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Oral history interview with Narcissa  
Swift King, 1991 Oct. 7-1992 Jan. 20

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## **Transcript**

### **Preface**

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Narcissa Swift King on October 7, 1991 and January 20, 1992. The interview took place in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and was conducted by Suzan Campbell for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. Additional information from the original transcript has been added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution.

### **Interview**

[00:00:04.42]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: It's October 7, 1991. And we're going to have a conversation about Georgia O'Keeffe and New Mexico during the 1940s and 50s and during the extent of Mrs. King's friendship with Ms. O'Keeffe. The Archives of American Art is responsible and sponsoring this interview. The interview is being conducted with the understanding that Mrs. King agrees to the verbatim recording of an interview with Suzan Campbell, representing the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and does further dedicate to the public all copyright interest in the interview.

[00:00:44.35]

It is understood by Mrs. King that the interview and any transcription will be owned and maintained in the collection of the Archives and will be made available to scholars and qualified researchers in accordance with Archives policy, subject to any restrictions that she may state. Do you have any restrictions on the content of this interview?

[00:01:07.10]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: [I have no restrictions. -Ed.]

[00:01:07.28]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: There will be no restrictions on the content of the interview. So let's begin. Mrs. King, tell me how you met Georgia O'Keeffe, if you will.

[00:01:16.19]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, of course. I was living in New York, and it was 1940. And at a party, I met both Georgia and Mabel Luhan and was put next to them at some table or tea

table. I can't remember what it was, but the three of us were together. And Mabel was in New York to try to form another salon, which she had had long, many years before in New York.

[00:01:46.37]

And Georgia, of course, lived in New York at that time, and had for many, many years with Stieglitz. We became friends right away. And I saw them both apart and together. And we had a very nice time. And something was said about a car. And I said I left my car in Chicago where I lived. And Georgia said, "Well, I have a car. And I need I need a driver because I'm not a very good driver."

[00:02:20.16]

And I said, "What do you need it for?" And then came out this thing. She said, "Everybody thinks I've been rotten to Stieglitz because I've been going out to Santa Fe—" to Taos and Santa Fe—the Ghost Ranch, actually. "And the reason I go there is because it means everything to me, and I paint. So I like to paint there," and blah, blah, blah. "And so what I have in mind is to go and see if there are any houses or summer houses around New York where Stieglitz would like to go with me, and if it would suit me to paint there."

[00:03:00.53]

Now, this is something that I've heard people talk about Georgia and on that subject so many times of how mean she was and left him alone and so on and so on, because he was mean to her too, at times. Anyway, so I said, "Well, I'd love to. I'd love to see the houses. And I'd love to go with you. And that's fine." So for about two weeks, I'd pick her up. We lived very close to one another in New York.

[00:03:27.23]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Where was that?

[00:03:28.44]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: She lived in a big, ugly apartment building about two blocks from the river, the East River. And I lived in an adorable little made-over cold water flat on Sutton Place, very attractive—small, but a view of the river and just wonderful. New York used to be wonderful in those days.

[00:03:51.49]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I can imagine.

[00:03:52.26]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Pathetic what's happened to it. Anyway, so we started out. And it was about two weeks. We she had a whole list from a real estate agent, of course. And some of the houses were very attractive, but they were not really for her. And every day that I brought her back to her apartment and left her in the car, she would look at me and say, "Narcissa, tell me the truth. Can you see me in any of those houses we saw today?"

[00:04:18.61]

And I had to tell the truth. And I said, "No, I don't see you in any of those houses." So the upshot was that she really tried. She really did try. And occasionally I'd see something about the house that might be attractive to her and called her attention to it. But she agreed. But it wasn't. It wasn't, it just wasn't.

