than just a place to be.

ER: To work, right. Then what I decided is--and I loved working with Margareta. I had been told that she was tough or--I hate to use this word--sort of a snob, but if she cared about you, she couldn't have been more wonderful as a boss. She became a lifetime friend for me and Joanne Koch, the three of us. She was absolutely a wonderful boss. But I felt that the Film department, for me, was too restricted. It didn't encompass enough of the rest of the Museum, and I wanted to do something that I could touch bases with more of the Museum--not that I didn't love working in the Film department, but it was very self-contained, and I think it's still pretty much self-contained, and I really wanted to sort of spread out. So they had an opening in Dorothy Dudley's office and I asked if I could apply for the job, and I did get it.

SZ: So at this point you didn't really know any of the main cast of characters very well.

ER: In a way you did, because Frances, my Aunt Frances, had been there so long, I knew through her -- she worked for Monroe Wheeler, so I got to know Monroe Wheeler. Even though I was never sort of a close friend of his, even towards the end when I was back at the Museum, I did go visit him when he was sick at his apartment, because partly through Frances a relationship had built up. Even with John Rewald -- Frances worked on his books for him, so I met him also -- John and I always spoke at parties and he always used to say how much he admired Frances. I developed relationships like that, but a lot of it was because Frances had worked there, and I got to know people through her. But the Museum was small enough that you could. I remember, and I think I was very fortunate, because I was, after working

in the Registrar's office, assigned an exhibition to work with Alfred Barr. That, to me, was the culmination of everything, because he was still "the god."

SZ: He was.

ER: Yes--I thought so--and I was very nervous about having to work with Alfred Barr.

SZ: Was he kind of separated?

ER: No, I think he was just a very busy man. Frances worked very closely with him, but I was just a young person, just starting out, so there was no reason to be noticed except that...to have been assigned to work on a collection show with him I thought was just absolutely wonderful. I got to know, again through Frances, people like Dorothy Miller. That was one of the things about the Museum: It was a family. Because I was someone's niece, everybody thought, "Oh, she's Frances's niece," and so you're accepted. It isn't that they wouldn't have accepted you, but it was almost easier to meet people.

SZ: It would have taken longer.

ER: I think it would have, even though the Museum was so much smaller.

SZ: Were there a lot of those kinds of interconnections at that point?

ER: Through Frances?

SZ: No, I mean did people get to the Museum through...?

ER: That I don't know. It could have been. That I'm not sure about.

SZ: So once you got there, you were glad to be there.

ER: Absolutely. The Registrar's office really turned out to be just the right thing for me. I'm very detail-oriented, which you have to be in that department, and I'm practical, with common sense. I'm not gifted as far as writing, which you have to be if you go into curatorial. So being in the Registrar's office was just right. First of all, you got to handle and see the art. I remember how exciting it was. Even though you sat there and did all the archival records, you physically got to see the art and handle it, and what a learning experience that was. I really learned so much just by physically having to catalogue all the collection works that came into the Museum. It was just a wonderful experience. You can't help but grow.

SZ: Now tell me a little bit about Dorothy Dudley.

ER: She was a wonderful woman. I understand, and this I never saw, that if she really wanted something very badly--this was when [René] d'Harnoncourt was the director--she'd go to his office and burst into tears because I guess he gave way to tears [laughing]. But she was a very, not only a very creative person as far as the job. She was the one who sent me to NYU to learn about computers. She told me--this was in 1967, way ahead of other museums--"You have to go to NYU and learn about computers, because we're going to computerize." Then they had this consortium with the Guggenheim and the Met and others, that was started, but Dorothy Dudley was a moving spirit behind it. She was always ahead of her time that way.

SZ: The consortium with the Guggenheim and the Met was what?

ER: It was called...I was on the board for years and now I can't remember -- The Museum Computer Network. It still exists, but in a different form today.

SZ: And its main purpose was?

ER: To develop a cataloguing system that was uniform in all the museums that could be developed. Everybody wanted to continue doing cataloguing the way we'd always done it, even though it was typed on cards. The same format. They hired a Jack Heller from NYU--I think that was his name, Jack Heller; then he went to Stony Brook--to develop a program, and of course it was a very clunky program, which is what it was in those days, you punched your cards and everything. It was tedious beyond belief. But I know we stuck to our guns. That's one area that did not have much support for years in the Museum, our program in the Registrar's office. Part of it was that Dick Oldenburg, not knowing much about computers, was not sympathetic towards them. The first deputy director who showed any interest in computers was, I think, Robert Howe. Before that, we hung onto this clunky program because we didn't want to give in and lose it and go back to manual, and he was the one who got us going so that we were able to bring someone in and develop a much more contemporary, updated program, which we now have on the IBM.

SZ: So you know you needed it.

ER: Now more than ever, but it took a long time for people, even the curators, to accept it. But once they began to see how it could be used.... Now Riva [Castleman] I felt used it better than anyone, by printing the catalogue of the print collection through the computer. The whole thing is, though--and you must know this, too--with a computer, everybody has to be absolutely accurate with everything and how you input it. I know we had trouble at one point with the Architecture department, who were very sloppy, and I had to go to the data processing department and just tell them, "Stop it. They cannot use that. They can search, but they cannot input, because they'll destroy the whole system"--until they got someone who really cared and who just didn't sit there putting things in without paying attention to how you enter their material. But Dorothy Dudley, to get back to her, she also was like a big mother to everybody in the department. I remember one young girl, Pat Saminski, who was a Christian Scientist, a lovely, wonderful, bright young woman. She had been in a car accident and she came in very bruised and she wouldn't go to the

doctor. She said, "I'm a Christian Scientist." I said, "Don't you think maybe you can get your mother to give you permission? Let's go talk to Dorothy Dudley." We really felt she could have had internal injuries. So we went in to her and spoke to her, and I think she actually did get permission from the family to have her checked and go to the hospital. She really cared. I know if you had a problem and you'd go into her office, she always had a bottle of liquor in her bottom drawer, and she'd say, "Let's have a drink on this" [laughing]. In those days it was very much more relaxed, but that was her cure-all. So she'd bring out the bottle and the glasses and she'd pour you a stiff drink so you could unburden yourself [laughing]. She was a very extraordinary...and she cared about all of the details. She worked very closely with the Metropolitan Museum on establishing the proper procedures for registrars, which, as you know, the museum registration book that she published with Wilkinson, the woman who was the registrar at the Met, is the registrar bible in the Museum field everywhere, not only in this country but everywhere. They've upgraded it three times, and they just asked me if I'd be the editor for the fourth, which I couldn't because I went to Japan last year. So they're upgrading it again, because of course you have computers today and people are sophisticated and they know more. But Dorothy Dudley was also very far ahead in many ways. She had us go to the conservation labs and watch how the conservators worked, to learn all about the terminology, because we examined works. I never got to the program at Cooperstown because as the Museum got busier we had less time, but I know she sent a lot of the staff to Cooperstown for two weeks to get an overview of conservation. She felt that you had to be well-rounded. I think that quality packing and insurance were established through her. They made you, when I first started in that office, they didn't allow me to do anything except recordkeeping, absolutely to learn every little detail, and no mistake--if there was a mistake, I had to redo it. Absolutely fanatical about it. I tried to keep that up when I was registrar.

SZ: I was about to say, that sounds familiar [laughing].

ER: I don't know how it is today, because the Museum works at a much faster pace. I think it's much harder. But the Archives, at least we know up to a certain point the records are very good, very accurate.

SZ: What you're saying is that she was really a pioneer in a certain way.

ER: I think she was very much a pioneer. I was fortunate to have worked with her. And then I left the Museum because I got married and went to California. But when I came back....

SZ: What year was that?

ER: Sixty-one? Maybe sixty-one. I can't remember. [Note: ER was rehired by the Museum, 1960-1961.]

SZ: So you were not at the Museum the first time for a very long stretch.

ER: A few years, but short. Then I went to California, had children, then came back to New York and went back to work at the Museum again, and was fortunate to go back to the Registrar's office.

SZ: Was she still there?

ER: She retired in the late 60's [Note: DD retired June 30, 1969], and David Vance was then made the registrar.

SZ: So this is what you had a certain skill in by that time.

ER: That's right.

SZ: There was no problem going back?

