THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **BERNICE ROSE (BR)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

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TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: We can start, and I can ask you, as I always do, where and when you were born, and something about your family background.

BR: I was born in Miami Beach, Florida, on October 7, 1935, in the St. Francis Hospital. My father's eldest brother had been gassed in the First World War, and by the '30s he had tuberculosis, as a result. He was sent to a veteran's hospital in Miami Beach. My mother and father were newly married and they went down to help take care of him and his family (he had two boys), so that's why I was born in Florida. The family was from New York. My father's brother died shortly after that, and his family went back to New York, where he had a very good friend who had volunteered to take care of them, because it was the Depression. My father stayed on for a little while, because by that time he had a business there --

SZ: -- "there," being -- ?

BR: Miami Beach. The last business he had there was the first drive-in in the United States -- drive-in restaurant. It was called the Pink Trail Inn, and when the Depression really took over he came back to New York with my mother, because she had been very ill with pneumonia. One of my uncle's sons had actually died of -- I can't remember what the disease was. It struck your spine. Meningitis. And in that climate, having those things was extremely dangerous, and my mother became very ill, so he brought her back to New York, and we lived with my grandmother in Brooklyn. I was about four years old at that time.

SZ: Were you the only child?

BR: I was the only child. He had difficulty, of course, getting a job, because of the Depression.

SZ: Was he skilled at something, or educated?

BR: No. He was very musical. We had this odd family, where it skipped generations, but he and his brothers were just natural musicians. One of his brothers actually toured with the Vincent Lopez Band, and my father had this wonderful tenor voice. He was offered a scholarship at Juilliard by Walter Damrosch, at that time, and he was only fifteen. My grandmother turned it down. She said, "One bum in the family is enough."

But the family -- My great-grandmother had had a hotel in the Catskills called the Schoharie Mansion, when they were young. The whole family used to go up weekends in the summer, to help her. My father sang and my uncles had kind of an orchestra. There are funny letters from my great-grandmother to my grandmother, very formal, asking her when she was arriving for the weekend. That place burned down.

SZ: As so many of them did.

BR: As so many of them did, because they were these wooden mansions. But my grandfather, on my father's side, was actually the director of the Krasdale Canning Company.

SZ: Which still exists, as a brand name, doesn't it?

BR: That brand name still exists. So my father really should have been a musician, but he finally got a job selling lighting installations and so forth. Then during the war he was the purchasing agent for all of that, because he was very charming.

SZ: So he went into the army and did all that?

BR: No, he was too old to be in the army. He was a purchasing agent for this lighting company.

SZ: Oh. For a lighting company.

BR: Yes.

SZ: So he was a business person.

BR: Yes. Sort of. He wasn't very good at business.

SZ: Did your mother work?

BR: No, my mother was too ill to work. She never really recovered from having the pneumonia. She was very weakened by it. On her side, her father and mother had come from Russia. Her father had come ahead, then sent for my mother, his wife and her brother, who was one year older. Then they had another child in this country, and he had been a very odd thing, because living in Russia, the Jews had to live in a certain area called the Pale. He had a permit to travel, so he used to do the business for a number of towns, because he could go into the cities. He would do banking and buying and that sort of thing, so it was a profession in Russia. But when he got to the United States, as so many other people did, he had to go into the clothing business, which was seasonal and so forth, and he died very young of a heart attack. My grandmother had quite a hard time, and my mother, who wanted very badly to go to college and be educated, had to go to work instead.

SZ: Not an uncommon story, also.

BR: Not an uncommon story, also.

SZ: So it sounds as if both your parents didn't grow up in particularly luxurious circumstances.

BR: My father's family was --

SZ: -- was better? They had been here longer, I guess, from what you're saying. You had a great-grandmother who was here.

BR: That's right. It was a little longer. Parts of my grandmother's family were all right, because the reason they came was that they had had six boys, and they were very comfortable in Russia but they couldn't buy six boys out of the Tsar's service. So they were in a position, when my grandfather died, to help my mother a little bit.

SZ: Did you grow up in your grandmother's house in Brooklyn?

BR: Yes. I grew up, and my uncle would come back and forth. He traveled a lot, and we were sort of jumbled in there, together.

SZ: And this was where, in Brooklyn?

BR: It was in a section called Midwood. I went to James Madison High School, and I went to the elementary school in the neighborhood. The city instigated something they called the Special Progress program --

SZ: That was "SP," right?

BR: SP, yes --

SZ: -- where you would skip --

BR: You wouldn't skip. You would do all the work, but you would do it at a faster clip. So I got out of high school rather early.

SZ: So you went to public schools all the way through.

BR: All the way through. Then I went to Hunter College.

SZ: Well, before we get there, maybe a little bit more about the years you grew up. You were born in 1935, so you graduated from high school in '53. Something like that?

BR: In '52.

SZ: Fifty-two, because you were early. So when you were an adolescent, it was the late '40s or early '50s. I'm curious to know what you were interested in, how you used the city -- if you did -- and things like that.

BR: Well, I always liked to draw. I was very precocious in that way. Also, I knew how to read before I went to school and I knew how to write before I went to school. When I got to school, somehow or other I only went to kindergarten for one grade instead of a year, so they used to keep me busy drawing. My mother always liked to read, and she liked to go into the city and do things. My mother and father enjoyed getting on the subway and going into New York. They used to take me to Radio City Music Hall, at Christmas and at Easter. We also used to go to the ballet -- the Ballets Russes -- when it came to New York. Since my father was very musical, I wanted to learn how to sing. I thought that would be wonderful, but I had no voice, and I have no ear.

SZ: That's what you meant by "skipped a generation."

BR: It skipped a generation, because my cousin's son sat down and taught himself to play the piano. So it was very strange. At one point during the war he tried to buy me a piano. I was very excited; if I couldn't sing, maybe I could learn to play the piano. But somehow that fell through. So what I did was take with other little girls. We lived in an apartment building in Brooklyn that was filled with children our age, some a little younger, some a little [older], and we all played together with the children on the street. So we all started -- all the little girls of the same age -- started taking dancing lessons together.

SZ: Ballet?

BR: Ballet. Exactly. The teacher thought I had some talent, so she suggested I be taken to the person she studied with, who was a Madame Swoboda, who had been with the Ballets Russes at one time. So my mother would take me in to 57th Street (the subway was a nickel at that time, I remember that very clearly), and I could have classes with Madame Swoboda.

Madame would come in -- she would drag herself in -- she was sort of bent over, and she was wearing these Spanish dancing shoes. You know, the black ones, with the taps on them, and she would get in front of the class, suddenly draw herself up, open her hands, become very majestic, and the class would begin. At the end of the class we had to curtsy and kiss her hand.

SZ: Very Old World.

BR: Very Old World. Once in a while her husband would take the class. He wore a white suit and white shoes, and he would sit on a chair with a cane and beat the rhythm. It was quite an experience. Then we would go to the ballet, and once in a while, for a great treat, we would go to the Russian Tea Room -- because the Ballet was on 57th Street, in Carnegie Hall, then. Up in the balcony we would sit with the Russian emigrés and so forth, and we would see the ladies in their rusty, black dresses. They had probably brought them from Russia, they saved them and dressed up for these occasions. It was an amazing kind of scene.

My mother had one friend who was crazy about André Eglevsky. She would sometimes go with us, with the ladies, and at one performance she yelled out in Yiddish, at Eglevsky, as he took a great leap, "What a man!" In Yiddish. She had a son, Benjy, who was really quite naughty. He was one of these personalities who couldn't be controlled -- utterly charming, and with a face like a cherub -- and he would do things like get into the coal cellar of the apartment house, she would stick her head out the window and scream for him to come home: "Benjy! Benjy Foyer! Come home this moment!" It was really one of those New York kinds of upbringings. In the summer, when it was very, very hot -- in June (we used to have these terrible

hot spells) -- Benjy's father used to collect us at school and take us to the beach, because we weren't that far from Manhattan Beach. When that closed down, because it was used by the navy for the war, we would go to Brighton Beach. Then we would go to Sheepshead Bay, to Lundy's [Restaurant], for Sunday dinners a lot. In these hot spells -- since there was no air-conditioning -- everyone would sit out on the street until they got exhausted enough to go to sleep. Sometimes he would bundle us all into his car (because he was one of the few people who had a car during the war), and we would drive up to Sheepshead Bay, to cool off, just to get the sea breeze.

There was a movie theatre a few blocks down, on the corner, which was air cooled, and sometimes we'd go there. But as kids, every Saturday afternoon, we would take our quarter and we would all go to the movies together. When the war started, my uncle had a Model A Ford, and there was an empty lot next to the movie theatre. I remember there was a drive to collect spare metal and so forth, so he figured, since he couldn't get gas anyway, he made a grand gesture and drove the car right up onto the pile and abandoned it, to the war effort!

SZ: That's a good image.

BR: He and my aunt lived around the corner.

SZ: Did you take drawing lessons?

BR: No! No!

SZ: No art lessons.

BR: No art lessons. Public school, then, had art classes, so there would be a special art class. When I went to high school they had an art program, but you had to spend extra hours, because it was considered not sufficiently academic so you had to spend more time in order to do it. Then I went to Hunter College, and I was a Fine Arts major there.

SZ: When you were growing up you said your mother took you in for these things. Did you go to museums at all, in the city?

BR: Yes. Mostly to the Brooklyn Museum. My father would take me to the Brooklyn Museum on Sundays, and I loved going there. They had a reproduction of El Greco's *View of Toledo* in the main hall -- which I loved. From the time I was little we would take the subway there, and they had plaster models of Greece, of the Parthenon and the whole Parthenon Hill, and the Colosseum. Well, maybe not the Colosseum, but of the whole Roman forum, and those were on the ground floor, also. I loved those, so he would take me to see those. I asked Bob Buck, when he became director of the Brooklyn Museum, if they still had those things, and he said, "Oh, yes, they're down in the basement." Of course, from school, we would go to the Children's Museum. We would go to the Brooklyn Public Library, which was in the shape of an open book, and they had classes for us at the Botanical Garden, where we would plant bulbs, come back, bring them back home and watch them grow. There were a lot of enriching city programs in the public school program.

SZ: They're all gone, mostly.

BR: Most of them are gone. But in those years they would take us on all sorts of cultural trips.

SZ: When you got older, what did you do summers?

BR: There was just one more thing. We used to go to the symphony, too. Leonard Bernstein would do *Peter and the Wolf* on holidays, for kids. That was another great thing at that time.

SZ: So you did a lot.

BR: A lot of stuff. And I loved to read.

SZ: You were a big reader.

BR: Yes. The first time I went away to the country I was nine years old, and my mother and I went alone to the mountains. I was pretty self-sufficient at playing. My mother had been quite ill when we got to New York. She had to be hospitalized for a while and my grandmother took care of me, so I was really very self-sufficient, but my grandmother and I didn't get along. My grandmother's idea was that my mother should take care of her and not me, when she had to take care of me. She was not happy. So she would drag me off to the beach and leave me playing on my own.