[00:04:38.13]

So then she said—oh, Mabel had invited me to—I was going out to California, had made the plans long, long ago, long before, in the summer. And Mabel said, please stop and stay with me for a few days in Taos. I said, "I'd love to." So we kept in touch. And I was to go. My car was still in Chicago. And Georgia said, "Well, if you like this car—" and I adored it. It was a sporty Chrysler Roadster, as I remember. And it reminded me of one that I'd had a few years before.

[00:05:14.62]

So she said, "If you will drive me to Mabel's, I'll drop you off at Mabel's and go down to the Ghost Ranch," where she was to spend the summer. "And then you can have the use of the car while you're in Taos and then leave it when you go away," and go out to California or whatever, Arizona. So that was the plan. And I drove her. And that was when you really get to know somebody on an automobile trip.

[00:05:43.51]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I can imagine.

[00:05:44.63]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And she was not in very good health. And she really, more or less lived on powders. And I would see her putting the powders in a glass and some water. And I just have a vision of her doing that. Ate very little. And she was not a whiny person at all, but she just wasn't feeling too well. So we got to Mabel's. And the gates were locked, and there was a letter in the gate for me, telling me that she was in Albuquerque in the hospital for something, some abscess or something or other. But it wouldn't be long, and for me to go to a guest ranch in Taos until she came back.

[00:06:31.15]

So I showed it to Georgia—the letter, the note. And Georgia said, "Well, you don't want to go." It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. She said, "I will call my hostess and see if she has an extra guest room." And her hostess was that famous Rebecca James, who lived there for so long after she was [divorced from -Ed.] Paul Strand, who was a famous photographer in those days. And Rebecca said, "Yes, I have another room. Bring your friend along," which she did. When we got there, she said, "I'm having a little cocktail party for Georgia. So hurry up and get yourselves fixed up." And there, I met my husband at the cocktail party.

[00:07:13.14]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Is that right?

[00:07:13.79]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: That is when I met him. And if it hadn't been for Mabel's illness and my going that way, I probably never would have met him.

[00:07:19.80]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: That is astounding. Then I'm sure you can tell me the month, day, and year that that happened.

[00:07:25.97]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I can tell you that it was in June of 1940.

[00:07:31.11]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: So the party where you met Georgia and Mabel must have been in the spring of 1940?

[00:07:35.78]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: No, it was in the summer of 1940.

[00:07:37.45]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh, so all of this happened in a very short period. I see.

[00:07:39.45]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Very short time, yes, yes.

[00:07:41.48]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I had an impression of many more months unfolding.

[00:07:45.11]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: No, well,—

[00:07:46.08]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: This happened in a matter of weeks.

[00:07:46.89]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, it would happen in the time—yes well, it happened. Not meeting her, I met her in the fall [of 1939 -Ed.]. And we became friends during the winter. And then it was in the spring [of 1940 -Ed.] that I took her to those houses in around New York.

[00:08:00.49]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: So it was In the fall of '39 where you met her at the party.

[00:08:03.26]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, exactly, exactly, exactly.

[00:08:06.03]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: And then in the spring of 1940, you took her on this house-shopping expedition.

[00:08:10.37]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes. And then drove her out—

[00:08:12.14]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: And drove her out to Taos.

[00:08:16.34]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes. So that's what happened. And I went to the Ghost Ranch, of course, to take her there, and saw where she was staying. She was staying—it was a dude ranch at that time, as you might undoubtedly know. And she [had] spent the summer[s] there. Now you see, everything more or less that I can tell you is hearsay because I didn't see anything. I mean, that was the extent of my of my friendship with Georgia, because I didn't live out here at all. I was here for a short time and met some of the painters in Taos and met and had some friends in here. The Harveys were great friends of mine. In those days, they were wheeling and dealing with the Harvey houses and railroads and so on. So what else can I tell you? She used to tell me—she would say to me, "Why are you so interested in Mabel?" And the fact is—and it's really not pertinent to anything much—but Georgia wasn't very interesting [to me—Ed.].

[00:09:25.62]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: As an individual?