ER: No, they had an opening. I was fortunate. I liked working with David. I'd known him well before--and with Eric Rowlison, who was also there. He became registrar after David. David then went to run the Museum Computer Network, that's what he did. There were people, Betty Burnham, who had been there; maybe she was at the Cooper-Hewitt by then. One of the things about Dorothy Dudley that was wonderful, and I learned a lot from her and tried to do the same, when other museums looked for new staff members, she would always tell her staff. She never wanted to hold anyone back, because you can only advance so many people, you have only so many places. But if there was a better position somewhere she'd say, "This museum is looking for someone. If you're interested, apply for it." She was very generous that way. In a way, people from the Museum went a lot of places and sort of took with them what she had taught and her standards, and her standards went to all the other museums. People would say, "Oh, you're from MoMA," and they would be happy to have you, because they knew that Dorothy Dudley had such good standards and such good training in her department, such careful training. So she really set up standards that followed through. Then she also had a program with the Metropolitan Museum where--and I'm not sure that was with Dorothy Dudley, but I remember the program--where people came from other museums in the United States for two weeks to New York, and they'd see how different things functioned in both the museums and the standards we'd set up. I continued something, but it was a little different. We started taking interns in. I had interns from the different universities, I had interns from different museums, from all over--Europe, South America. We needed the help, but we also treated the intern like a staff member so that they really learned something. They were known to become, in some cases, curators, and I still hear from a lot of them. It was a very satisfactory program. A lot of them were students from museum study programs, from NYU and Queens College, Fordham. The internship program has grown at the Museum. Now it's run through the Education department, so you recommend people to the Education department today.

SZ: In the beginning, beside the fact that the collection grew, other demands grew too, as circulation....

ER: Everything grew, yes. When I first went to work in the Registrar's office, we were busy, and occasionally you'd have to work at night, because that's when you take the exhibitions down. But you didn't work the seven days a week, which became almost part of your lifestyle, at the Museum, especially mine towards the end. At first you didn't notice it; it just sort of gradually got more and more hectic, because they were trying to put in more and more shows, and as the Museum grew, there were more and more galleries, and the more exhibitions you do, the more public you get, and it just sort of keeps escalating. And of course it's not only the exhibitions, it's the loans. You don't just go and take something off the wall. When you make a loan through a department, or through the Painting and Sculpture department, you have to redo the gallery if the work was removed from the gallery, which meant the registrar people had more responsibilities all the time, with all the changes in the galleries, with the more loans we made to major exhibitions. Of course, you can't borrow from other museums major works unless you reciprocate. So, as the shows got more sophisticated and bigger demands were made for works of art, we also had to lend comparable works. Then again, insurance values went up, so suddenly we find that we had to travel with the works for protection to be sure that everything was properly handled. Packing became more sophisticated. Conservation got more and more involved with packing as well. You became much more aware of the different types of customs brokers and truckers--all these things, and how they handle things, if they handle things correctly. Also, it seems to me, as the collection grew, at one point we had our collection in six outside warehouses. There was no storage space, and there still is no storage space, in the Museum. It's minimal; it's outside the Museum. At one point, there was hope that we could buy our own building just for storage, but then the cost of the last expansion and everything ended up being too much. So that never came to fruition. But people also know much more about how to store today, and the proper climate control. In the Photography department, their storage is at a different temperature than any of the other storerooms because of course the

emulsion lifts off the film. So you have to take all these things into consideration. So you learn, and I felt that in the Registrar department I not only learned about the art and how to handle it, and we were always on the floor for the installations, and for the packing and insurance and custom brokers and everything, but you learned about storage and truckers and airlines even and which airlines you could use that gave you the kind of service that you demanded, because of the value of art. As values got higher, the insurance was so high we had to accompany so much of the art, and that puts a terrible burden on the staff. There's just so much traveling you can do. It sounds very romantic to say you're going off to Russia, except that when you have hopes that you might get out of the country and they're making it very difficult for you to leave, like my first trip to St. Petersburg. The customs papers were coming from Moscow, and we had checked out of the hotel--you can't get into a hotel once you're checked out--we had no food or anything, the trucks were ready for us at nine in the morning, and the papers weren't coming and customs wouldn't let us leave, they had the truck sealed, we couldn't get our belongings. And finally, the director of the museum put his foot down and wrote out by hand a list and said these works really belong to those museums, you're just going to have to let it go. We left at six at night, just made the Russian border before closing, and when you go through the border the dogs sniff--at that time they went under your trucks and you all had to get out and guards standing around with their rifles. The people in Finland whose trucks were handling all this thought something terrible had happened. They kept calling the museum in St. Petersburg from nine in the morning, and the museum kept saying we were on the way. The Finnish firm thought all this art had disappeared. The head of the company, because he couldn't drive across the border, had walked across the border to find us, he was so distressed.

SZ: This doesn't sound very romantic.

ER: That's right. It isn't romantic. And we hadn't eaten all day. When we finally got to Finland at two in the morning, this poor man from the Finnish firm, he banged on the door of a diner and persuaded them to open it up and let us get something to eat.

There were several of us from different museums. I was from The Museum of Modern Art, and there were several other museums represented.

SZ: This had to do with what show?

ER: We were taking back the Gauguins on that trip. I can't remember what the art was that I took over, but I'd gone in with art and we were coming out with other art. Also, you spent all your time going...they say, "We need this kind of paper," so you go to a bank and you spend half the day. Then they finally come to you and say, "No, we don't have this paper." So you go back to the Museum, and then you have to go to someone else's office and spend half a day. They're so disorganized. I had a problem with Spain once, even though I'd been there many, many times with exhibitions. After we did our big [Pablo] Picasso show, we returned the Guernica, and we also loaned some Picassos--they were doing a major show in Madrid, besides doing the Guernica at the Cason del Buen Retiro, which was a big event in Spain--and several couriers went over, accompanied the art, and the Spanish government wouldn't give us a per diem or the money that they'd promised us. So finally, I just went to one of the departments--Ministry of Culture; it was in one of the big buildings--I went and I sat down in the office, and I said, "I'm here to collect the per diem promised us." They said, "You'll be getting it." I said, "I'll wait." I waited several hours, but I got not only mine but all the other couriers'. I said, "I'm not leaving until I get all the money" [laughing]. This is what you have to deal with. And you have to be strong, because if we'd written later and said you still owe us all this money, the chances of getting it were pretty nil. So I just went, waited very patiently. I sat there and I was reading. They'd say, "You'll be getting this," and I'd say, "I'll wait, I'll wait." And what could they do? They couldn't bodily pick me up and take me out of the building. So I got the money. There are nice things that happen on these trips, but then there are these other incidents that you have to be prepared to handle. You can't panic and you can't be too emotional, or nothing will get done. You can't threaten them, because they'll probably turn you out. So it's interesting. I've had wonderful experiences. I remember in Switzerland, and not speaking any German is

a problem. All I could say is, "Nein, ich, ich kann Sie nicht verstehen" and got to the airport and they had to take the nets off some very large boxes, and this man gets on top of the boxes and was going to stand not on the battens, which are extra support, but in the middle of the box, and I couldn't think fast enough in German and I grabbed his leg. I said, "Nein, nein, nein and jah, jah, jah," pointing to where he could step, and I was beet-red in the face because they all turned to look at me, but then they all started to laugh. But if you can't speak the language, what are you going to do? My first reaction was to protect the art. So I grabbed him. What could you do? You have this terrible sense of responsibility, and this is what people don't realize. You're not just sitting on a plane and somebody else is responsible for the art: You're responsible for it, from the time it leaves MoMA. All these things didn't exist in Dorothy Dudley's day, though. The insurance wasn't high; you put the art on the truck and you assumed it would arrive somewhere. We used to use railway express. We received a work from Florida, their most important work, a Matisse, and it came with a gash because a forklift went through it--thirteen inches, and a lot of other smaller gashes. It was Rayfish on the Beach. We've borrowed it since, and you can't tell it was restored. Jean Volkmer did the most incredible restoration job. But obviously the work depreciated. So this is why your responsibility is to go to the airport, to make sure a forklift doesn't go through something.

SZ: So after that happened, that's when...?