SZ: I think only children, also, often develop a sense of self-sufficiency.

BR: Yes. We used to have frequent collisions.

SZ: This is your Russian grandmother.

BR: Yes. My other grandmother was quite marvelous. She lived just off Central Park West in this huge apartment, and my father used to go see her every Thursday night. A lot of times I would go with him and my mother would meet us, they would go, and my grandmother would babysit me. She would make cookies, and she would make special dishes. She was the most terrible cook, because she never really had to cook, but she had a lot of fun making cookies with me. She would make potatoes and spaghetti for dinner, etc.

One of my father's brother's wife had died and she brought up my cousin, but my cousin was out at boarding school a good deal of the time and my uncle, during the bad years, lived with my grandmother, to take care of her. But then, when he started to have some money, he moved to an apartment nearby but would still pretend to live with her, so she wouldn't feel lonely. Once in a while he would spend the night there. One Thursday my grandmother said to my father, "I'm very worried about your brother, Frank." (My father's name was Bert.) "I'm very worried about your brother, Frank. He never takes a bath." So my father told my uncle, and he was very careful, then, to go in and run the bath, to make her happy.

My uncle had this incredible quirk. He liked to go to auctions, but they were the sort of auctions where you would buy 100 of something. So he would buy 100 umbrellas, he would stack them up in his apartment, and his friends were welcome to take them as they appeared. Or, he bought fifty pairs of ladies Italian shoes (he had a lot of girlfriends who were showgirls, and they would come up); or fifty cashmere sweaters; or the entire contents of a gourmet shop.

SZ: He was pretty unique.

BR: He was pretty unique. I was told he was pretty much the developer of the rudimentary profession of fundraising. He invented the dinner at which you honored a person, then you got all their friends to come. He started that for the March of Dimes, and he got President Roosevelt as his honoree, a number of times. People would buy tickets to these dinners but they wouldn't want to come. A good deal of the time it was boring, or it was repetitious, but he would get entertainment. So the whole family would have to get all dressed up and fill up the seats, so I got to go to these funny dinners. Then when my grandmother was older -- my father's mother -- she wanted to go to the theatre, so I would accompany her to the theatre, to see musicals and things.

SZ: Did you go to camp, or anything like that?

BR: I went to camp once, during the war. My father was never a tremendous earner. He was a very impractical person, and he happened to have some money and I went away to camp, but that was the only time. It was fun. Then when I was older, the last year of high school and the first few years of college, I went away and worked as a camp counselor.

SZ: And got paid for it.

BR: And got paid for it.

SZ: Did you like doing that?

BR: Not particularly. The first couple of times it was okay. One of the summers I was a swimming instructor -- because I was a very good swimmer and I had a Red Cross certificate, which I got in college. Another time I went with a friend to a camp run by the swimming instructor, and it turned out that they were gay and somehow had the idea that my friend was gay. When it turned out she wasn't, they gave us a very hard time. Finally, we just left, because it was just too awful. There were some interesting experiences.

SZ: I would say.

BR: Going to Hunter College, we would go on the subway every day, and on the subway there were varying experiences but it wasn't dangerous.

SZ: Well, that started in the early '50s. Did you have a secular upbringing? Or a religious upbringing, at all?

BR: It was secular, but my grandmother was kosher.

SZ: Your Russian grandmother.

BR: My Russian grandmother, with whom we lived. She would celebrate the Jewish holidays, so the family was always there for the Jewish holidays. My father would sing, or my uncles would sing, my mother's sister would come with her family and her brother, who got married very late (he got married in his forties), and his wife (whom he finally married) and step-son. My father's brother, Frank, would come very often to visit us on Sundays, because his daughter was away. In fact, when I was a little girl he used to take me to Coney Island, which was not very far away, to go on the roller coaster. Then we would come home, he would lie down on the couch and let me comb his hair. That was one of my favorite pastimes. So we were, I suppose, a rather peculiar family. My mother's brother, Joe, and my Uncle Frank used to pal around together with the showgirls.

SZ: They liked that.

BR: Yes. Every once in a while my Uncle Joe would bring one for my grandmother's inspection.

SZ: In high school, were you a good student? Were there subjects you liked in particular?

BR: I was an okay student. I had kind of a difficult adolescence because my grandmother -- I guess she didn't exactly develop Alzheimer's, but she did develop --

SZ: -- some variant of it?

BR: -- a kind of old-age psychosis, and I shared a room with her. She would get up in the middle of the night with delusions and so forth, so it was a hard time for all of us. Sometimes I would go to class very bleary-eyed, and I had mathematics early in the morning, which was not my strong point, in any case. So my father had to get me a tutor for mathematics.

SZ: You must have some memories of the war.

BR: Primarily, I would do certain chores and one of my chores was helping my grandmother to do the shopping, because my mother really wasn't strong enough to do that. I would be given the ration cards and that sort of thing. I remember when Roosevelt died. We were in the local kosher delicatessen having sandwiches when the news came. Then I remember V-J Day and the great celebrations. But I remember more clearly the post-war era and how frightened we were of the Russians and the atomic bomb, for a very long time. That stayed with me. So that was more of a memory. I remember things like going to the public library to get books, because one didn't buy books in those days, one took them out of the public library. That was a very important aspect of New York life. There were libraries all over the place.

SZ: Did you read newspapers? Were you interested in world events? Other than the Cold War?

BR: Yes. We got the Sunday *New York Times*, and I would sit on the floor and read it on Sundays. My uncle bought my grandmother one of the first automatic record machines, a big one with a radio --

SZ: -- that had the changers?

BR: -- that had the automatic changers. So she would listen to music in the morning, on Sunday morning, and I would sit on the floor and read the paper.

SZ: So your choice of Hunter -- was that just sort of the thing that people did?

BR: Well, my father thought I was really too young to go away from home.

SZ: That's right. Because you had --

BR: I was sixteen --

SZ: -- when you graduated.

BR: -- when I graduated, and went into college. Bard College had offered me a scholarship and we debated it.

SZ: Had you gone up to see it?

BR: No. No, I hadn't. But finally, for a variety of reasons, they felt I should stay at home. I passed the test for Hunter. I got a very good score, so I went to Hunter. As I said, I never really liked it that much. Going to school on the subway every day, you never had that feeling of closeness to the school, although I did participate in a lot of extra-curricular activities. I was president of my class junior year, and Hunter had this very famous yearly performance put on by the students, called "Sing." Danny Kaye's wife,

Sylvia Fine, was famous for having written "Sing," so I worked on that every year, all through college.

SZ: Because -- ? You liked to write? You said you couldn't sing.

BR: I couldn't sing, no. We all worked together, putting it together. We would write lyrics to already existing show tunes, and I designed and built the sets. There was a man there whose last name was Lunden [?], who was in charge of this activity, so at one point I thought I might become a stage designer, but somehow -- That was very difficult in those years, because for a woman to get into the union was very difficult. In those years, as everybody in the art world knows, doing anything as a woman -- a woman painter or anything like that -- was extremely difficult. I was studying painting in college. I was studying painting with Robert Motherwell, Ray Parker, and William Baziotes. They were all in the department there, and we were up on the top floor of Hunter College. The art department was run by a very interesting woman. Her name escapes me at the moment, but she had her hair dyed a brilliant scarlet, and she brought all these New York painters in to teach. She had some very good art history professors, as well, and we had to do art history and studio. So I was there, I was also working on "Sing," and I was swimming and doing that sort of thing.

SZ: I know the answer to this, but for the record -- The student body of Hunter College at that time was all female?

BR: It was all female and you had to live in the city, except, if you agreed to be a teacher, you could come from --

SZ: -- Long Island or something?

BR: Yes. Or you could come from Westchester, or something.

SZ: But you then had to be a teacher once you graduated?

BR: Yes. You had to take the teaching curriculum. They had very high standards but they had to let in a certain number of students, so what they did was they flunked out half the student body after the first year. There were girls there who -- I remember one young woman who came from upstate. She really had no money at all, and she would have to work for a semester, then come to school; work for a semester, then come back to school. There were a lot of girls from families without any money at all. In sophomore year we got an influx of young women who had gone to out-of-town schools, who wanted to be back in New York, and girls who had gone off to Ivy League schools.

So it was a very mixed student body. I was next to the youngest person in my class. There was one girl younger than I. It was an interesting experience, and the teachers were very interesting. Most of the teachers in the public school system when I was growing up in it, and a lot of the teachers still, at Hunter, had become teachers because of the Depression. Had it not been for the Depression they would have been in all kinds of other professions, and they were very, very good.

SZ: So it was a place that was rich in resources, if you wanted to tap them.

BR: Exactly.

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

BR: In my junior year I got mononucleosis, got depressed and tried to flunk out.

SZ: This was when you were president of the class?

BR: [Laughter] Yes. I was, I think, not the most cheery president of the class at that point. The next year the mafia got together and said, "You've been president of the class," and this girl who was the youngest said, "I've been the vice president. Now I think I should be the president and you should be the vice president for senior year," and I said, "Okay. I can't argue with that."

I had been working and saving money. A friend of mine in school had determined that she was going to go to Europe the summer between her junior and senior year, and I had been working and saving money to go with her. Of course, that set my plans back quite a bit.

SZ: Did you miss a lot of school?

BR: I missed six weeks of school. So my Uncle Frank said, "Well, I'll give you the money you need to make up the difference in what you have." So for $300 I took a National Association of Students trip to Europe. I think it was an eight-week trip, and it included the Holland America Line fare. Suzi Gablik who was sort of wild and at Hunter, she had gone to Black Mountain and she knew Bob Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and all those artists. She wanted to go to Europe, and her mother thought she was too wild and didn't trust her. But she brought me home to her mother's house for dinner, and her mother saw that I was this very well-behaved person, so she said okay, Suzi could go, too. She knew Harry Torczyner, and Harry Torczyner sent her to visit Magritte. Of course, the moment she got on the boat she dropped me for more interesting fare. We had a good trip.

SZ: The students traveled together for eight weeks?

BR: The students traveled together, and they were from all over the place. We had student guides, and we traveled on buses. It was 1955 and the food in Europe was terrible. Of course, with the amount of money we had paid --

SZ: -- you didn't get much!

BR: I remember Spam and tomato soup a good deal of the time. But, really nice student guides.

SZ: You said you had studied art history?

BR: Yes. I had some background.

SZ: You never really said why you had chosen studio art, except for the fact, I presume, that you had this talent.

BR: Yes, I did, and I wanted to be a painter but my father had said, "Well, you can't make a living doing that." We had the usual kinds of discussions. He did send me to a class to learn to type.

SZ: I'm sure it came in handy.

BR: It became an issue later, at the Museum.

SZ: So tell me about this trip. Where did you go and what did you see?