[00:09:26.44]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: As an individual, no, she wasn't. I remember on the way out, there were those periods of silence, as there always is on a long motor trip. And I thought, well, what can I get her to talk about? So I decided, which I love to do, to find out that if she were not herself, couldn't be herself, what woman would she like to be? What would she choose to be? And she looked at me in horrified astonishment. She said, "Well, I've never thought of anything like that!" And I said, "Well, think of something like that." [They laugh.]

[00:09:56.94]

She could not imagine being anybody but herself. You see, that would be not possible. So

she said, "Well, what about you?" And I said, "Well, I think I'd like to be Indira Gandhi because I'd like to be the president of a great big country, wouldn't you?" And she said, "I can't think of anything like that." And that was that. But we had a very nice time, really a very nice time because she loved the West and so did I. I'd been in the West many times. I had some relatives who had a ranch in Arizona and had been out there a lot and had been here [in Santa Fe -Ed.], but not for very long.

[00:10:33.21]

But I'll tell you a few anecdotes, if they they'll amuse you. You don't have to use them. But to give you an give you an example of her manners and the way she treated people. In this little place where I was living then on Sutton Place, above me was a young man that I'd met, I guess because we lived in there. It doesn't matter how I met him, but we became pretty good friends. [...]

[00:11:02.08]

And when he heard that I knew Georgia, he said, "Would you please ask her to come to tea some day with you? I'd love to meet—" He loved names, names and that kind of thing. Well, his uncle had been married to an ambassador to Russia at that time. Had been just back from it. [...]

[00:11:34.70]

So I said, "Well, I'll ask her if she wants to come. She may or may not. She's very opinionated and doesn't want to do anything she doesn't want to do." And I'm very much in favor of that attitude. I've been that way myself often. Anyway, so I said to Georgia, I had this friend who lived above me [in this apartment -Ed.]. And he had been visiting them in Russia, which was slightly interesting in those days. I said, you might like—he'd just come back from Russia and blah, blah, blah. And she said, "Yes, I would like to do that."

[00:12:03.98]

So we went, and we had tea. And I brought him out a bit because of some amusing anecdotes in Russia and so on. And she sat there. Time to go, we went to the door. And he said "Oh, Miss O'Keefe, I can't tell you how much I will treasure this meeting with you." And I'm very sloppy and very overly done, I thought. And he said, "And I hope you'll come again." She looked at him and said, "I won't," and walked through the door. And that was it.

[00:12:37.08]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: [Laughs.] Really?

[00:12:37.40]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, yes, she was that way.

[00:12:39.30]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Blunt.

[00:12:39.62]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Could be blunt and hurtfully rude.

[00:12:43.52]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Do you think that she had a perception of her effect in that instance, or in other instances?

[00:12:48.23]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: You know, I never could figure that out, whether she did it for effect or whether or whether she just—

[Telephone ringing.] I'm not going to answer that. My maid will if she's around. Because it takes me so long to get over there. That's the one thing I hate about this getting well.

[00:13:04.17]

Another thing, I had a letter from her after I left her car, after that short time. A friend of mine came up from Chicago in my car, and so he drove me up. He followed me up to Georgia, to the Ghost Ranch. And I think we had a drink or something, a Coke or something like that. And I was in my Levi's and boots and the way I would be in Arizona, and the way I had been right along in Taos. But dusty, and I had a few drinks. I mean, I never had any alcohol problem, but I mean, I probably had a liquor breath. That could well be.

[00:13:43.04]

Well anyway, so when I got back, I my mother was spending the summer on Cape Cod. And I went to join her and my sister. And I wrote her a letter and thanking her for the car and so on because she had plenty to thank me for. But it was something that I liked to do, so there was nothing to it, you know what I mean? Anyway, she wrote me and she said, "Dear Narcissa—" I have to get this right because it's so funny. "Your car, when you returned it to me, was in the same condition you were, very messy and unattractive." [They laugh.] I treasure that. I think it's one of the funniest things.