ER: I think that's when people started to realize that you needed more supervision, and also, that you had to be more careful about the carriers you used. A work of art, a Matisse again--Oceania, that huge paper cutout--was being unloaded from a plane, and it dropped from the plane. None of us were there. The box arrived at the Museum broken. We said, "But where did this happen?" Everybody, airline or trucker, was too embarrassed to admit the work had been dropped. The only thing that saved it, it had not only a strong frame, it had Plexi, and it managed to hold it. Things like that happen. And then you realize that, when you're there, when they see you watching, even though you can't say anything at the airport, you're watching, and

your presence starts to create a sense of care. I think accidents begin to happen, and that's when people realize...also, as I say, insurance was getting higher and more works were traveling--that was it too. Many more works were traveling. That has a lot to do with it. And you know how it is today. These blockbusters shows that started when [Thomas] Hoving was director of the Metropolitan Museum. And we're still competing with that.

SZ: What was the Modern's first blockbuster--Cézanne: The Late Work? Would you consider that [a blockbuster]?

ER: I'd consider it a major exhibition, but I wouldn't call Cézanne a blockbuster. I wouldn't use that term on it. It was really more of a scholarly.... Picasso, yes. Nine hundred and thirty-four works in that exhibition. But it wasn't only the exhibition. It was the fact that we could only have so much value in the building. So the collection, the important collection had to leave. The Mondrians went to Chicago. We sent Dallas Monets. We sent Futurists to Paris. We sent a lot of the collection to many...I mean, we're not only bringing in hundreds of works from overseas, we're sending out all the collection at the same time. It was an incredible job of organization, the bringing in and going out. I can't believe that we did it and that it was so successful and that everything was safe. Also, we had government indemnification, which meant every work had to be examined before it left the premises of the owner from whom we borrowed--it doesn't matter where it was from. It used to be by our staff, because I remember the first time we had government indemnification, from the government, I went over to Switzerland to examine everything and see it packed. Then we started to hire conservators in Europe that we considered responsible to do the reports. The reason you do this is...it's amazing: A person will lend you something and they haven't really looked at it in a long time--maybe it's been up on their wall for years--and when it comes back they say, "You've damaged it," because the conditions look different. So you really need to do very detailed examinations before a work leaves someone's house. It's to protect everybody. It protects the owner, too. I hate to say it, there was a person we used to borrow from--it was a gallery dealer--every time a

work was returned to him he claimed it was damaged and he claimed depreciation. So I know that with one of the works....

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1

ER: ...so I know that with one of his works I went to his apartment with a photographer and photographed the work on the wall, before we even packed it and took it out of the building. It was the only way to do it. I don't remember a claim on that one [laughing]. But it's amazing, people do forget. Even with the Vienna 1900 show, Kirk's [Kirk Varnedoe's] show at the Museum, we had one silver piece that had stones on it, and the owner, a gallery dealer from Europe, said that the stone had cracked. That piece had also been shown in Vienna, at their major exhibition, and the owner had made for that catalogue a color plate, and in that color plate, when he'd loaned it to Vienna before we even received it in New York, it showed the damage. We went through the books and found it; we'd also noted it in our own very detailed report. It could have happened, he said, on the way from Paris to us, because the show went to Paris as well, but his original photograph showed it. So you have to do detective work, too. The job requires, I don't know what it requires, but being practical and delving into everything, protecting the Museum by being as careful about your reports as you can, and about your receipts--if you return something and you send your receipt to the person to be signed and they don't return it, to please write them and ask them to acknowledge that he received the work, and in good condition. Just before I left the Museum, we had a call from someone who said we had borrowed a [Alberto] Giacometti from his father, and he could not find the Giacometti and he felt that we had never returned this work. This was in the '40s that we borrowed it. I went through our records; I found two receipts signed by his father saying we had returned the work. I suspect--and this is supposition--that he probably sold it and never told the family. But it's a good thing

we had the records to prove that we had returned the work. So those are very important things.

SZ: When Dorothy Dudley left, did she pick her successor--did she pick David Vance?

ER: I think she did. I think he was trained for the role. Then when he decided to leave, I guess actually, as promotions go, the next person was Eric. Then he went to Australia, and then there was no one. I had come back again to the Museum, because I'd left in the meantime.

SZ: You left a second time?

ER: Yes, I left a second time. I remarried, and we went to Europe for three years. When I came back, Eric left and I guess they had, was it two associate registrars? There were Betty Burnham and Teri Varveris. Now that was a terrible problem. You know the Museum had that strike? It split the Registrar's department. I wasn't there at the time, but the effects were still felt when I went back in the early '70s. Betty and Teri would not speak to each other. One was very pro-union, one was very anti-union, and it really created a division. It took years to get rid of that division. It didn't happen until practically everyone [left]. There was a turnover. Teri went to work for Metropolitan Life, in computers. I don't know what Betty did; I'm not sure if that's when she went to the Cooper-Hewitt. But people sided with one or the other, and it really was a very stressful time. It was a shame, and I'm not sure it didn't affect other departments, too, the union strike, because I guess what people called other people who came to work and the people who didn't go through the line and stuff. I guess there were a lot of hurt feelings about it. I'm just thankful I wasn't there at the time. So I had come back, and I was made assistant registrar at that time.

SZ: But there was no registrar?

ER: No, no registrar. Then they decided to put me on the search committee for a registrar. We did interview people, but eventually I got it. I felt I was there at the right time. It was just one of those things. We did interview people, and there were other people with experience that would have been good. But in the end....

SZ: Did you have to go through the formal process of applying?

ER: Yes.

SZ: This was after you had looked at people?

ER: Yes. It was at the same time. I think that's the procedure at the Museum. I just happened to be....

SZ: It's just funny that you were on the search committee.

ER: I guess because they didn't know I was going to apply. But it turned out okay. It's just one of these things, where I happened to be there at the right time, when the position was available. I felt...I wasn't sure if I could handle it, but I felt strong enough. There were problems. There were problems with the art handlers. You'd say, "Put a screw in that box," and one of the men would say, "I only handle nails." And I'd say, "Would you please close that box with a screw?" "Well, I'll have to grieve to the union," and I'd have to say, "Go grieve, but kindly do the work." There was this attitude, and for part of it I blame it--and I don't mean personally on Betty or on Teri or anything--but what happened is, they were doing all of the work over the telephone, and no one was going downstairs, where the Registrar shipping and receiving is handled, to see what the men were physically doing and supervising, or how things were handled. It was always issuing orders over the phone. I didn't feel that you could run a department that way. I felt you had to have personal contact, find out what the problems are, sit down with the people. I know a lot of the art handlers said, "Here's Eloise with one of her nasty memos again" [laughing]. But I think the thing is, we

eventually sort of straightened it out. It's never been a perfect situation with the art handlers, but they do do amazing work, and they get a lot of work done. But I have a feeling, since they're all sort of independent-minded artists, it's much harder to drive under those conditions. We had many problems. It wasn't easy. But I will say, some very, very skilled workers, really impressively so. It isn't that our Museum was unique in that problem, really; other museums have the same problem. Also, the problem in the Registrar's office was, and it was hard on them, is that...the way we did it was, we'd assign an exhibition to someone in the office, and of course they'd have things that they'd have to send downstairs, orders, and I think the people down in the shipping and receiving area felt they were getting orders from too many people. It is true, so we had to work out a paper system so that everything was filtered through one desk, because otherwise...also, the orders not only came from us but they came from other people through us. Suddenly, Bill Rubin would need two more people with his installation, and John Szarkowski would need another person. So you'd call down and say, "What are the men doing? John needs this and so-and-so needs this." They're really torn in many ways. So the way I did it is, I went downstairs every morning. I felt it was important to sit down downstairs and see what the schedule was, who was installing, what shows were going on, who was assigned to what. Also, other things happen. Works of art are delivered, so men have to be called off to receive, to ship out. So if a curator would call and complain, "You promised me so many people and they didn't come," I could say, "Look, they're coming, but we also have this delivery today and it's for your exhibition, and the men will come to the floor." You have to be very practical and organized in the department, because the curators had their demands, they had their pressures, they had their show to get up on time and they wanted it in time for the press; also, they sometimes want it up earlier because so-and-so was coming to see it, someone important, some scholarly person. And so you try to accommodate the curators, too. I mean, I frankly liked all the curators I worked with. I don't think I had any problems there. I might find it frustrating trying to accommodate everybody, but I think I was very fortunate to have worked with people like Bill Rubin. He could be difficult, but I have a great deal of respect for him. He loved the collection so much and artwork so much, it was a

pleasure to work with him. He cared so much for the art that you couldn't help but get enthusiastic working with him. So when we were doing the installation for the collection, I assigned myself to work with it--the reinstallation after the big building program--because I really enjoy working with Bill. Also, the hours--I couldn't have asked other staff members to work seven days a week, every day for months.