BR: We went first to England.

SZ: It must have been an amazing thing.

BR: It was amazing. It was amazing. I don't remember England as being very ruined. There was a lot of rebuilding by that time, in England. We went to see the major cathedrals, we traveled on this bus and we saw that. We had this really nice English guide. I remember one night we stayed up all night, walking all over London. That was totally amazing. From London we went to Holland. We took the Channel boat, and we were, of course, very sick on the Channel boat. We saw Amsterdam, we saw the Lowlands, and from Amsterdam --

SZ: I don't suppose Holland was as rebuilt as England was by that time. Maybe you didn't go to Rotterdam, which, I think, had been really --

BR: We landed, actually, in Rotterdam before, and then took the boat across to England. But we didn't stay, I think, in Rotterdam that first time. We went back from England, I believe -- it may have been the other way around, but in any case -- it wasn't that they were in such bad shape, it was just, as I say, very little in the way of variety of

food. I'm sure that what we were eating wasn't much different from what a lot of the population was eating.

From there we went to Paris and I found Paris overwhelming. Even though I was a New Yorker, I just could not deal with it. But we went to Chartres, and we went to Rheims, and all those places. Then we went to Italy, and, of course, that was quite marvelous. Our tour guide was very handsome and charming. He was from Florence. We went to Florence and Naples, we went to Pompeii. We went to Rome, and that was the end of the trip, but the other friend with whom I was traveling -- Laura Massoff [?]-- she was a great friend and she was studying dance, very seriously (ballet). She had an uncle who was a doctor, who was in the army in France, and she had a friend who was a kind of platonic boyfriend. I think perhaps he was gay and his friend was gay. We wanted to see Germany, so we went to Munich, and Munich was utterly flat. Where it wasn't flat there were heaps of rubble --

SZ: -- ten years later.

BR: -- ten years later. It was neat but it was flat. Years later, going to Munich, I realized that most of what's in Munich is reconstruction --

SZ: -- and they made it look like the old stuff.

BR: -- and they made it look like the old stuff. They were very successful at it, but my first memory of Munich was utterly flat.

SZ: You didn't feel funny being in Germany?

BR: Very much so. Very much so. But being with two American occupying soldiers was a different kind of experience. We were still, technically, at war with Germany --

SZ: That's right.

BR: -- because the Russians would not sign the peace treaty. So these were occupiers. They went down to Berchtesgaden but I had a stomach virus and I didn't go with them. I'm very glad I didn't go to Berchtesgaden. It was not something, I think, I really wanted to do.

Then we went to France. Actually, Laura's uncle came to get us in Germany and we went to France again. This was kind of an interregnum of ten days or something. Then we were to meet the group and become a group again, to go back to New York. We went on a bus from Paris to Rotterdam, and then took a boat. It was a very, very good experience for me.

SZ: And the art -- ?

BR: It was extraordinary, because it didn't have any reality until then, but those spaces, and even more the contact with Europe, with that other place, even more than the art, was a very interesting and liberating kind of experience -- really being on one's own for the first time, even though there were the guides and the itinerary and so forth. Still, you were alone in a foreign place.

SZ: So you went back and finished school.

BR: I went back and finished school. That year, one of the young women who had come back to Hunter from another school and I were very friendly. She was engaged to be married (a lot of the girls became engaged to be married in those years, in the senior year). Her husband was studying to be a doctor -- her fiancé -- and he had a lot of friends. So she fixed me up with a couple of double dates, and on one of them I met Herb Rose, who's my husband now. On our second date he asked me to marry him. This was like February or something of my senior year, and I said, "Don't be ridiculous. I'm too young to get married," but he persisted. I had another boyfriend and thought I was in love with him, but things were not going well. Gradually, it worked itself out, and by June of married Herb.

SZ: June of -- ?

BR: June of '56.

SZ: When you graduated.

BR: When I graduated.

SZ: You've been married a long time.

BR: Yes. A very long time. So he wasn't so crazy.

SZ: What was your maiden name?

BR: Berend. It was one of those names that was picked up at Ellis Island, very Nordic. [Laughter] It's a northern German and Danish name. The family name was Raprinsky [?].

SZ: So there you go. At least you know that. So when you married your husband, what was he doing at that time?

BR: He had finished law school, and he was working for a law firm. He went to Syracuse. His friend, who introduced us, had gone to Syracuse and then to Harvard Law. When he came out of Harvard Law he went to work at a sort of largish law firm and he didn't like that. So after we were married he went to work for a friend of the family who had a small, two-partner law firm, and represented the United Jewish Appeal. That was something his family was very involved in. My father-in-law was a labor leader and politician. His name was Alex Rose, and he was head of the Liberal party in New York.

SZ: I know the name.

BR: He had come to this country before the First World War to study medicine, and he was cut off from funds by the First World War. He went to Canada and joined the

Jewish Legion, when Balfour declared that the English would give the Jews some land in Palestine if they helped with the war. He joined rather late, because he was quite young, and he was actually guarding Turkish prisoners. He never did get into battle. Then, of course, the British did not let anyone stay. Some people stayed illegally and became the Irgun, but my father-in-law returned, through Canada, to New York, where he had uncles and so forth, and he went into the millinery trade. They were just forming unions, so he became involved with the union movement. He eventually became head of the union.

When Roosevelt was seeking his third term -- Well, first of all they formed the Labor party, and the Labor party was taken over by the Communists. So a group of people from the Labor party seceded and formed the Liberal party. The whole thing was because they wanted a third line for people to vote for Roosevelt, when he ran for his third term. Because there was a lot of controversy over that. So they were the balance-of-power party in New York --

SZ: -- for a long time.

BR: -- for a very long time, right up to the time that my father-in-law died. He was also very involved with Israel. Herb's sister, who was eight years older than he, had actually trained to go to Israel and had been stopped by the war. She married someone she met at this training place, he went off to the army, and when he came back they stayed and had their family, here in New York. They finally did go to Israel, but very, very late, after the two oldest kids had been through college and the two youngest -- Well, actually, the two boys stayed here, and the two girls went with them to Israel, but that was much later. He was always involved with Israel and Golda Meir, because the people who had been in the Legion were considered a special group that were honored in Israel, and because he had these political ties he was, of course, very helpful.

When I married Herb we got involved in politics a lot. We got married in June, and my father had been quite ill so we had this quiet wedding. But my father-in-law needed --

SZ: -- a big wedding.

BR: Yes. So we had this compromise thing, where we had our small wedding, which my uncle arranged -- my Uncle Frank -- because he used to give these parties at the Waldorf, so we had it at the Waldorf. But then my father-in-law gave us a very big engagement party the weekend before, and he had to entertain the politicos. We had 400 people, and Herb and I had to stand there and say hello to everyone, goodbye to everyone, and so on and so forth. So that was really quite an event.

My mother and father had gone away, for my father to rest, and I had to go out and buy my own dresses for these occasions. I brought back a black dress and my aunt said to me, "You cannot wear a black dress!" so she took me out shopping for the proper dresses, and wedding dress, to wear.

SZ: Already you had a predilection for the New York uniform, right?!

BR: Exactly. The little black dress, [laughter] which, for my generation, you had to have. But I didn't have that many dresses, anyway, because we didn't have any money. When we married Herb was making $60 a week, which they raised to $75, when we got married.

SZ: Where did you live when you first got married?

BR: We got an apartment on West 86th Street.

SZ: So you moved to Manhattan.

BR: We moved to Manhattan, and we had one bedroom. It was this dirty, dreary place and it had to be painted. We worked out that if I stayed home and painted it over the summer, then I could get a job in the fall, and we would save money on my doing the paint job.

SZ: So you did it.

BR: So I did it, and it took four coats of paint. Herb, of course, couldn't spend any time doing it because of the hours that young lawyers worked. And, we were on a pretty tight leash, financially. I had a habit of leaving change in my pockets, which I still do, and we would go through my pockets to find money to go to the movies. Then I got a job at *Pageant Magazine*.

SZ: Which was what?

BR: It was a kind of clone of the *Reader's Digest*, but very much lower on the food chain than *Reader's Digest*. I worked as what was then called Gal Friday for the chief editor, and he had me read manuscripts that people would send in. He would have all these writers come in to write stories for the magazine, and they were the same writers who wrote for *Reader's Digest*. I discovered that these writers had several names, and they would use different names to write for different periodicals but they were all the same. They would write for *Life Magazine* and so forth, and they would do research on a story and they would have the pro- part, which they would use for one story, and the anti- part, which they would use for another story, under different names. That way, they could make a living. They were good writers, even at that time.

The editor's name was Ray Robinson, and he subsequently became the chief editor of the *Reader's Digest*. They were very honest in their reporting, but they would tell one side of the story at a time. I remember this was during the years when Castro was down in Cuba and everybody thought he was a great hero. R.W. Apple was a great friend of Ray Robinson's, and he had disappeared for a while, with Castro. One day he showed up in the office, and I was very, very impressed.

SZ: Was that a hard job to get? Or did you know somebody? And what was the job market like for someone like yourself, in those days?

BR: It was pretty easy. You had to go to an agency. I had learned, as I say, to type, and I had also learned a rudimentary form of shorthand, so I was able to get that kind of job. I think it was $60 a week. Then we had --

SZ: I was going to say -- you were really flush.

BR: We were really flush. I think we were paying $85 a month -- No. Rent was $110.

SZ: Oh, wow. So you were tight.

BR: No. It wasn't. It was $85. The next place cost more, or it went up later -- or something. No, it was $85, I think. I could ask Herb. If his salary was $75, it couldn't have been -- We'll have to ask him what the rent was. I just don't remember.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **BERNICE ROSE (BR)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **PACE WILDENSTEIN GALLERY**
32 WEST 57TH STREET

DATE: **4 JANUARY 2002**

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SZ: We stopped last time just at the point where you had come to the Museum about getting some employment.

BR: Right. Althea (Mrs. Borden, as we called her) said that Gertrude Mellon, who was a trustee and was a volunteer at the Museum, needed an assistant. Her assistant was leaving, and it was a part-time job. I don't know if I said I'd been married right after college --

SZ: You did tell me, yes.

BR: So I thought that would be good, because I could paint, and I could work. Mrs. Mellon did special events for the Museum, aside from the fundraising and that sort of thing, which, at that time, Emily -- what was Emily's last name? Anyway, you can find out. [Interruption] Emily Woodruff. Emily sort of ran the department, but Mrs. Mellon did special things. The Museum, at that time, owned the guest house that Mrs. Rockefeller had had built. There was a butler there, and I had to run back and forth between the Museum and the butler, and also to check if there was enough wine and liquor and so forth. The butler sort of liked to imbibe, so we would keep track of --

SZ: And this was very stimulating work for you?