[00:14:24.72]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: That is—

[00:14:25.41]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Isn't it wonderful?

[00:14:26.23]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: You got a note to that effect?

[00:14:27.12]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes.

[00:14:27.51]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh, I think that's fabulous.

[00:14:29.44]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, that was in the letter. And I wrote her back and said, "What did you expect me to be like? I'd been driving all over and dusty and had lunch on the way," and blah, blah, blah and was—wrote her just such a letter she wrote me. But it didn't mean anything. I mean, we corresponded and met each other in Chicago [and Paris, etcetera – Ed.]. When after I got married to Clinton, we never—we both despised the name Clinton. So I always called him King, and so did all his friends.

[00:14:59.12]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh, how wonderful.

[00:15:00.19]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I don't like the name Clinton. And there's something about it. Try to say it. It gets your tongue all mixed up at the teeth.

[00:15:06.42]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I'm that way with names and words too. And I never know why.

[00:15:10.32]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, if they don't—if I don't like them, I try not to use them.

[00:15:13.00]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, I like King. Fortunately, he had that name, too.

[00:15:15.73]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, it was very nice. Well, anyway. But during all of this, of course, I heard about Mabel and the jealousies and the goings on. I never heard a word about any lesbian stuff. Now, I may just not have heard it. But I was around with people who knew them all very well. And I never heard it. Well, Mabel wrote a book long before I met her, when she was very young, saying that she'd had some little experience with a friend of hers, a schoolgirl friend of hers. And that was it, I mean, as far as—

[00:15:52.83]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, my opinion—my grandmother and I used to talk about these things. And my opinion is that schoolgirl crushes are quite common.

[00:16:00.16]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: They are. Of course, they are.

[00:16:01.90]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: And [inaudible] schoolgirls.

[00:16:02.40]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: In fact, when I went to Farmington, Miss Porter's (because my mother had gone there) they encouraged the new girls to act like swain to the older girls and give them flowers in the springtime. I mean this. And it was perfectly—it couldn't have been more innocent. But it could have developed into something. I thought, later on, when I knew more about homosexuality—I didn't know anything about it in those days. But it happens very, very often, I mean, a kind of a schoolgirl crush. But anyway, how did we get off on that? Somebody sent me some pages from one. And I thought it was outrageous. I can't remember who wrote it.

[00:16:44.86]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, it might have been the book by Benita Eisler.

[00:16:49.09]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I don't know any of their names.

[00:16:50.64]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: In any event, there have been many, many books. And I want to ask you to go back to Mabel's house in 1940, the first summer that you were there, did you ever spend time with her? Or did she not return from the hospital?

[00:17:03.92]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: She didn't return from the hospital [for several days, but I didn't visit her -Ed.]. Besides, I got mixed up—not mixed up, but got used to [seeing -Ed.] Clinton King, who was living in the same guest ranch that I was. And we were together all the time.

[00:17:14.47]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I see.

[00:17:15.08]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And Mabel loved—one of her famous faults was she loved to break up friendships and marriages, as I'm sure you've heard.

[00:17:25.67]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yes.

[00:17:26.87]



NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And she was infuriated that I had met him, you see, and was already established with his friends and the woman who had the guest ranch, who couldn't have been nicer. And everybody loved her in Taos in those days.

[00:17:38.88]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Do you remember who that was?

[00:17:39.58]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes. Her name was—if you hadn't asked me, I would have told you—Ruth Swain.

[00:17:44.79]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh, Ruth Swain was also a very good friend of Rebecca James.

[00:17:49.23]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, she certainly was.

[00:17:50.49]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: What was Ruth's guest ranch called, do you remember?

[00:17:52.86]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: It was just a—what was it called, did you say? I don't remember what it was called.

[00:17:57.12]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Do you know where it was?

[00:17:58.14]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: It was on Ranchos, a little road that comes up from the main road into Taos.