SZ: That was quite an undertaking, wasn't it?

ER: Yes, that was. Everybody worked hard. I remember being there at night and the elevators not working, and climbing up to the sixth floor to get my coat--because we were in that temporary space--so that I could go home at eleven-or-something at night. We got through it. It wasn't that Bill wasn't working as late and the men weren't working, the art handlers. I remember Harvey [Tulcensky] saying to me one day, "Eloise, we have to rehang this painting the third time because Bill's changed his mind about it. It took us only two men the first time, it's taking four men to lift it this time"--they were getting so tired towards the end, before the reopening of the Museum. It was so stressful. They were so wonderful; I don't know how they did it.

SZ: It was a different kind of stress than the Picasso show?

ER: That was also very exciting. That was different in the sense that we had couriers from all over. We had sometimes six and eight shipments a day coming into the Museum, different nationalities of couriers, many languages being spoken, all of these couriers watching us open their works of art. Fortunately, we had Vlasta Odell, who spoke Czech, there at the time, to help with the Czech couriers. We had enough people who spoke enough languages that we could cope with the different couriers and the different languages. I remember Dick Oldenburg calling up and saying, "Send Vlasta upstairs, because I have to make a call to Czechoslovakia or something." It was very nice having her at the time; she was very, very helpful. But that was quite something, because the insurance was so high. Organizing at the airport, we had to hire so many people; we did not have enough people to supervise

everything and meet all the couriers at the airport. There were just not enough staff for it. So we had to hire a lot of extra people, just to handle all of that, and the unpacking, a lot of extra people. And of course Alicia Legg was doing sculpture and Carolyn [Lanchner] was helping Bill. I remember I went home early one night--I must have gone home at ten--and at eleven or twelve or one o'clock, it was late at night, I get a call from Bill Rubin; he's still at the Museum--this was the Picasso show--and I hear Carolyn Lanchner in the background saying, "Now don't yell at Eloise." And he said, "I'm just going to build up slowly" [laughing]. Bill had so much on his mind, he had to get it off onto someone else. When I worked either with...I can't even remember, because the Picasso and then the major installation, I'd be at work at six-thirty or seven, and I'd walk in and the guard would say, "Bill's called you already," because he had to have a certain work, and I'd say, with the Picasso show, "Well, Mrs. Somebody didn't want the work to come in today, Bill. I know you're doing the gallery, but she's giving a dinner party tonight."

SZ: You had a lot to check on.

ER: Yes, and you had to remember. Even though people were working in different areas, I had to remember that, yes, that work couldn't come in because so-and-so had a dinner party, whether Bill was doing that gallery or not. And then of course there was Dominique Bozo installing; he came over. What a terrible loss that he died of cancer. That was sad; what a wonderful man. And Bill was very generous. He would take us all to lunch or dinner, after everybody would work all day. But I remember one weekend, we were doing the Picasso show and I was in the garden resting my feet, that were so swollen from standing so long on your feet, sitting out in the garden. I think Laura Rosenstock was there and Carolyn and I don't know who else. Bill comes out and says, "I'm taking so-and-so to lunch. Would you all like to come?" I think it would have been easier for Bill if there were other people. And all of us just looked up. We couldn't move. We couldn't move. I didn't even want lunch. Bill felt he had to take this person to lunch, but none of us had strength to get up and go join him. That was the hard part, my feet.

SZ: Did you have the same kind of relationship with Arthur Drexler in the Architecture department?

ER: I got along with him. I know he was difficult. He was, I guess, a pretty difficult person, and I'm not sure if his staff felt that way, or if they were loyal to him--I think they were pretty loyal to him--but for some reason I managed to get along with him. I never had any personal problems with him.

SZ: It's been my impression that he kept his collection much more....

ER: Absolutely, yes. It was more with installations. What we did, we did a lot of cataloguing of his collections, and eventually more and more of it went over to his department in the beginning. We were always behind, it's true. We just couldn't keep up with it. Finally, we agreed to pay part of a salary of someone who worked in his department to start cataloguing. We just couldn't cope with everything in the Museum. It was just growing so fast. Arthur and I were able to work all that out. I didn't have a problem with him. He wasn't easy, but we managed to get along. If he had a problem, he'd call me and I'd go down and he'd sit there like this, "Eloise...," and his hair would be like this, it would be standing up on end. He'd be so stressed out, he'd get so emotional. He'd pull on his hair and it was standing up.... I tell you, I'd try to be calm and calm him down and work out his problems, but... [laughing].

SZ: And what about the Photography department?

ER: Yes, they were always very cooperative. Again, though, we were doing a lot of their cataloguing and not keeping up with it. We were always behind. We just had too many things. As the shows got busier and more and more people.... They hired their own cataloguers eventually and we trained their people to use the computer. That's a very, very strong department. I've always felt it was a very competent department--

caring about its collection and recordkeeping and things like that. I've always felt they were very, very thorough, very good.

SZ: And Prints and Illustrated Books?

ER: Fabulous. Never had a problem with them.

SZ: But your working relationship was closer to that of Painting and Sculpture, right, than with Prints?

ER: I worked very closely with Painting and Sculpture, but when I first worked in the Registrar's office I used to do a lot of work in Riva's department. I'd log in the things coming in and things like that, so that I always felt...I think at that time, I'm trying to remember if that was still Prints and Drawings, or if it had already split.

SZ: It was split in the late '60s, early '70s.

ER: So I guess it was still.... Riva was very practical, organized. When you worked with her department, I always felt that they were on top of everything. Their letters were out on time for their requests for loans, and I can't say that about all the curators in the Museum. Certain curators work way ahead of time and very skillfully, but others were very slow about getting their letters out and kept adding to their show and things like that. But that's part of something you just have to cope with...and learn to deal with, that's part of your job, is to cope with all this. We're not there to criticize. We're there to work and hopefully get everything done and brought in in time for the curator to have it for the show. No matter how slow or late they are, our job is to get it there and get the show open on time, regardless of the other problems. That was it, that was our responsibility. We were there as the support department. A lot of problems come up when, I hate to say it, some young people come to the department and they suddenly, because they're working with the curators, they get grand ideas--in the Registrar's department. I hate to say it, but it did happen many

times. I kept saying, "You have to remember, we are a support department. We're not the important person. We're there to serve these people, we're a support department." And that was one of the problems that happened when Carrie DeCato came, to replace me. That was such a disaster.

SZ: I want to talk about that in a minute. Can I turn this off for a minute? [pause in tape] You were just saying something about your successor.

ER: Carrie DeCato. The sad thing about that was, I'd worked with her. I'd worked with her during Picasso, I'd dealt with loans with her. I knew her for many years. Dick Palmer knew her. We all thought she was terrific. We really, truly, thought she was terrific. Even the personnel director said she interviewed beautifully. I explained to her that we're the support department--I kept reiterating that, which I always do--but I guess New York...I'm not sure if she thought New York was this grand city or whatever it was, but she came with this idea that she was--and I blame the registrar's committee from the AAM [American Association of Museums] for this--that the registrars are somebody really special, like the queens of the museums. So she came with this idea that she was very important. I couldn't get it across to her that we are not important, we are a support department. The other thing that we found out, she couldn't make decisions, and none of us realized it. When she worked at the Walker Art Museum under the director there, Martin Friedman, it was a small museum--I suspect the staff was around, what, thirty, thirty-two--he made all the decisions. I never realized, she'd never made a decision in her life, and you have to make decisions like this [snapping her fingers] every day in a big museum if you're responsible for a department. And she couldn't make decisions. I could see she wasn't going to work.

SZ: You could see it. But you were gone.