BR: Well, what was stimulating about it was, fortunately, it was seated in the Architecture and Design department, in the office with Greta Daniel and Mildred Constantine, all those great people, and Wilder Green went in and out a lot. But Wilder and Arthur Drexler had this sumptuous office that Philip Johnson had also designed, with these extraordinary wrought-iron lounges. They had these big tables that were like garden tables, and I forget the name of the designer but it was really quite exquisite. They had this vast office in which they sat at on the lounges and at these tables side by side, with this big window, in the wing of the building that Philip Johnson had designed -- that little [inaudible] building, which was taken --

SZ: The 21 Building.

BR: -- taken down. The 21 Building. They had the most wonderful things coming in. It was like a temple, almost, where they sat, but the room where I sat was very, very lively, with all sorts of things happening all the time -- things to read, things to look at -- so from that point of view, it really was very, very stimulating. It was also sort of socially, sociologically, a very interesting kind of job. Because here I was, a girl from Brooklyn, working with someone who was a very high-born German lady, who had been married to a Mellon, and very cultured. During that time she was building a little *pied-à-terre* in Connecticut, which was being designed by Ulrich Franzen. So that was very interesting to me, also, this deep involvement with modernism that everyone had, as a kind of mission.

So I took that job. After a while they merged the two departments, and Mrs. Mellon didn't do that anymore. I went to work very briefly (I've almost forgotten this) with Emily, for Emily. Also, with Arthur Drexler something happened. Everyone was very informal, and one day I called him "Arthur," he got very upset, and he went to Mrs. Mellon and said, "She shouldn't call me by my first name." So after that I always called him Mr. Drexler, and for years afterward I was just a little afraid of him. Also, I was in awe of him. He was extraordinary. The department heads of that time -- and, of course, going forward for quite a long time -- were really brilliant people.

SZ: And that's what you mean, when you called him "extraordinary?"

BR: He was brilliant. Just in day-to-day contact one could see that. Wilder was also very special in his way. They always advised on installations and so forth. Wilder worked very closely with people on installations, although I later found out that everybody had to learn to do their own, but I guess we'll get to that.

So I'm with Mrs. Woodruff, and she had a couple of young women working for her whom I came to know very well. One of them I've known on and off since then, so that was an interesting moment also. I was a little lost, I think, in that department. I didn't know quite what I was doing. I just sort of did it. I always maintained, with Mrs. Borden, that I couldn't type, because I didn't want to be a secretary. But, of course, I could type sufficiently to write a letter and do anything I really wanted to do on the typewriter, and she pretended to believe me most of the time, and she didn't give me real secretarial jobs. But since I wanted to paint, for several years I would take a job for a while, then I would leave, take a job for a while and leave. That was okay with them, because they ran this very loose things. They had actors down at the desk downstairs. The guards were artists. It was that kind of place. Then there were all these very well-bred women, some of them doing volunteer jobs, and some of them working in the offices. I was in the education department, taking telephone calls at one point, for the Artists' Carnival. One time I sat in the lobby and took $5 and $10 donations, because it was some anniversary of the Museum and they were raising money and exuding good will.

SZ: Yes, that's right. They were getting ready to have that celebration, and had a big fundraising project. The twenty-fifth, I guess it was.

BR: Yes, it could have been the twenty-fifth. It was not high-key, by any means. Something like that. Everybody knew everybody else. I knew people at the information desk.

SZ: Was Frank O'Hara there then?

BR: Frank was there, yes. One of my part-time jobs -- since you bring up Frank O'Hara -- I would see Frank all the time and, of course, I knew who he was. But he worked primarily in the international department, and I got a job with the international department, but it was with Helen Franc.

SZ: This was one of your part-times, also.

BR: This was one of my part-times. She was doing a project called "French Drawings from American Collections," and Frank had gotten Jimmy Schuyler a job with Helen. I was working with them, and there was another man working, whose name I haven't remembered in years. Helen was doing all the organization, and, of course, she was very good at organization -- and she was putting the book together -- but very volatile. In those days things had to go back and forth by airmail. The book was being printed in France, by the French government, so every evening a packet had to go out, and this one guy was responsible for what was happening with the postage. Sometimes he wouldn't have it, and she would literally jump up and down. Jimmy Schuyler and I would sit there and watch this explosion, so I got to know him a little bit. Then we lost contact. He went out to the end of Long Island to write, he became depressed, and that's a whole other history. So that was one of my interesting experiences.

SZ: So this series of different jobs lasted for how many years? Approximately?

BR: Oh, 1957 -- somewhere -- two or three years or something like that. Then Herb and I moved out to Queens, and it was godforsaken, and so difficult to get in. It meant a bus ride and a subway ride, and it took an hour and a half to get in, so for a while I didn't work.

SZ: Just painted?

BR: Just painted. But it was depressing, to say the least, to be a woman painter. I went to a couple places and they liked the work, but they said, "You know, you have to be a member of a group." I remember one was Martha Jackson's son. I was studying

painting with Motherwell, also, at night, at Hunter College. In some ways he was very discouraging, in other ways he was wonderful. Because he thought this was the most important thing in the world to do. But finally one day he said to me, "Oh, I can see what you're doing. Your space spreads sideways." He just didn't believe in women painters, also, but at that point he admitted the painting was interesting. So that was when I went out to try to see if anyone might be interested. That was really post-Abstract Expressionism. It was that period in between.

I went to the Hansa Gallery, and what's-his-name [Richard Bellamy] liked the work -- the guy who later was very involved with Mark di Suvero, who ran the place. We'll find his name. He died a couple years ago, and he had a great eye. He did a lot of Richard -- Anyway. We'll have to find it. My names today, are --

SZ: I'm not much help.

BR: I'll look it up. So I got kind of discouraged. I was at one of those times when you're seeking your identity, and I thought, "My God. I don't have a subject. I don't know what to paint. Maybe I can put paint on a canvas, but what do you paint?"

I was working in the Museum, again, and Jenny Licht had come to work there at that time. I would talk to her about it, and she said, "You know, you're doing good enough painting, but there are a lot of people who know how to paint." And that was absolutely true. There was Frank Stella, and he had come out with his extraordinary work. That was a real breakthrough. And I thought, "I'll never do anything that smart." So I decided to really go back to work, and it coincided with Althea Borden saying, "Look, you have to have a regular job. We're tightening things up. We need to have --"

SZ: You had to work full-time, or --

BR: Yes. I had to work full-time. They were stopping all the part-time work, and they really needed to regularize the staff. So I said okay. She said, "Well, Richard Palmer, who's a very, very nice guy, needs a secretary --

SZ: But you don't type.

BR: -- in the International and Circulating Exhibitions Program." And since I had a nodding acquaintance with Frank O'Hara, and a nodding acquaintance with everyone there, as one did, at least, in the Museum (and I did know Dick, and so forth), I said, "Well, okay." I didn't really want to be a secretary, but she said, "It's an interesting place, and you'll enjoy it there." So I said, "Yes, I'll do it."

So I went to work for Dick, and ten days into the job, Bill Seitz was working on a show for them, bringing in Israeli art. They said, "He needs an assistant, to work on this show. They have no one up in Painting and Sculpture, so will you work on this show?"

SZ: You must have jumped at it.

BR: I said sure. So I worked with Bill on that show. Oh, but I know what came in between. When I came back to work (I have to check out this sequence, too) for Alicia Legg in the Painting and Sculpture department. I believe this predates the Seitz thing. I don't know. I really would have to check it out. But anyway, one of the part-time jobs was working for Alicia. She needed an assistant, because she always assisted Bill Seitz and Peter Selz on their exhibitions, and she just needed someone to keep track of the cards, to do this and this. There were times when the work was very heavy, and there were times when it was not. Sally Kuhn was Bill Seitz's assistant and Terry Varveris was Peter Selz's assistant. Peter was head of the department. He wasn't there for very long, because he had a more conservative take, eventually, than the trustees were interested in, and he did a show on figurative painting that was a bomb. He also, I guess, had a tendency to pinch the trustees' wives, and the female trustees.

SZ: Not a good habit.

BR: Not a good habit. But that was the rumor.

SZ: Not a smart move, anyway.

BR: Not a smart move, anyway. So I was working for them. There were times when I was really worried, because this was sporadic work. Not that Alicia didn't need an assistant -- she certainly did -- but it was the rhythm of the work. At one point I asked, very innocently, Peter Selz, if there was anything I could do for him, and she became very angry at me. She said, "How could you do such a stupid thing? It makes it look like I don't need anybody." So then, without my knowing it, she began to campaign for a full-time assistant, I think partially in order to protect herself. But because the work was so sporadic, if someone wasn't there, it was not an efficient way to work.

Jenny had come from England (she married an American), and she was working in the circulating department. So they agreed Alicia should have somebody, and she hired Jenny as a full-time person, and Alicia said, "Well, I didn't know you would work full-time." So I said, "Well, I would have worked for you." But I think she was still a little bit annoyed. I think she was afraid I was a little stupid in certain ways, or whatever the problem was. So that was when Althea said to me, "If you'll work full-time, go to work for Dick." Then I did this thing for Bill Seitz, directly.

We got that together successfully, then Peter Selz left and a lot of pressure was put on the Drawings and Prints department to fill in with exhibitions. Bill Lieberman was away, working on a show, and Elaine Johnson, who was running the department, felt they needed somebody to work on these extra shows they were doing. Since I had done this successfully with Bill Seitz, I was asked if I would spend half-time in the Drawings and Prints department, and half-time with Dick Palmer. I said yes, so I would trundle over to the Drawings and Prints department every afternoon, the handler would vacate his desk, I would sit at his desk, and I would work on these exhibitions.

SZ: Was this the first time you started to get, in some way, deeply interested in or knowledgeable about -- ?

BR: Yes. Because working with Alicia was very interesting. She showed me how to lay out exhibitions. I really learned that from her, because she was sitting there and she was doing that, at that time, helping Bill Seitz and Peter Selz do that. So she was the first person who ever showed me anything about exhibition layout, and also, just the technique for moving the walls. Because the back building was laid out with interior columns, but no permanent walls, so that the walls were always movable for the exhibitions, and that was part of the whole concept; that each installation would convey the spirit of the work. On that job I also got to clean the exhibitions, because that was before they had preparators cleaning the exhibitions. I remember every morning I would go down and clean Bill Seitz's Gorky exhibition. I cleaned the Rodin exhibition. Those are the two I remember best. So I really got to study things very, very intimately. It was wonderful. In that sense, it was the best job anybody could have.

SZ: What about the medium of drawings, once you started in that department? Was that something you knew a lot about? Or had a particular affinity for at that time? Or was that something you kind of fell into?

BR: It was something I kind of fell into. At first it was drawings and prints. After a while Bill came back, and at first he was very shy with me. But then he decided that I worked well and so forth, so they asked me to come in there full-time, because they needed someone to take care of loans and to catalogue prints before they went out on loan, because even though they had Riva Castleman as the print cataloguer, and they had Eila Kokkinen as the drawing cataloguer, and they had a registrar -- Gloria Hodsoll -- that still wasn't enough for the volume, to get things done for the volume of loans and exhibitions that the department was doing.