[00:18:04.09]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yes. How long did you stay with Rebecca?

[00:18:07.54]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: About ten days.

[00:18:08.89]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: In her compound there on Bent Street?

[00:18:11.40]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, and then went down. Then I went on my way.

[00:18:14.56]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I see. So you didn't stay at Ruth Swain's guest ranch during that ten-day period?

[00:18:20.68]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: That's where I stayed.

[00:18:21.39]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh, so you weren't at Rebecca's house then?

[00:18:23.28]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, no, no. I just spent that one night.

[00:18:24.70]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Just the one night at Rebecca's?

[00:18:25.58]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I would never have imposed on somebody I didn't know.

[00:18:29.14]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: And then Georgia went after that one night, went down to Ghost Ranch.

[00:18:31.03]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, I took her down there and came back in her car, and had the car, and met King's friends, and had a wonderful time. And then I was very messy and unattractive when I [laughs]—according to Georgia, when I returned.

[00:18:47.67]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Went back to Ghost Ranch to take her her car?

[00:18:48.54]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: [Laughs.] Yes, when I went, yes.

[00:18:51.39]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: How did you get from Ghost Ranch down from—

[00:18:53.14]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: My friend from Chicago came with me.

[00:18:54.98]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Followed you?

[00:18:55.29]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Followed me [from Taos -Ed.], yes, in my car.

[00:18:57.67]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah, I'm just trying to make sure that I get this clearly.

[00:18:59.17]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, of course. Well, then what? You asked me a question, and I—just a second ago. Oh—

[00:19:07.29]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Whether you had—whether you did see Mabel that summer or—

[00:19:10.86]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: No, because she was heard to say and came back to me, "If I knew Mrs. Swift, I would call her and tell her that her daughter is going around with a very disreputable man." And the disreputable was that he was a great friend of her son, John.

[00:19:26.25]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: This is King?

[00:19:27.48]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes.

[00:19:27.92]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I see.

[00:19:28.68]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And John. And they used to—well that was in the days when everybody drank a great deal. They weren't alcoholics. They just were heavy drinkers. And I was, too. And certainly King was. And so she acted very put out, Mabel did. So I said, to hell with her. But we made up after I got married. And she invited us to dinner several times. And we just we resumed our friendship in New York.

[00:19:57.58]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I see. I'd like to know something about you. Because I think who you are is important in relationship to your friendship, both with Georgia O'Keeffe and with King and the other artists here.

[00:20:09.45] [...]

[00:20:27.09]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I grew up in Chicago and went to boarding school, as all my friends did in the East, and made my debut, and had a lot of fun. Always liked artists. And I never was—responded much to my businessmen young beaus and so on. And well, just had a wonderful time.

[00:20:52.04]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Could you tell me, was Clinton King the first suitor or the first man you met that you took seriously enough to want to marry?

[00:21:00.36]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, no, I had—no, no, not at all.

[00:21:03.53] [...]

[00:21:04.88]

There's nothing fascinating about it. It's just that I was able to do what I wanted to do and not get married if I didn't want to. I had plenty of beaus, plenty of them everywhere, and had a wonderful time. And I didn't want to marry anybody that didn't have the kind of life I wanted, which was a free life.

[00:21:25.11]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, tell me about Clinton King. What attracted you to him at that first meeting?

[00:21:28.44]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, he was just astoundingly attractive-looking and attractive, period. And he came from a rather rich family in Texas—not the King ranch family. But his father started a candy—well, was in oil and things like that—started a candy business, which became very, very successful. Everybody of a certain age remembers Kings Candy because it was such—so good. And they made it there and everything in Fort Worth.

[00:22:02.00]

And he had two brothers, both of whom were average, normal young men. But he was—always had a flair for—he loved music and wanted to study music. But his father wouldn't allow, wouldn't put it up—put up with it. He said, I didn't want a—he didn't want a long-haired son—typically Texas.