ER: Yes, but I told Dick Oldenburg before I left I didn't think it was working, that I had made a terrible mistake. Everybody else had interviewed her, but I still felt it was a

mistake. So they gave her warnings, and they still hadn't gotten rid of her. I kept getting calls from the staff about problems. I happened to go to New York and I saw Kirk. I said, "Kirk, you're doing this big [Henri] Matisse show, you have all these things. If they don't get rid of Carrie, you're going to have terrible problems dealing with this." And they got rid of her. But they were nice to her. They told her to go to the AAM meetings, where you can do a lot of job interviews, and look for a position. No one told her to say she was fired, but she went around and told everyone she was fired. I don't know what was wrong with her. It was sad, because she really was a disaster, and I don't know if New York went to her head or what, but I could sit with her in the office and talk to her and tell her, "Carrie, this is the way we are--a support department." I don't think she paid any attention. I think she didn't want to hear that. She came to New York and she was going to be somebody very important at The Museum of Modern Art. Then she didn't have the skills, either, which none of us realized. She'd never made decisions; they were all made, I'm sure, by Martin Friedman. No guarantee on that; I'm not too sure, but I think that's what happened. Now they have Diane Farynyk, and I think she's terrific.

SZ: And who was there before.

ER: Yes, that's right. She'd gone to The Jewish Museum and had lots of experience there, so she was perfect.

SZ: And you had a hand in that choice?

ER: Yes, I recommended her. Going into a major institution isn't easy. I think there's so much to learn about the institution and how the departments interface with each other, and the personalities. I think it's a very difficult thing, don't you? I started there when I was young and the Museum was small, so in a way I grew into it. But I think coming in from the outside, you have to have done an awful lot on the outside and had tremendous confidence in yourself, especially in a job like the Registrar, where you touch base with so many departments. If you're a curator, you come into your

department and you do your exhibitions, and that's something you can do in any museum. But we have to work with all these people and accede to all their requests.

SZ: We talked about the reinstallation, but...you didn't tell me the story of Guernica.

ER: That's a wonderful story. That's one of my favorite events. It was an event. Dick Oldenburg called me one day to his office and told me that they were going to return [Guernica]. We knew it was going to go back, because it wasn't even in the plans for the new wing, and they didn't want anyone to know when it was returning, because they felt that, since we'd had the major Picasso exhibition a lot of people had seen it here, so we didn't want to announce it. Also, letters were coming into the Museum saying that the work should either go to the town of Guernica or it should go to Barcelona or it should go to Majorca or it should go here or wherever...everybody had their opinion about where the work should go, so it was just better to keep it hush-hush. So Jean Volkmer and I knew about all this. I had to arrange for all the studies--I had to tell Antoinette King--because we wanted to do every study before it left the building, examine every one under microscope and do detailed study, because once it left, it left for good.

SZ: And you wanted to do that kind of study just to be sure that....

ER: Just to have the records, very detailed records, for the Museum. I just loved it--I loved working with Antoinette on that project. I made sure I got to do all these things. Then, when it was time to deal with Spain, I chose the packers in New York but I didn't tell them what it was. I did the measurements. Packers will not usually take anyone's measurements but their own, because if a mistake is made, you have a problem with a box.

SZ: You mean the box just isn't right?

ER: It isn't right...because everything's custom-built to the quarter of an inch, or the eighth of an inch. But these are people I'd worked with and they accepted my measurements.

SZ: Did you tell them what it was for?

ER: No. But then I had to speak to Danny Clarke, the head carpenter, because he had to do the packing of the Guernica. Now, Guernica had been rolled when it arrived in this country, and it had been rolled again when it went on tour in the 50's?, but it was a small drum, which we still had in storage, but we couldn't use it, because first of all, the painting was older, drier. The maximum drum you could get onto a plane today was larger, so I had to find out what airline I could get it on to Spain, and I had to work with the Spanish on those.

SZ: It wasn't a secret to them.

ER: No, they knew, because of the ambassador and everybody. But the company I worked with, we never used "Picasso" or "Guernica"--everything was done by code, in my telegrams and everything. There was no work ever mentioned. So once I knew the size of the door of the aircraft, I told Danny Clarke the maximum-size case. Then he built the drum that the Guernica had to be rolled on that would float in the box the maximum size he could build it. So it actually had to roll over three times, which wasn't bad. Then, when it came to the day--and Dick Oldenburg was really very good--he said, "You do it when you're ready, Eloise. You tell me when you want to do it." Now the Painting and Sculpture department knew, but they were very quiet about it. The packing, everything was organized, and then I had to tell the day before, the staff that was going to work, that we were going to do it, and of course Dick Oldenburg that were going to come to see all this. We decided to do it on Tuesday night, because the Museum's closed on Wednesdays. That way, on Wednesday, Cora [Rosevear] could reinstall the whole gallery, without there being all this empty space. That's why it was done on Tuesday night. Frankly, it was the most

moving thing when they started to roll it. I just got goose pimples. When Jean and her crew had unstapled it from its stretcher and the glassine was layered onto the surface and it started to roll on the drum, I just couldn't believe it. It was just so moving. The people who had made the other boxes, A & S Fine Arts--they are people we'd worked with for years and years and years, packing for the Museum--they helped us with the dismantling. The Guernica was even too big to pack into its case on the floor. We had to get it down the stairs on its drum, and the case was in the fire tower, because we didn't want anybody to see it the case and speculate about the work to be packed in it. So it had to be packed in the fire tower, and of course everybody, the dignitaries and Oldenburg and the staff that were there were all there on the stairs, watching us, and when Danny Clarke put in the last screw, everybody clapped. Danny said, "I was so thrilled." It was really a big event for the staff that worked with it. Then the next day, of course, it had to leave. Our insurance covered it until it got out of the gate, and then once it went into the trucks, it was the responsibility of the Spaniards. I went over to Spain--I was invited to be there for the opening--and I went anyway because I was going with Picasso loans to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Madrid. I thought it was a very moving experience. The opening of the Guernica, the lines of people waiting to get in to see it, and no one impatient. And when they got into the gallery and saw it, they just stood there. It was as if they were in a cathedral. It was so touching. They were so moved. This painting came back to them, and they just stood there. It was behind this terrible glass. They put bulletproof glass [in front of it]--everybody was so worried about all of this--and people were so patient. I remember Sert coming up to me, grabbing me, because he knew I was from the Museum, kissing me on two cheeks, "Oh, you saved this painting and kept it." It had nothing to do with me, you know; I was a symbol. Dick Oldenburg was there and the Phillips were there, and Diane Farynyk was there, because she'd come over with other Picassos, and I think Carolyn was there, because she came over with a shipment. I can't tell you how touched I was by the Spanish attitude. Then the curator who had come over for the dismantling wanted all the information we had in our files; fortunately, I'd worked with Antoinette on this recataloguing of the studies, but I'd never even got them properly typed up. So I

gave them copies of all my notes, and they still in the book that they published they gave me credit for the cataloguing of the studies--I never expected it. I got there and they gave me the books and there was my name in it. But it was really a wonderful, wonderful, moving experience to go there, to see the welcome the Guernica received. Now I gather--and I know Bill Rubin objected--they wanted to move it from the Cason del Buen Retiro to the Reina Sophia. I don't know how that's been resolved, do you know? I haven't been around New York. Because he feels it should stay in the Prado, but of course the Prado doesn't have much space, even though it looks a hundred times better since they've been fixing it up.... It looks beautiful now, really...it glows, the galleries that have been restored. It really is a big improvement. So I'm not sure. But I found that just so touching. I was so pleased that I was in Spain when it was opened, too. I felt very, very fortunate. Everybody, I think, the last few days before we packed it in New York, knew that something was going on, because I was closeted in my office with all these Spaniards, the door closed, finger typing away. Everybody suspected, but we didn't say anything.... I think the only reporter that Dick Oldenburg notified was Grace Glueck. No other person was notified; she was the only one. And you would know that better than I would.

SZ: I was actually there that night.

ER: That's right. Weren't you moved? I was terribly touched. And yet, it really had to go back to Spain. It was never ours. It was just ours to take care of all those years. All those Spanish, they're taking photographs. That was too funny. Of course, it was a big event for them, a major event. I remember, I went to the stamp market with Dick, in Madrid, on Sunday and bought Guernica stamps. All these things were issued at the time of the arrival. So that was kind of fun.

SZ: You've known the directorship of four different directors, right?

ER: Barr, d'Harnoncourt...well actually, no; he [Barr] wasn't the director then. I wasn't there during Hightower.

SZ: You were there for Lowry?

ER: Was I there? Bates Lowry was there about six months. I was there.