By that time the Museum had put up the new wing, the east wing, and the Department of Drawings and Prints had a gallery there. So my job, then, also, was to clean that gallery, and if we took something down, to let it go out for exhibition -- because we would do that, in those days -- then I had to find something to replace it. That was my exhibitions, drawing and print cataloguing, so I straddled the two areas

in the department. I worked very closely with Bill Lieberman on those things -- as everyone did. Bill always involved everyone in the department as a unit. He was very, very good at that. There were some things at which Bill was notoriously disorganized, but his sense of museological organization and how to go about organizing tasks intellectually -- and also that no task was too small for anyone to do --

SZ: It was sort of a democratic approach.

BR: If he was working on an exhibition, we all worked on the exhibition. It wasn't "You, that's your job," or "You, that's your job," or whatever. We all did it as a team.

SZ: Was he generous with credit, too? And praise?

BR: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I would never have imagined that I could do the things I did without his just taking it for granted and saying, "Please do this," and "Please do that." And showing how, by example. He wasn't a big talker, but you just went through all the steps with him, you learned to do it, and then he let you do it alone. He wasn't always second-guessing you, which was tremendously important. I don't know too many people who haven't worked in that way with him, who know that about him. You've probably heard a lot of stories about Bill and his eccentricities, as you've been doing this, but one of his really strong points was encouraging people to use their abilities. Sometimes it was because of his weaknesses, I don't deny that. But he was there for you, and he created a team.

So it was very interesting, and there were all these crazy jobs we did. We were all terrified of the framer, and we had to do labels and so forth, and we were always making mistakes with labels. We would reach the point where we were terrified to take yet another label down to the frame shop. These little labels had to be works of art, so we would figure out how to type up a new label, then cut it and glue it down on top of the old label. There were just so many funny things that went on, and sort of got us all together.

Elaine Johnson was there to make sure everybody worked and everything went properly, because of Bill's -- While we all worked as a team, there were things that would go by the board because there was the concentration on the main task, and some things might leak out around the corners. So she would watch everything very carefully, and when I reached the point where I was really working very, very hard, she made sure I got some assistance with the loans and so forth. Then Bill started having me sign my name to the loan letters so that, then, the loan letters came to me. That seems like a nuisance job to people outside the Museum, but, in fact, it's a job of great responsibility and power, or was at that time. Bill's point of view was that we should help (it was the Museum point of view at that time), that we were an educational institution; that we had the greatest collection at that time, and that we were there to help as much as possible. So we made loans, and I got to know a lot of people --

SZ: Lenders.

BR: Lenders, I got to know people at other museums, people at other institutions, curators who were doing exhibitions. And because we were so helpful, we were all in it together. So that was also a very good feeling.

SZ: So it really was the way in which you learned your business.

BR: Exactly. Exactly.

SZ: Did Bill have a great affinity for prints and drawings? I know how he ended up there, so --

BR: You know how he ended up there.

SZ: Well, you can tell me.

BR: Well, the story I was told was that he had come into the Museum as the fair-haired boy, working for Alfred. His mother had died (she committed suicide and he found

her), and that sort of set him off on a terrible kind of nervous breakdown, and he disappeared into Europe and couldn't be found. Alfred got very mad at him and created this department of prints and drawings for him, to take care of him.

Bill had been a student of Paul J. Sachs, which was, I think, how he got to Alfred. So Alfred was always sort of keeping an eye on him, and Bill had a secretary, Joan Vass, whose husband was an artist. Bill tried to help them, but her husband was really quite crazy. He would go on jags where he would destroy paintings, and Joan was also. Alfred would talk to Joan, and Joan could be unconsciously vicious. She would tell him funny stories about Bill, which didn't help the situation at all. Instead of talking about the sort of thing that I've told you, I think it was pretty destructive of Bill, who, actually, at that point was working and doing some really interesting things, and building up that department. He didn't have a lot of money to do it, and he worked very hard at wining and dining the ladies. He was able to get certain funds and so forth, and he really was more interested in prints than he was in drawings. He put together an extraordinary collection, especially of German expressionist prints -- things that, a few years later, would have been impossible to do anything -- Some of these things he bought for $10 and $15 --

SZ: At garage sales. No.

BR: -- before I got there, because he had a really deep interest in that sort of thing. He made an extraordinary print collection, but the drawing collection was still, in a sense, shared by Alfred, because anything that was color, anything that was a collage, or anything that was really interesting --

SZ: -- Alfred kept.

BR: -- Alfred kept. Right. But what Bill did was -- and he couldn't buy anything major, because he didn't have the money. Because even though Cubist drawings may have been less expensive then, or whatever, there was this thing about who was doing the major stuff. Also, there was not the money to go out and get the Matisses, or all those kinds of things. It was really a very low budget, and it was very unusual to

spend even close to $1,000 for a drawing. Bill put together this extraordinary, basic collection of 20th-century, modernist drawings, which later would have been impossible to do. Because when people couldn't buy major drawings, they would start buying these kinds of drawings later on, and people would come in and show us drawings later on, and they were things that belonged in museum collections, because they were really interesting, but they were minor drawings, and they cost big sums of money later on. But we had this fabulous base of things.

So this was while we were still the Drawings and Prints department, and we would put up these exhibitions. Sometimes we would do half the gallery and prints would do half the gallery. He gradually got to the point where he would let Riva install the prints, and where he would let me install drawings, or a drawings exhibition. So we were doing independent work.

SZ: And, basically, he had you and Riva. He had women in his department.

BR: He had women, and he had Eila. Eila didn't like so much doing installations, so I did installations with him. He was very nurturing. He was like a mommy in some ways.

SZ: What about the writing part of it for him, at that point?

BR: At that point Bill didn't want to write, so he would say to us, "Write a wall label," so we would sit down and we would write wall labels for whatever. He and Elaine would vet them. So we got to do that, and to learn how to write very concisely. The other part of the training one got then, at the Museum, was that we would turn some of these exhibitions into traveling exhibitions for the circulating, the national circulating exhibition program. The international was a little more complex, and we got those things later on. So we did these small exhibitions, and they had editors over there, in the Circulating Exhibitions department, who were really very good. The Museum had some extraordinary editors in those days, Helen being one of them. She always did Alfred Barr's work, and René d'Harnoncourt's work, but --

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

BR: -- there were two editors over there who were terrific, and they would work with us because every exhibition would not only have a wall label that would be shipped with it, it would have a brochure, a four-fold brochure, and you had to learn to write those brochures. They would sit down -- we would write and they would sit down -- "Now what do you mean by this? You have to be more concise here. What is the thought you're trying to convey?" And we learned to write, and we learned to structure exhibitions. That was a very important part of the training. Then we graduated to -- We didn't graduate, but we also did international circulating exhibitions.

SZ: Which were different in what way?

BR: Well, they were more ambitious.

SZ: This also gave you exposure to lots of different curators, too.

BR: Exactly. And lots of different institutions. We didn't travel with the circulating exhibition shows, but we did travel with the international circulating exhibitions, and this was a program that had initially been through Europe after the war, to show that we were not the "Ugly American." You probably have the history of that department already.

SZ: To some degree. I interviewed Porter, and --

BR: You interviewed Porter and he told you about it. And you know Porter's background. That was an amazing organization -- a different color for every file, like the OSS shows. Well, there were these manuals of rules for organizing circulating exhibitions, rules for organizing international circulating exhibitions, that were followed scrupulously. I assume you have those documents. It talked about your relationship to the registrar -- how many copies you needed of everything -- it was quite amazing, and a very interesting learning experience. And, you had to travel with those shows. This was part of Nelson Rockefeller's relationship with Latin America, and with the

southern hemisphere. There have been these stories, talking about how this was a "tool of American diplomacy," and it really was. It really and truly was. But it wasn't insidious in the way these articles claimed. People were extremely grateful. On the other hand, I went into Colombia, into Latin America one year, with an exhibition (this is getting a little ahead with it) of Alexander Calder. We had these huge crates, and people came up to us as we were unpacking -- because we had to unpack outside, as we were working in a very small space, and we had these huge flat packs that were eight-, ten-feet tall. They wanted to know if they could have or buy the crates, to make houses!

SZ: Oh, God.

BR: But that's a later stage than I'm talking about now. So that was how --

SZ: That's how you learned. Maybe we should start with the first -- but we won't get to it -- the first exhibition you did. Let me just ask a couple of other questions. I didn't ask you before: Were you there for the fire?

BR: Yes. Yes, it was something like six weeks after I went to work. As I said, I was sitting in the Architecture and Design department, and Alfred came around and said, "Don't worry. It's just a fire in the restaurant. Everything's under control." But it wasn't, and it wasn't in the restaurant, it was downstairs on the second floor -- which we found out later -- but Alfred came around and said, "Be calm. Be calm." So we went into Arthur Drexler's office, which had that big, glass curtain, because smoke started coming up, and it was getting very smoky. There were a couple of women visitors and one of them really panicked, so the firemen put the ladder up, broke the window through and took her down -- down the ladder outside. But then Alfred came with the firemen and they took the rest of us down the stairs. He and René d'Harnoncourt -- I don't remember where René was, but he really went 'round with the firemen and made sure they knew where the staff was. I assume René was doing that, too. We were outside the building, all of us, watching the firemen soak the building down. I went down to the corner and got a telephone, and said, "If you hear the Museum is on fire, don't worry, because I'm okay." I called Herb.

SZ: Were you frightened?

BR: Yes. Very, very frightened. And I remained frightened of fires for a very, very long time afterward, and I'm still not very comfortable with fires. Anytime I would hear a fire engine I would get --

SZ: -- wonder whether they were stopping where you were.

BR: Exactly. Then they were trying to get things out of the Museum, and they had things in the garden and so forth. It was a terrible, terrible mess. We went back in there a few days later, and everything was covered with black soot and the place stank. It was an extraordinary job just to get everything cleaned up. You knew the date, for years, just because -- Now I don't remember, but it was terrible. Then we learned that a man had died. But gradually things came back.

SZ: The last thing -- How much did your life outside of work revolve around the Museum or Museum people?

BR: Well, that's an interesting question, because my husband was a lawyer, and he was working the hours that young lawyers work. I had some friends from college and I saw them a lot. I didn't really start to socialize with people from the Museum except during the daytime or whatever, until I went to work full-time. The first couple years I was going to graduate school -- night school -- at Hunter, studying with Motherwell, and there was that awful trip back and forth, and I made friends there, with whom we socialized. We lived there for three years, but I was not working for three years. It was less than that. One of the reasons -- To go back to the Museum, they had this wonderful thing, even when you were part-time, they would pay for analysis. So when I reached that *crise*, where I didn't know who I was, of course somebody said to me, "You should go for analysis." So I did that, which was --

SZ: This is a new one on me. I never heard this before.