SZ: You were there when Lowry was there. So it's d'Harnoncourt, Lowry, and then there was a troika--Wilder Green and Walter Bareiss and [Dick Koch]. I was going to ask you if you can kind of compare them, what you felt about them.

ER: The Museum was so different. When d'Harnoncourt was director, he was able to do exhibitions. The fundraising wasn't so difficult, the cost of exhibitions wasn't the same, the insurance wasn't the same, the values, the packing costs--everything was less. So the responsibilities of the director weren't, I think, as overwhelming. All I remember of Bates Lowry is that he decided--I think it went to his head, too, when he came to the Museum from Brown University--he suddenly decided to carpet the whole fifth floor towards his office and dickey it all up, instead of paying attention to things that were really important. I don't think he knew what it was to be a director of a museum. He was thinking of his image more than he was thinking of the Museum--that's how I saw that. As for Wilder--I knew Wilder, because, partly, he was with the International Program--I didn't really know him as a director, or Walter Bareiss. I felt as far as Dick Oldenburg, we worked very well together. I think he had many problems about the Registrar department. I think he came to respect us and I think he realized how much work I did, how much I really accomplished, both with the Picasso exhibition and with the new building. So I never had a problem. If I needed something, and I didn't ask for very much--one thing I found out about Dick, he did not like to be bugged, he did not like pressure put on him--but I went to him only two or three times when I had a major problem. One was during Picasso, when Ed Saxe decided that we should save money on air conditioning, and I was very upset, because you don't save money on air conditioning when you've got millions and millions of dollars' worth of art that belong to other people in your museum and you're responsible for the condition. So I went to Dick, and I have never seen him so angry-

-not at me--and he called Bill Rubin in and was furious at Ed Saxe. Ed Saxe was there to save money for the Museum, but he was saving it the wrong way; you don't save it at the expense of the collection. Dick really listened. I was really upset. He even had to put in a third water tower, because we couldn't cool the Museum with so many bodies in it. And I got support on that. I found that if I really needed something, Dick was really supportive. But I didn't go to him [often]. I tried to do everything and solve my own problems. Or I would also go to Bill Rubin if there was something, but only a couple of times, when there was a major problem, I felt I could go to Bill Rubin also, because he was very strong and also cared about the collection. But otherwise, I tried to manage, except once, going to Riva and telling her, "For God's sake, don't have so many shows so quickly together. We can't cope," or something like that, because she was responsible for part of the programming and it was getting more and more difficult for us to handle it all.

SZ: But you said that, when you did go to Dick, you....

ER: He would see me and I never had a problem.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2

SZ: We'd been talking about directorships, and I guess we were getting to a point where I was going to ask you to characterize Dick's directorship.

ER: I felt he was very supportive towards me and I had a great deal of respect towards him, but I feel that towards the end, the very last few years with my tenure there, that his relationship with Jim Snyder was actually destroying his relationship with other staff. I felt very strongly that Jim really interfered or was trying to control everything, besides wanting more power, telling things to Dick that I felt were not necessarily true to influence him. So you lose a little respect for the director when he allows

somebody like Jim Snyder to be so powerful or think he's so powerful within the Museum. I found that very hard to deal with Jim Snyder. I tried to get along with him, Jim, but I felt very strongly that I didn't want to have to put up with it anymore and so it was a good idea to retire from the Museum--one of the reasons; I had several. One was Jim Snyder. The other, of course, the pressure on the job was just never decreasing, and you never have a personal life, because you've put in so many hours at the Museum. The other was, the value of the art was, to me, something I couldn't face.

SZ: You mean the responsibility for that?

ER: I felt it really was a responsibility. When they sent me to Europe with the Demoiselles d'Avignon, to the Musée Picasso in Paris, I was the one selected to go. The Museum was reluctant to lend that work, but we were committed because the heirs had loaned us so many works for the Picasso show, and we'd promised to lend it in return. We thought we were going to lend it many years before, when the Museum didn't need it in its galleries, but then the Musée Picasso wasn't ready for it. There was a lot of discussion between Dick Oldenburg and Bill Rubin and Bucky Block from Huntington Block insurance about the handling and the insurance arrangements for this transportation, and they said that I was going to have to take it. It went well, and we had all kinds of police escorts, and then I had to take it to Spain and we stopped at police barracks for lunch and we stopped at police barracks overnight. I enjoyed it all. It was wonderful to eat in a roomful of policemen [laughing]. It was very amusing. Everyone was very courteous to us. You get into the dining room and you take the next empty seat and there's the bread and the cheese and the wine on the table and then the fruit, and then they put a big platter down in front of you. Actually, it was all pretty good, and the escorts were always very courteous. But the responsibility, I knew that if anything happened, whether I took good care of it or anything, I was still responsible for it ultimately, and that it would fall on me, even if it was beyond my control.

You can't even put a value on a work like the Demoiselles--impossible--and I just felt that I didn't know if I wanted that kind of responsibility anymore. The younger people don't seem to mind; they think, Oh, this is art, I'm going on a trip, I'm going to take it over, but I just found that the responsibility was greater and greater. So between that, the pressure on the job, and having, I felt, Jim Snyder, sitting there, pushing, pushing, pushing for more control of the Registrar's office, and splitting it up into a separate department for the art handlers and stuff, I just didn't want to deal with it anymore. I think one burns out, and that's what happened to me: I just burned out. And so I came to Mattapoisett. I still have very fond memories of the Museum and of the staff. But I feel that Dick has lost a lot of his credibility because of Jim Snyder, which is too bad. That's very hard on the staff, it's hard on the Museum. And now it's sort of in limbo, and I'm sure it must be hard on everybody there.

SZ: One thing we didn't talk much about when we talked about the various departments, we didn't talk about the International Program and how you interfaced.

ER: Just like any other department, actually. We treated it like a curatorial department. If the works had to be collected and catalogued and packed, we still did that. They, of course, did a lot more...they did what a curatorial person would do. They would arrange for the works, or if it was a show within the Museum that had already been curated within the Museum, they made the arrangements overseas with the other museums. But whether it was with Dick Palmer's department in the U.S. or with the International Program overseas, the responsibilities were the same, except that with Liz Streibert and with Marion Kocot, who is no longer there now, they did a lot of traveling and accompanied a lot of the shows, so it wasn't always necessary to send Registrar staff. They were also very supportive, because the International Council helped me put out a little booklet on handling of works or art that had been written by Eric Rowlison years ago, but a lot of it was a little obsolete and I wanted to do it in Spanish and Portuguese with illustrations. They supported it and Carol [Coffin] worked very hard with me on it, and I thought it was a big success. It was wonderful, because we were trying to deal more and more with South America, and this gave

them a little booklet to show the kinds of vocabulary we used, the kinds of handling we expected if we loaned to them, all that. I thought it was very nice of them to support that, so in that sense they were very nice to our department. And of course they also had Rose Kolmetz, who did a lot of translation for years, and of course correspondence comes in many, many languages and contracts, and she was a tremendous help in translating contracts and correspondence, which are very touchy things. You better be absolutely sure it's correct. She did a lot, of course, for her own department, but she was a big help to us, and I'm sure other departments who needed translators--a remarkable woman that way.

SZ: One of the things that has been said about the International Program, and I guess this was earlier, was that it really functioned separately and on its own, that that could cause difficulty for other parts of the Museum. But it doesn't sound as if....

ER: I had no sense of that. First of all, it is separate in the sense that they have their own Council, but they contribute a great deal of money to the Museum. Besides what they contribute for other things, they contribute a lot of money personally to the Museum. Also, those members are important if we're going to put exhibitions in many places overseas. It's through their support that I'm sure the Museum is accepted in a lot of places overseas, because they either know people on the board and there's entree into museums over there. I realize they're also social, a lot of those people, but I believe it's more than that. A lot of them are really serious, and serious collectors, or they're trying to help their countries, to bring art to their countries, like South America, that they think is really worth seeing. But I never think of them as being separate. You can think of every department that way, because everybody works within their own. The International Program used the Registrar just the way the other departments did. They also used Publications, didn't they? I'm not too sure about that, but I think they used Publications. And of course they have to get cooperation from the curators, too, the International Program, because if they want exhibitions, the exhibitions have to come from the curators. So it's just like Dick Palmer and the circulating exhibitions in this country, only this is overseas. I can't see that. I never

really looked at it as separate, except I realize they have their own Council and that they have their own programs, but I think that's a small part of it. And I think it adds a lot of prestige to the Museum.

SZ: You said you weren't there for the strike, but you experienced....

ER: ...the after effects.

SZ: The after effects, and of course subsequently you had to deal with a department that was unionized but not totally. So what's your feeling about unions at a place like the Museum.

ER: Frankly, I think the Museum was at fault for the lousy salaries. I really think...people want to work in a museum, so in a sense it's almost as though they abuse it. I don't know how a director gets this across to the trustees. You can have a very wealthy board of trustees, and to them, whether you earn ten thousand or thirty thousand, they don't see the difference. But it's a great deal to the person who's living on ten thousand. I really feel that we needed the PASTA--the Professional Staff Association. I don't think they had any choice, or the salaries would never have gotten any better. I don't know how good they are today, but I know, our entry level, we kept trying to push them up. We'd try to hire someone else and I'd say to the personnel director, "We're not going to be able to hire anyone at that salary," hoping that we could raise it another couple of thousand. They still expect people to live in New York on nothing. It's not fair to say, "That person has a husband." That's not how you look at someone's salary. You have to look at the individual and what they're worth, not that they can afford to work for nothing because they have a husband also who's bringing money in or something.

SZ: Wasn't it almost expected that anybody who came to work at the Museum, or a museum, came from an economic situation where it didn't...?

ER: I think years ago, when the Museum started, there were a lot of people who--and Frances might be able to tell you more--who probably were able to afford to work for very little. But it isn't that way today. The Museum is a big business. It is not...the thing that's not fair is, when you get into the other areas of the Museum where the salary is compared to outside salaries, the salaries are better. I think publishing is another field that they don't pay very well. Don't you think people want to get into it? So they're willing to pay a lesser salary. I think that's what happens in the Museum. They can always get someone because they're so impressed that they were finally hired by The Museum of Modern Art. But that's no excuse to underpay. Also, for a long time I think the women were being paid less, I think in positions of management, than the men. I don't know if that has been corrected. It might have been. But I think that was also very poorly done. So I sympathize. I think there are things bad about the union in the sense that I could see it with the art handlers, for example, saying, "I will use a screw, not a nail." That's just nitpicking. They try to nitpick, and it's very, very frustrating, and it is infuriating. But I think the Professional Staff Association was absolutely necessary, and that's because the Museum staff wasn't being compensated enough. It isn't as though people don't work hard. The curators put in time, people really put in a tremendous amount of time on their jobs there.

SZ: Being sympathetic to the union, how was it for you, anyway, at times when there were actions or threats of actions?

ER: I encouraged my people to go out. I know we had one girl in the department, and there was a walk-out for one day and she definitely was very anti-union. I said to her, "I'd rather you didn't come in"--and I don't think this is what you're supposed to do, I don't think that was cricket--but I said, "If you come in and everyone else is out except for me, you're going to not have friends in the department. Just take the day off. I don't want to splinter the department." I didn't want to say that she had to join the union, but I didn't feel...I think she was going to destroy her relationship with the rest of the staff by coming in to work. So I told her to take the day off. I'm sure you're not supposed to do that legally, but I didn't want to destroy the department. Because

I told you, when I came back to work there, it was so split, with the pros and cons, that I just thought it's too awful, it's too awful in the department to have it split. I felt, okay, go out, don't come in. That's the only time, though. Every other time they had a walk-out, everybody walked out and I just came to work. You just have to manage. I think the Museum eventually got very good benefits. When you look at benefits in other institutions, the vacation package was excellent--of course, you're underpaid--but I think the medical benefits at one point were excellent; now I think they're having to reduce them, because they can't afford them. But I think the Museum gained a lot, and I'm not sure they gained a lot of that--not the vacations, because that I think always existed--but a lot of the benefit package, for health, etc. was probably gained through PASTA. So that was worth it.

SZ: It seems to me that you missed the fire. You were not working there then.

ER: No, I was in San Francisco then.

SZ: Were you there for the auction in 1960?

ER: No. Where was I then? It's hard to remember. I came and went. I don't keep records of those things.

SZ: I'll try to think of some other milestones.

ER: I was there for the building of the east wing, in '64, and of course for the last building program. Those were trying times, because I remember, I wasn't involved at all with the east wing thing, but I remember that you'd come to work and everything was stolen off your desk, because the workmen had to go through the corridors to get to the east wing and they had these bins and they'd just dump everything in them, even things like pencils. If I remember correctly--I'm not too sure; you'd have to ask Richard Koch this, because he was deputy director at the time, I think, of the east wing--there were so many complaints for thefts that he went to the construction

company and management there said, "Just keep a record and we'll pay you, because if you complain, they'll walk off the job." So we learned as a result, and when we were going through the building program this time--'80-84, the last one, that opened in '84--they had guards on any construction person who came into the occupied area, and when it came to storage and everything, we had our carpenters build it, so there was absolutely, guaranteed, no access by these people. They were animals, I hate to tell you. They'd eat sandwiches and walk on them on the carpets. They urinated in the halls. I remember the electrician or the telephone man saying, "May we have a room where we can lock our material, because the other people steal it"--they stole from each other. It's really a horror story. When I was installing art in the garden, which was almost the last couple of days before the reopening, because the garden was slow--we used it for storage and the working crew--and the marble was being laid in the garden and I was bringing in Henry Moore with a great big crane in the street, a marble sculpture, going over the wall, bringing it into the garden, and the marble people came up and said, "Your people can't handle this." I said, "But they're union. They're riggers, it's their union, it's a sculpture." He said, "No, it's a marble sculpture. Only we can handle it." So the union boss came up to me--fortunately I had an Italian name--and we're walking up and down the garden. I said, "Do I have to pay you?" or "How much do you want?" or something--I wasn't sure what they wanted--but they finally let me bring in the sculpture. These marble people don't know how to handle a rigger or anything like this, but it was marble, that was their union. That's the kind of thing you had to deal with these people. I tell you, I couldn't believe it! And it was just about a day before the opening. It was so frustrating. They were just...and you <u>had</u> to be nice to them, because if you weren't...like at night when we worked. We were trying to move the drawing collection, and we had turned some of the elevators over to them to use during the day, the construction people, and I thought we could use it at night. They said, "Uh-uh. It's our elevator." You know what we did? It wasn't quite cricket, we got some money to pay the man to run the elevator for us. That's bribery. Can you believe it? We're paying him to run the Museum's elevator so that we can move the

art?

SZ: I guess that's what you had to do.

ER: I was just horrified [laughing]. But we had to move the art. Working under those conditions was not easy. The staff were wonderfully cooperative. It's just you have to deal with all the construction people. I know that one wall that was built by our carpenters, they broke it down deliberately, because they wanted to still go through that way. We put it up because we wanted to start installing art in the galleries, get ahead of them, and they deliberately broke it down. It was really something, dealing with the construction. Fortunately, I had nothing to do with it except on bases like this. It wasn't easy, but it was a learning experience. So a registrar has to know everything. It's a really all-encompassing job.

SZ: You have to have certain interpersonal skills, too.

ER: I guess. If you're traveling with art or anything like that, you have to be practical, because things happen on a trip. Maybe the plane gets diverted: You can't panic. You have to keep your head. If you go to another airport because there's a storm, you just have to be sure they don't unload your cargo--or if they do, then you stay with it and ask if you can put it in a dry place or if something happens to the plane. There are all kinds of things you can't do. You cannot panic. You cannot send someone who's going to get absolutely hysterical on a trip, because you have no guarantee that your plane is going to make a direct flight. And you're responsible for that art.

SZ: Were you ever put in a position where you just didn't feel comfortable?