BR: You never heard this before?

SZ: No, no.

BR: Oh, well, that was why some of the people worked at the front desk! [Laughter]

SZ: Who instituted that policy? How interesting.

BR: I really don't know.

SZ: That's very interesting. Great.

BR: No one has ever told you this? I can't believe it. It was one of the reasons for all these creative types to work at the Museum, at the desk. The job itself was not that fascinating.

SZ: And the pay wasn't so great.

BR: The pay wasn't so great. And those people could go to work at 11:00, so they had time to go to their analysis, to go to their readings or interviews or whatever, to go and dance, take a class, and then come to work.

SZ: That's great. [Laughs] Well, the first show you've listed, in any event, was '68 -- Pollock.

BR: Well, that was the first big show, yes.

SZ: I'm just trying to think if there's anything else I missed, up until this time, from an institutional point of view. God, there was a lot of stuff, I guess, but I don't have time, so --

BR: Yes. Okay.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**BERNICE ROSE**
INTERVIEWER:	**SHARON ZANE**
LOCATION:	**32 WEST 57TH STREET, NYC**
DATE:	**30 JANUARY 2002**

TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SZ: We talked about the first years you were there. There were a few presences that, really, we have only mentioned in passing. Maybe there's something you'd like to say about them. I was thinking, particularly, of Alfred, Monroe, and René, all of whom disappeared about the time you really started to put your shows together.

BR: Okay. For me, I came to know Monroe slightly later, and, really, through work that Bill Lieberman did. As far as I was concerned, he was just a presence in the hallway. I think I came to know him better after he left the Museum. Of course, he was still there while I was working for Alicia Legg, but I wasn't really quite sure what all those people did, because I was working part-time, and not that much involved with the Museum. As far as Alfred was concerned, he was this incredible person who sort of locked himself away in a room, at that point. He was working on *Painting and Sculpture in The Museum of Modern [Art]*, seeming never to quite finish it. A few years later he would wander the halls, and I didn't think he knew me at all.

One of the things Bill Lieberman did for us, when we were "little girls" in his department -- he decided we needed the experience of going to an acquisitions meeting. At that time Acquisitions was a central committee for all the Museum, so he took us to this meeting. Alfred was presiding, and he was amazing, his flow of language and everything. One painting came up -- it was a European painting and I don't know what it was, anymore (at some point I should go through and see which one it was) -- and it was pink. He looked at the committee and he said, "Now, we

don't need to be afraid of something because it's pretty." I never forgot that. Another time, when it was clear that his mind was wandering, he came up to me and he and said, sort of hesitantly, "I can't tell you how much I admire you." [Laughter] It remains a total mystery to me. Sometimes I would come on him, looking out the window into the garden. He would shake his head at that Henry Moore sculpture that was supposed to have been on 57th Street. He really didn't like that sculpture at all. Another time (and I don't know if I should really say this), Bill Rubin was passing by, he [Barr] shook his head and said, "Bad man. Bad man." [Laughter]

But René d'Harnoncourt was a presence, and one of the things that happened was -- I don't remember when Virginia came in. I think it was after this, because I only remember Eila, Riva and I being involved. We decided that other museums had assistant curators, and that it was time we were given titles, because we were doing the work that assistant curators normally did, in other museums. So we got together and we went to Bill [Lieberman], and told him how we felt. He said, well, okay, he would discuss it with René d'Harnoncourt. So he did, they discussed it with Althea Borden, and came up with the idea (this was 1965) that we could become assistant curators, but we would have to spend a year working with another title -- and they came up with the title "Curatorial Assistant."

SZ: That's where that came from?

BR: That's where that came from. So we did that, and at the end of the year René d'Harnoncourt took us to tea in the penthouse and said, "Now you're promoted to Assistant Curators." René was quite deaf toward the end, so he did all the talking because he knew if we talked, he couldn't hear us. It was a very funny kind of thing.

René was very big, and if I stood behind him, you really couldn't see me -- which was kind of extraordinary. I'm not that big, but he had this presence of the Great Father, and when he said something shall be done this way, or "You do that" -- I remember one time (people were always very badly paid, but they were <u>really</u> badly paid, initially) he got a raise for the staff. He called us all into the auditorium -- the movie theatre -- and he announced that he was giving the staff this raise, and how hard

everybody had worked, and how wonderful everyone was. He said he was giving us a four percent raise. Well, the way he did it, you felt you were being given this extraordinary gift. I think, for me, as I remember, it came out to $2.00. But you really felt that he had fought for you, and this was given with great love and appreciation.

SZ: That's a great example, I guess, of his leadership style.

BR: His leadership style.

SZ: Before we go on, and just to make it clear, for the record -- were there no other assistant curators in the Museum, at that time? Are we talking about just your department, or Museum-wide?

BR: We're talking Museum-wide. The one thing I don't remember is whether Jenny Licht had become an assistant curator, but I don't think so. I think she became an assistant curator during that year that we waited. That's something you'd have to look up, but, possibly aside from that, this was Museum-wide. There were department heads and there were all sorts of people working for them, but there were really no other titles in the Museum.

SZ: The department head was the curator?

BR: The department head was the curator, yes, except for Bill Seitz, and they were "associates," or something like that.

SZ: That was because Alfred was still there, right?

BR: Yes, yes. Alfred was above them. They were Museum Exhibitions, and Alfred was Collections. Now I'm looking for the Pollock exhibition, because I think it was 1966 that we began on that. It was decided there were to be these "artists in mid-career" exhibitions, and Pollock was on the list. Then they were supposed to be "alive." But that was earlier. Then it was decided that there should be another Picasso retrospective, since Frank O'Hara had worked on the first one and written something

rather extraordinary about Pollock. He was to organize the exhibition, and it was divided into paintings and works on paper. Jenny Licht was to work with Frank on the paintings part of the exhibition, and I was to work with Bill on the drawings part of the exhibition. René called a meeting of all of us, and very graciously told us how the exhibition would be organized, with each person working and doing -- "You'll do this, and you'll do that" -- and so forth. That was quite wonderful, because you really felt that here was someone who was in control of the situation and knew what he was doing.

In any case, what happened (and this started a lot of problems), aside from the tragedy it was in itself, was that summer Frank was killed, on Fire Island, and the question became, who was doing to do the Pollock exhibition? Bill Rubin had already done his Surrealism exhibition and Adjunct [?], and so forth, and Bill Rubin had taught at Hunter College as well as at Sarah Lawrence. I had taken classes with him. Also, Robert Motherwell was working at Hunter, and I had studied with him, with William Baziotes who also taught there, and Ray Parker, who was kind of a second generation. Bill Rubin felt that because of his association with these people -- his knowledge of Surrealism in that era, and that he'd met a lot of the artists -- that it was he who should be asked to do this exhibition, even though he was, I think, at that time, still in transit.

SZ: He wasn't there.

BR: He wasn't officially there. However, he was a good friend of Clement Greenberg, and Lee Krasner (Pollock) was very angry at Clement Greenberg, and she didn't want a Greenbergian to do the show. Of course, her cooperation was absolutely essential, at that point. So René finally decided that Bill Lieberman had been working on the show, he should step up and do the exhibition, and Jenny and I would be the assistants. Again, she would work on the painting part of the show, I would work on the drawings part of the show. The show was to occupy two spaces in the Museum, what was then called the Garden Wing, and what was called East Wing. Most of the drawings were to be in the East Wing of the Museum.

Jenny and I were good friends at that time, so we all set to work, and I must say we had quite a marvelous time doing it. Bill [Lieberman] always used a wheelchair for his exhibitions, and we used to do things like "whizzing" each other, past the big paintings, to see what happened when you passed them at full speed! We were really [?] -- But we ran up and down the stairs, and there was a certain amount of creative chaos that was very stimulating. One day Bill walked in, as we were installing the show, and he'd found another Pollock drawing that was quite beautiful. So we had to put it into the show.

Other things were going on, also. Lee had brought in someone who had been doing some research on American art, and it was decided that, because Bill Lieberman had so much to do, having taken over both aspects of the show, this man, Francis O'Connor, should do a catalogue. But since he wasn't a writer (he was more of a research person, he had done something about the WPA Artists' Project, and was a careful archivist), that the catalogue for the exhibition would be a chronology. Irene Gordon was the editor on the project, and Harriet Bee was her assistant. So Francis turned in his first draft -- and I had been working with the material that Lee had turned over to us. She had turned over all the letters, all the archives she had, and we had gotten from Pollock's first Jungian analyst the paper he had written about Pollock (which was another interesting story).

So Francis wrote this chronology, I read it, and it contained none of the letters -- which were right there in the filing cabinet -- and there was all sorts of information missing. I came to learn that any time Bill turned something over to me, like that, and asked my opinion, that he felt there was something wrong. So I went to Irene and I said, "Look, I don't know what to do. Because, this is just not complete. Aside from the fact that it's not complete as I know it -- because I know what material we have -- I just don't think it will stand up as a publication," which was pretty nervy of me, as a little whatever-I-was at that time. "There's this and this material." So she looked it over and she said, "You're absolutely right," so we went and told Bill. What Irene proceeded, then, to do was to rewrite the whole chronology. So everybody who was involved with that project knows that it wasn't really Francis O'Connor who did that book, but she got no credit for it whatsoever. Harriet still remembers that, today.

She'll say to me, "You know Francis didn't write that book," and I'll say, "I know, Harriet. You don't have to tell me."

Meanwhile, Bill Rubin was upset that he didn't get to do the show. But, as I said, we really enjoyed it. I recall I got my first long dress for the opening of that show. Herb took me to buy a long, black dress, and I had lost weight, because of running up and down the stairs, so I felt very svelte. Standing on a ladder, just before people came in for the dinner -- because Mr. Weisman, who had lent one of the paintings -- had put a plexibox around it (it was the first plexibox we saw on a work of art), and it had gathered a lot of dust and so forth -- I was giving it its last cleaning, in my long, black dress, before the show opened. The show really was spectacular. It had all the major paintings in it. So that was a very, very good experience.

But Bill had agreed with the Drawing Society, at some point during this process that he was going to write a book about Jackson Pollock's drawings. As you know, from what I've said before and from things Riva has said, Bill just didn't write. So one day he came up to me and said, "You know all about this. You will write the Pollock book." I'd never written a book before, but Bill said, "Write a book," so I sat down to write a book. Harriet Bee became the editor on the book, and it was decided that it had to be a superb publication -- a picture book with an introduction and some ideas about the drawings next to each drawing. We borrowed the drawings, they went to the printer. The printer was in Pennsylvania, and he had a special camera. They photographed the drawings inside this very special camera, then they hand-corrected --

SZ: They were beautiful reproductions.