ER: There have been problems at airports, and that's partly because you're dealing with other unions. I know that on one shipment I had going to Switzerland, on Swissair, I had cleared it all ahead of time with management at Swissair, that I could not only

see everything put on its pallet at the cargo terminal and put on its flight but I could follow the art to the plane, because it wasn't a cargo plane loading right at the loading dock but was going to have to go two miles up the passenger terminal. They said fine, and when the crew that was loading the pallets heard that I was going to accompany it, they walked off the job--unless I backed up. And it had nothing to do with them, but it was their way of showing their power. So I backed up. I mean, what can you do? I wanted to accompany it, to make sure I saw it get on the plane. You feel much more comfortable if you see it loaded on the plane and you know it's on the plane, because it happens that sometimes you get to your destination and the work of art is not on the plane; that has happened to museums. So I like to always see it loaded. We had an incident in Spain. Several museums in the U.S.--the National Gallery and us--had loaned works to an exhibition in Spain. This is in the early days of great loans to Spain. The couriers came back and there was no work of art. They were bumped. The person we were dealing with over there, the customs broker, didn't deal with it properly. So Cora agreed, I said we shouldn't we lend to them for a couple of years, and the other museums all agreed. Everybody in Spain came and started to talk, and "Why don't you give in?" And we didn't give in. We thought they'd never learn if we were to give in. Eventually, we started to lend again. The airport in Spain is horrendous too. To leave the works of art sitting there, unprotected. So you have to be firm with a country like that, until they learn. I remember all the Spaniards coming, the president of this company and the president of this and this and this, and everybody putting pressure on and it was their fault. But we didn't back down--for two years, I think it was. That gets the message across, which nothing else would do, because then the museums also realize the responsibility--not only the transport people and the customs broker but everybody. And that's what you have to do. So you just have to be mean [laughing]. It's not mean; it's protecting the art, basically, is what it is.

SZ: Which is one of the requirements.

ER: Everybody agrees to your requirements, and what you eventually learn is who really does exactly what you'd required, or the ones who aren't as honest about it, and that's when you start to say, "This place we don't have to send a courier, because they'll meet the work and they'll stay with it. But we know this institution hasn't always done this, so we have to send a courier." So eventually you get to know who are the reliable customs brokers, who are the reliable airlines, who are the reliable museums, and which ones you can trust, because you don't really want to send everybody for everything, because it's very hard on the staff to always have to travel. At first it sounds wonderful, but after a while you get awful tired of just getting on a plane and going over. You're at the airport for several hours before the work is even palletized. You have to have it at the airport early, because they have to see what's coming in, to weigh everything that's going on the plane. So then you're standing there for hours, then you get on the plane, and then at the other end you go through the same process, and then you get to the Museum. Then you can go to bed. So sometimes the trip, it's not like you just get on a plane.

SZ: It's not glamorous.

ER: The only nice thing is, if you go on cargo, you're the only one and you have the cabin to yourself. So you can stretch out on three seats or eat when you want or whatever. But other than, you know...sometimes you travel on a crowded plane with everybody else, after spending several hours in the cargo terminal. Then when you get to the other end you go to the cargo terminal, and you're standing--there are no chairs in the cargo terminal, you're just standing. It's grueling sometimes, these trips; they're not easy.

SZ: You were describing how overwhelmed with work you felt you were at the end.

ER: Not just me personally--the whole department.

SZ: Is there a way now that the department is taking this in a different fashion?

ER: I think they're still overworked. First of all, there are so many curators who want to put on shows, they don't all get a chance. Also, they don't want much time between exhibitions, and of course the faster you move everything...it's not only stress on Registrar, it's the carpenters who have to redo the galleries, the painters who have to paint the galleries, everybody--Jerry Neuner, who's responsible for the design--everybody's working at this high level of pressure because they only want the galleries closed for two weeks. Turnover, turnover, turnover. It's not only that. Too, you have, say, the east wing, where you have the collection installed, and they use it to show new acquisitions for painting and sculpture. You take down the collection, you put up acquisitions for an acquisitions meeting, you take that down, then you reinstall the collection. So it isn't only exhibitions, it's the collection, and the collection galleries are always changing. Photography has a space that's always changing; they put on lots of mini-shows. Prints does the same, Architecture does the same--all the departments themselves have many shows going--so it isn't only the major galleries. And then you have the Projects galleries, which I think are wonderful, actually, they change every five or six weeks too. They're smaller shows, but still, everything is moving, constantly; there's never, ever a break. If there's an event going on in the Museum, they want to redo what's hanging in the dining room, they want to redo the lobby. It's constant movement--constant, constant, constant. There's never a break anymore. I just found it...for years, as I said, when we were going through the building program I sent Matthew, my son, away, because I came home one night and he said, "Mom, you never talk to me anymore." It's true. It wasn't fair to him. I was never home, seven days a week at the Museum. Not only me. Dick Oldenburg and Bill Rubin.... I remember, Easter, the men said, "Do you think we can get Easter off?" I said, "I'll ask Bill." So I said to Bill, "Do you think we could have Easter off?" and he said, "What for?" [laughter]. So I said, "How about if we could leave at two o'clock?" So we left early, and Alicia was still talking to Bill, but I snuck out. I knew, if he saw anyone, he'd think of something else to do, so the thing to do was to sneak out. Bill had so much on his mind in redoing the galleries and changing things. He worked as hard as anyone else. And I must say, I loved it, but I thought

after that things would slow down, and they never did. You sometimes have to have a break, and it never came. We kept up that same pace. I was called on weekends. If anything went wrong, I was the first name on security, so I'd have to come in. If someone saw a mark on a painting or something, and then I'd call Cora, it depends on what it was, or I'd call someone else, a conservator or whatever. I remember going at one-fifteen one night. They were building the tower above us, and there was a leak in that tower, and guess where the leak went? Into the storage. So I just threw on clothes, I don't even know what I put on, got into a cab, and fortunately at that point I had been doing training with the guards on how to handle things in case of an emergency, and one of the guards said, "Isn't it good you were training us? See, see?" And in the meantime they'd called Terry Mahon, who was still a conservator then. But there was two inches of water that they were vacuuming up in the storeroom, and we were very fortunate that very little happened, but we did have some damage. But who's called? Then you still have to go to work the next day. And then we had that problem where someone threw blood on a painting, a Picasso.

SZ: Which painting?

ER: That was interesting. We'd already opened. What it was, it was this Hungarian, and he'd been doing it all over, because he even told the newspaper he was coming there to do it--I think it was for publicity--it was his own blood, and he threw it on the wall, but of course it splashed on a Picasso. The guards, no one, dared get near him because he had more vials. Actually, it did go to court--I had to go to court--but fortunately it was a grand jury, not a jury, and the judge did find him guilty. But he was going all over doing this--this was his art. You get all these strange things going on in the Museum, you know [laughing]. That was really weirdo. Antoinette had to go with me, also, to the jury, because she was the conservator who had cleaned it, and we were instructed in how to handle it. Fortunately, he was convicted.

SZ: What about the social aspects of the Museum? Did that take up a large part of your time?

ER: Not I guess the way it did for curators. The curators, in a way....

SZ: You didn't have trustees to woo and things like that.

ER: No. With the curators, it's fundraising and they're talking about their exhibitions. I didn't have any of that. I went to the openings, and then at one point when they were having this membership drive and they asked the staff to be there. I was happy to do that, and I did enjoy going to the dinners and some of the events. You see a lot of your colleagues from other museums...one thing about being in the Registrar's office or any of us who travel, like curators or conservators, is you make a lot of friends in other museums, and if you have a big show, you get to see a lot of your colleagues. So in that sense ,I've made friends all over, and it's nice to see them. It's a very nice feeling. When I was in Barcelona last year, the director of the Picasso museum, Maite Ocana, I've known her for years, and it's always nice to see her. We always go out together, she's had me to her home to meet her family--this kind of thing. They've become really good friends. So in that sense.... I still get catalogues from friends--from a woman in Barcelona, Artegas, her father used to work with [Joan] Miró, and I'd met her and others when I was there with exhibitions, other people, and I keep up. They come to this country, they call me, I either go to New York, or when I was in New York, saw them, went to dinner with them. It's that kind of thing, and that's something that just never goes away. Those friends stay for years, and it's very, very nice. So when you go to another country, I never feel I go as a tourist, because when I went I always went on my job. So you see it, all the places you go, other museums, you see it on a much more personal basis, and I always found that very satisfactory. Even in Japan when I was there this time, last year, the director, just the dearest man, had me to his home several times with his four children, made sure I was included on some of their weekend outings, like going to the aquarium; his mother and father had me to their home. Other people were just as kind. I still am getting correspondence from Japan. They don't forget you. I find it a very touching. One of my interns, she was a Swiss girl and she's now a curator in Lausanne, and she

sends me catalogues that she has published. She and her husband, Pierre, when he comes we go out together. They would love me to stay with them if I ever get there. They've become really more than...they've become friends, not just colleagues.

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END INTERVIEW