BR: -- the negatives, the color separations, each one separately. So they were just beautiful reproductions. We had a very good designer for the book, Joe -- I can look inside the book and tell you his name. He was wonderful. It was a wonderful kind of working arrangement, and the supervisor in the production department of the publications was wonderful.

Lee let me into the warehouse to look at all the drawings that were in the warehouse, that nobody had ever seen. I realized -- I think it was after the show -- I realized that the dates on the drawings, the figurative drawings -- it had always been taken for granted that all those were done throughout his lifetime, and I realized that that was totally wrong.

SZ: They were all done before?

BR: All the figurative drawings were done before 1946-'47. So I set out to sort of systematically figure out what their dates might be, and Bill said to me, "One of the things that Paul Sachs taught me was that you start from the known dates, you start from the end, and you work backward. Because you can see what did happen, but you can't predict what will happen." So that was what I did. Then I keyed them, also, to certain paintings, because those were keys. I also realized that what Pollock would do was he would do little sketches, then he would do a whole drawing, a finished drawing, that incorporated what he had made in those little sketches. Those were in parallel with the paintings but were actually quite separate from them. They were not studies. So the study drawings were study drawings for paintings and for drawings. Then I had the date of when Pollock had worked with [Stanley William] Hayter on prints, and part of what was done on that show was -- Virginia Allen had by then come to work for us, Lee gave us the plates and the proofs that Pollock himself had pulled, in 1944 or '45, for those plates, in Hayter's workshop, and a new group of prints was pulled by Gabor Peterdi who was a printmaker who taught at Yale, and whom I had also studied with at Hunter. But she worked separately with him. Then he did a couple of proofs, and he couldn't finish the process. So he suggested a master printer who would do the work, and that was done for Lee. As I said, I had those prints to work with, so when I did the introduction to this book, I wrote it that way. I didn't say, "Nobody ever discovered this," but I just did the redating. So that was very exciting for me.

I know Riva told me she didn't think you could do that sort of thing on Museum time, so, again, early in the morning I would go to work, and I would sit and write. When people came to work, I would lay it aside. I would work with Harriet on the text and

she would say, "No, we have to make it more concise, because we want a nice balance between the text page and that," so I would have to really hone in on my ideas about what these drawings were, and tell a progressive story about each of them, individually." Of course, we went right through the drip works on paper, because there are these extraordinary drip works, on paper. Later on, when Kirk was doing the Pollock show, he called me and said, "There's a controversy. Do you think he did the drip works alongside the big drip paintings?" I said, "No, I don't think so. I think he did them the way he did everything else. He would do a group, in a great burst, and probably he would do them after the big works left the studio," because he had a pattern of sending the big works out of the studio, for the full show -- which would take place in October or November. I said, "I think that's when he would do those drip drawings." But that was much later on.

So that came out. Then what happened was, René was killed, Bates Lowry was hired, and Bill Rubin had come in. I don't remember exactly the order in which all of that happened, but it was all very much connected. Bates turned to Bill Lieberman, as the person with experience, to figure out a new structure for the Paintings department -- with, of course, the pre-set idea that Bill Lieberman and Bill Rubin would work together.

SZ: Where did that pre-set idea come from? Because Bill Lieberman was down in Prints and Drawings.

BR: He was down in Prints and Drawings. But at that point he had done several really wonderful shows.

SZ: Also, Alfred was getting ready to -- wasn't that part of it? To retire?

BR: Ready to retire. Walter Bareiss had enormous respect for Bill Lieberman and his abilities, and probably convinced Paley and the others that Bill Lieberman knew the Museum knew the Museum and Bill Rubin did not, and that they needed someone there who also knew the Museum and museological practices, which Bill Rubin did

not; and that Bill Rubin could do the exhibitions, to a large extent, and that Bill Lieberman would be there for the collection. I think that's how they really felt about it.

This, of course, was a disaster. First of all, Bill Rubin, as we know, was madly ambitious, and what he wanted more than anything else in the world was to replace Alfred Barr as the great scholar of modern art. Of course, after this, René was scarcely ever mentioned. It was Bill Rubin and Alfred Barr, because that was Bill Rubin's ambition. He and Bill Lieberman did not speak the same language. There was simply no way those two men could communicate. Bill [Rubin] was, to put it kindly, a "fantast." He would make things up, and really come to believe them. He was an actor. I recall once, when we were working on the Pollock show, I was sitting at the big desk in the back that Riva used to have. I had a flat file behind me, for drawings, and I had a lot of drawings in there, because I would look at them as I worked on the book. Bill had me take those drawings into the print room, where we had these magnificent, locked, wooden flat files, and put them in there. He paraded Lee in, with me trailing behind him, and said, "Look in what a beautiful place these drawings are." Of course, they were just as safe behind me, but it was that kind of thing. That's only a mild example.

Bill Rubin was brutally forthright. I remember once he wrote a memo to me, while I was still in the Drawing and Prints department, asking me to do something. I met him in the hall and I said, "Of course I'll take care of this for you, but you should know that that kind of request should be addressed to the department head. Even though you know I'll do the work, you ask the department head." And he said, "I don't understand this place."

But Bill [Lieberman] decided he wanted certain people with him in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, and he once asked me who I thought should be head of the Prints department. He was very friendly then with Donald Karshan and I thought, "Oh, he's going to bring Karshan in. He said no, he was thinking of Riva, what did I think of that? And I said, "Oh, I think that's wonderful. That would really be terrific." But, at that time, he wasn't talking about her being the head; that she would --

SZ: He would be the head, but --

BR: -- that he would supervise her. Of course, Elaine Johnson would remain with the drawings, but the drawings would actually be, formally, a part of the Painting and Sculpture department, even though Prints would not. Elaine would remain downstairs on the fourth floor (this became very important -- downstairs, upstairs), and remain with the drawings. He would be in charge, and she would have Martha Beck and Joan Rosenbaum to work with her. We'd all been working together at that point. I would go upstairs with him, Virginia would go upstairs with him, and he had hired Meg [Margaret Potter] -- I don't remember Meg's last name now -- for the Painting and Sculpture department. But because the place had to be physically done over up there, to accommodate everybody, she sat downstairs with us for a number of months, before we all went upstairs. At one point Jenny and Kynaston called me upstairs to talk to them, and they said, look, they just didn't want to work with Bill Lieberman; they just thought he was a terrible person and they were really against him. They really felt threatened by the whole thing. I said, "You know, I've worked for him a long time. There are things about his personality that can be trying, but he's been very, very generous about letting me work, giving me things to do, and also bringing things along. I don't think you really need to worry."

So that made us into enemies, because they had already decided that there was going to be a battle, and that everybody had to --

SZ: -- take sides.

BR: -- take sides. I was very naive. I never got to be smart, politically. Never. I didn't know this would make us enemies, but they knew they were drawing the line. Also, at that time, Bill (we had three Bills at one point), Bill Agee had been hired as a curator. There was room for him upstairs, so he was up there, and he was part of the "upstairs group." But anybody who came upstairs, including Meg -- who was not part of the Drawing department -- became the "enemy." This, I think, was instigated not so much by Bill Lieberman as by Betsy [Jones]. She and Bill [Lieberman] had been enemies for years. In fact, at one point Bill said to me, "I'm going to get rid of Betsy

Jones." Of course, Bill Lieberman was never capable of getting rid of anybody, and the first thing he did when he went upstairs was to try to give Betsy things that made her feel good, that she was in charge of. But the enmity was so strong that that there was no way of getting around it. This was a woman who had worked for years and years and years under Alfred. None of those people had ever been shown any gratitude, and here was a young guy who, when he was a young guy, had been [?] --

SZ: -- and he got everything.

BR: -- and he got everything. She would never forgive him. In fact, when I did the Pollock book -- which was in conjunction with the Drawing Society, it was decided that there had to be a party for that, because of the Drawing Society. She and Sarah and somebody else ganged up to me, "Why do you have a party? Why are you so important?"

SZ: So it wasn't just these two men, it was really a lot of staff people who were really, also --

BR: -- fomenting.

SZ: -- not happy.

BR: -- not happy. Not happy at all. They all felt --

SZ: How about Bates in this? Where was he?

BR: Well, Bates --

SZ: Was he already running into trouble?

BR: Bates never got a handle on it. He thought he was running a group of happy academics, and he didn't realize all the in-built, structural problems that had been

there for years and years -- these emotions -- and the loss of René, as the great father figure. Of course, he was "tall" but he wasn't a great father figure. He just simply didn't know how to put it together. Then, to put these two personalities together, who simply didn't know how to talk to each other -- although there was certainly plenty of work that everybody could have done, everybody wanted to do the same thing, shows and so forth. Bill would have meetings with the whole staff, he would ask for exhibition suggestions, and he was careful to try to spread things out and make people feel like each one was going to get a share. But it simply didn't work. Whatever it was that anyone got, they felt they should have gotten the thing that the other person got. Or, it wasn't exactly the thing they wanted to do. Of course, he made a lot of mistakes. Bill [Lieberman] could have a lot of sympathy with people, then be very stupid with them, so it just didn't work with the two of them, and it got worse and worse.

Finally, my Pollock book was published, and in the meantime I had started to go to the Institute. In 1965 I went up there, because I decided at that point that, while the Museum had been very informal and they had not required degrees, that that was going to happen; that as we got titles, etc., it was definitely going to happen. So I went to the Institute. I took one course a semester, and I used my vacation and holidays for studying. I would save up my time to study for exams. Another thing that happened with the Pollock book was, I had been given this assignment by Charles Sterling -- You were to do two papers at that time, you didn't do a master's thesis. I had done one paper for Robert Goldwater about whether or not there was a tradition, a sculptural tradition. Because Bill Rubin was always saying that in the 20th century -- or, actually, from Bernini on -- sculpture was always dependent upon painting. So I had done that as a paper. Then Charles Sterling wanted to know -- You know that triptych that's up at the Cloisters, now, which is attributed to Campin at that time was attributed to somebody called the Master of Flémelle. He was a great scholar of medieval, transitional-to-Renaissance art.

So I was going to Israel with Herb, who represented (and still represents) the United Jewish Appeal, and he used to go to a lot of meetings in Israel. We had this ticket, so he said, "You go to Brussels, and you go to London on the way. Go to Berlin, and

look at these pictures by these lesser people, and you figure out how they're related to this painting. Are they lesser masters, working at the time? What is the story about this?" So Herb and I do this, we go to Brussels, he tells me to look up this man who's the curator at the library there, but not to write to him because he might get the idea I was trying to steal his ideas from him. So we go there, and, of course, he's been in London for ten years. So, in the midst of all this paranoia --

TAPE 3, SIDE 2

BR: I come back from this trip (and Sterling was a curator at the Louvre, as well as being a professor at the Institute), he's not there, but I go to Colin Eisler, who was standing in for him with his students who had these kinds of assignments. He said to me, "What? You had to do that, too? He sent four other people." I said, "But Colin, there's not a paper in it. I can explain in three paragraphs that these people are parallel with him, not advanced in any way. They saw prints of the paintings, just updated their paintings a little bit, and there's nothing more to say. I have no paper." He said, "No, you don't. Especially since he's given it to four other people, also, to do." So he went to bat for me to use the Jackson Pollock book as my second paper -- which, in ordinary circumstances, might have been a Ph.D. degree, since I had thoroughly redone the -- but, he said, "It's difficult, because it's published, and they don't like to take published work." I had made these scrapbooks in which I had dated all the drawings. I had these little photographs I had made of them, so he submitted those also and they let me use it.

The book came out, and at the same time there had been the idea that Lee wanted a catalogue raisonné of Jackson Pollock, so Bill told her I would do the catalogue raisonné. This was very hush-hush. By this time, Dick Oldenburg was the director. I was not exactly happy about doing this, because it was the kind of detail work that I really hated to do -- although I had done a lot of cataloguing, and I had actually catalogued the Theatre Arts Collection under Elaine Johnson's direction, because she was superb at that kind of detail. She always vetted our cataloguing, and she really taught me how to research and catalogue material that wasn't just immediate, but had historical roots. I knew that, even though the material interested me and I

was interested in research, I was not interested in this kind of thing. And I'd just been through collating these hundreds of drawings, which had driven me crazy, however interesting, and I didn't want to spend the rest of my life, practically, as it seemed to me then (it was at least two or three years of work), writing letters, "Do you know where --?" and whatever. Irene Gordon came to me and she was horrified. She said, "You don't want to do this. This is not your talent. Your talent is the overview. Even though you use the detail, your talent is really the overview." I said, "I don't want to do it, Irene, but I'm not being given a choice, here."

So that was the situation. Then Bill Rubin heard about it. I was at home one evening and he called up, raving, shouting in my ear for an hour. "Where do you have the nerve to think that you could do a Jackson Pollock catalogue raisonné?" (you see, he was still smarting about the Pollock show) and on and on and on. I don't remember most of the conversation. I was just sitting there -- yes, no, no, yes, no -- with the phone held a little away from my ear. He was beside himself.

And that was it. He had my book, and he said, "I am going to read your book." So he actually sat up and read it that night, and the next morning he called me back and apologized. He said, "Clearly, you know a lot about Pollock, and your book is very, very good. I think we can work together."

SZ: On the catalogue.

BR: On the catalogue raisonné. Which of course, meant that I could do all the work.

SZ: And he'd just put his name on it.

BR: Well, I don't think he would have just put his name on it. I think he would have contributed. But I think the major part of the sleaze work would have been mine. So he went ranting into Dick Oldenburg, and Dick Oldenburg did not know what to do about this situation. In the meantime (all these things come together) there had been this brief René d'Harnoncourt Study Center, but we'll get back to that. While we had been in some other reconstructing phase -- no, that comes later. What happened

was, the museum in Copenhagen wanted to do a Matisse show, so they wanted to have reciprocal relations with The Museum of Modern Art, so the Museum would let them have the Museum's Matisses. They sent an invitation to the Museum to have someone come to a seminar at the Louisiana Museum, because the Louisiana Museum had this wonderful facility. It was a beautiful boat/guesthouse, where they were having curators from Germany and Holland, along with Danish curators. So Bill and Dick decided to get me out of Bill Rubin's sight by sending me off to this thing, right? Then there was a great deal of jealousy about why was I going to Europe, when nobody else got to go to Europe.

SZ: Jealousy on the part of some of the other -- ?

BR: -- on the part of some of the other staff people, because at that point nobody ever had any travel money except the department heads, and they had discretionary funds. Their favorite trustee would give them money for these kinds of things.

So off I went to this conference, and I was one of the few women there. It was very interesting to me, because I learned at that conference that there was a whole generation missing of the German curators. Most of the museum directors, actually, had come in from other professions, after the war, because what happened during the war was, the art historians had left. Actually, the Warburgs and people like that had brought them out of Germany, to save them, and that's how what's called the Courtauld-Warburg Institute started in London, and that was how the Institute of Fine Arts started in New York. These guys, one of them, I remember, was a journalist, others were historians --

SZ: You mean, these museum directors.

BR: These new museum directors in Germany. They were young, and they were trying to put together a whole new museum system for Germany. Germany had started what was then an every-four-year exhibition Documenta, so the people who did that were there. It was just fascinating to me, it was a whole new world. Then I came back to the Museum and to the reality, where, at that point, Dick, I think, finally decided that

the Museum would not do the Pollock catalogue raisonné. He was perfectly right. We didn't have the money to do it, and we couldn't afford either my time or Bill Rubin's time.

SZ: Did Yale end up doing it?

BR: What happened was that Gene Thaw, who was a great friend of Lee's [Krasner], had been very, very successful as a dealer and made a lot of money, and had a scholarly background, wanted to work on the catalogue raisonné. Lee brought in her old friend, Francis O'Connor, who, I think, had learned to be a little more thorough at that point. Meanwhile, the background of the Museum -- the intense turmoil over unionization and so forth -- because the book didn't come out until -- I don't remember when the book came out -- *Jackson Pollock: Works on Paper* -- I don't think I have the date of the book, whether it was early '70s or late --

SZ: 1970.

BR: 1970. So I'd been working on it for a couple years. I think I started after the circulating exhibition of *Jackson Pollock: Works on Paper*.

SZ: Maybe we could finish up the resolution of the two-Bills issue now? Or do you have a different plan, in terms of the way you're thinking about things?

BR: Well, the resolution of the two-Bills issue, as you know, took a very long time and had several episodes.

SZ: And, actually, it was intertwined with all the turmoil and the changing directorships and stuff like that. So I'll let you do it your way.

BR: Yes, and I'll try to tell it in a way that's understandable. It also had me taking over from Bill for a certain period of time. Okay. John Hightower came in in 1970. Meanwhile, we had trio of [?] -- and I had been doing some exhibitions for South America. In 1969 we decided to do a filler exhibition downstairs, because something

happened and an exhibition fell through. The Museum had this wonderful Calder collection, so it was decided that an exhibition should be done from the collection, and that Wilder Green should work with me. So the Perlses, I guess, wanted me to go -- they wanted me to write a catalogue, a little catalogue. I guess, also -- I don't know who it was -- wanted me to meet Calder. But I was sent off to France in November of '68, or '69, to visit Calder. Bill Lieberman had also been talking with the people who had been Brâncuși's caretakers, and had inherited a lot from him -- the two Romanians who lived next door to him, whose names I do not remember. They evidently had notebooks of Brâncuși's. At that time Dick was still Director of Publications, and this was done on his budget. Dick was always a tremendous tightwad. He related to the Museum money as though it were coming out of his own pocket. I'm sure you've heard that before.

So somebody from Publications went with me, Françoise Boas, and she was to evaluate this Brâncuși material. I was to go and meet Calder, and my plan was to do an interview with him but the Perlses warned me that his speech wasn't very good. They told me he had had a stroke -- which I later found out wasn't true, he just had speech problems. He had been an alcoholic, and he was not allowed to drink anymore and so forth, and they really didn't think I would get very much from him that would be interesting. But, in any case, the idea was to go and meet him.

So Françoise and I went to Paris, first to see the Romanians -- where they wined and dined us and took us to Brâncuși's tomb. I was not a very good drinker. I recall one day we had to meet them, they took us to lunch and we had lots of wine. Then we went to this *cimetière* at Montparnasse to look at the grave. Then we came back, and they gave us a whole chocolate cake, which we had to devour, then went out to dinner and had to drink more wine, again. Françoise got so she would recognize the signs when I couldn't drink anymore. She said, "You would go ghastly white and turn green around the edges." We did that for a couple of days, and she thought there was really interesting material.

Then we hired a car and started driving to through Loire Valley. We had instructions. It was a terrible, stormy day, driving through the Loire Valley, and as we listened to

the radio we realized it was the middle of a hurricane -- which very seldom happens in France. They were digging up the roads, they had removed all the signs and markers, and I just don't know how, in the semi-darkness, with this wind howling around us, we ever got there. There were all these trucks on the road, and Françoise had night blindness. I had never driven in Paris, so she drove us out of Paris, with the "priorité à droite," which was still in force, then. Then I took over and did the driving, and every time we got behind one of these trucks, in a storm, I would drive off into a parking lot and wait until the trucks went by. I don't know if you want this level of detail, but it was immensely funny.

We finally, somehow, got to the Calder house, where he took us in, and was very, very convivial. It was the old house which was built on top of a "cave," an old "cave" that had been carved out of the rocks. It was the most extraordinary atmosphere. You could see that he had made utensils that hung on the walls, and [Louisa Calder] made rugs from his designs. All [Louisa] did was talk about how the "peasants lived such dull and dreary lives," and she would do these things so "they could see there could be color in their lives," because this was still a very backward part of France, when they got there.

Calder had arranged for us to stay at his daughter's in-laws' house. One of his daughters had married the sculptor Jo Davidson's son, and they had a chateau nearby that they had turned into a chateau-hotel. But, of course, it wasn't running in November and they were off somewhere. They left their son and the maid to take care of us. Calder led us over there in his car, and I couldn't get this little car up this very steep grade. Finally, he pushed me over and he drove the car up this steep hill. It was just all so funny.

Our first night we had dinner at the chateau, then Calder went home and went to sleep. The next day I went down and started this process -- which, of course, was lovely because we got to know each other -- but I didn't get that much information. I did not get an "interview," but I got a lot of information.

SZ: And you did the show.

BR: And I did the show. He gave me a stack of gouaches as a gift for the Drawing department, and he made some special loans for the exhibition. Subsequently, we sent the exhibition to South America, to travel, with his loans. I wrote this pamphlet -- I came back and it had to be done. I wrote this pamphlet over Thanksgiving weekend, with Irene Gordon as my editor. I sat at a table, she sat opposite me, and I typed. She said, "You just keep typing, and I'll cut it apart and put it together." Because we had two days to do this.

So that's how we did it. She was remarkable. She could make anybody look good, no matter what she did. Later, this was called, in *The New York Times*, "the best piece that had ever been written about Calder." So it was very crazy in some ways, what you could suddenly do under pressure. But, in any case, Dick was upset with me because he felt I had spent his money and I hadn't come back with a Calder interview. He didn't want to bother with the Romanians, because he felt they wanted a lot of money. He just didn't want to do that. But it was great for me because later, when the Calders came to New York, they came to the house for dinner. Then a couple years later Herb and I went back to France, they had a new house by then, and we were able to visit them in the new house. It was thrilling.

SZ: I was going to say -- it must have been.

BR: It was absolutely thrilling.

SZ: You were obviously doing well, just learning what this was.

BR: Yes, and that was really how you learned at the Museum of Modern Art. I don't think people did that in any museum, anywhere. That was so special, in that way. So maybe we should end there.

END INTERVIEW