[00:22:21.59]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: [Laughs.] In those days?

[00:22:22.68]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: In those days.

[00:22:23.36]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: The long hair was an issue?

[00:22:24.69]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, it was—

[00:22:25.65]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: That's an interesting sort of symbol.

[00:22:26.93]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, there was no—it was—well, always musicians have had long hair. Well, anyway, so he then—and this is interesting, because this very evening, I'm going to see the daughter of the woman who gave him his first lessons in painting.

[00:22:43.85]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: For heaven's sakes.

[00:22:45.18]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And I heard him talk about her so much. He said she was a darling. And his father was furious. But he had lessons, and he obviously was very obviously talented, very talented. So he made some portraits and some watercolors and sold them there in Fort Worth and went to Paris, where he stayed quite a few years and became a good painter—very good painter. Everything in this house is—he had many periods, different periods of technique, which because he was very—he was creatively restless, which I liked.

[00:23:25.77]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I do, too.

[00:23:27.29]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And all these—everything in this house on the walls are his—he has done. And they show the different periods. Those are entirely of prints. Which he—do you know what the difference between an intaglio print and a lithograph is that the intaglio print—do you know this?

[00:23:48.66]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah, I know something about it.

[00:23:49.78]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, they do it only on one plaque, whereas the—and it's very different from the lithograph, which has so many for the—a plaque for every color, even if it's just this. These are all intaglio prints from the same plaque.

[00:24:03.53]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Beautiful pieces.

[00:24:04.07]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And he was experimenting in the different colors to decide which he'd make the edition from, and happened to keep them. And I came—

[00:24:12.48]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: They're beautiful as a set.

[00:24:13.01]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: They're marvelous, just marvelous. People just—

[00:24:15.86]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Ten pieces.

[00:24:16.54]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: —rant and rave about that wall.

[00:24:19.43]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Which one did he settle on, this one?

[00:24:21.24]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: This one. Yes.

[00:24:23.07]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: That's the one I would have guessed. I'm so happy. [Laughs.]

[00:24:25.64]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, you're very—

[00:24:27.50]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I'm happy when I'm right because I find the artistic mind, the process to be not available to us always.

[00:24:33.86]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: It isn't always.

[00:24:34.89]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: That's a very beautiful, beautiful piece.

[00:24:38.72]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: It's been very successful.

[00:24:40.91]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: What took him to Taos? How was it that he was in Taos for you to meet him on that auspicious time?

[00:24:46.52]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: [He was waiting to get a divorce under New Mexican requirements. It was more convenient than in Texas. -Ed.]

[...]

[00:26:54.49]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: When did you marry?

[00:26:55.57]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: In '41.

[00:26:57.27]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: How wonderful. So it was a very romantic courtship.

[00:26:59.84]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, it was. It was very short [laughs], anyway, and lots of fun. I went down there [to Fort Worth -Ed.]. And we were, I think, engaged in—and Louise Trigg—you know Louise Trigg from here?

[00:27:10.50]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I know who she is.

[00:27:10.71]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: She's a great friend of mine. We were great friends long before we were married, either of us. And that night at the party in Fort Worth, I was there staying at her ranch before going down to him. And so I drove her down to Fort Worth. She had a lot of relatives there. So she stayed with a relative, and I stayed as a guest of the Kings at a very attractive club, which they put me up in. And I went.

[00:27:41.76]

We met each other about three days later at a big party. And I went over to her and whispered in her ear, "I've gotten myself engaged to King," to Clinton. Of course, in those days, I didn't call him King. And she said, "Well, I'm engaged to that man." She pointed to a very attractive-looking man who got killed in the war. So naturally that didn't go through. And she married Bob McKinney some years later. And well, that's about it.

[00:28:06.03]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, what brought you and King back to New Mexico?

[00:28:09.54]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: We didn't, never lived in New Mexico. We only came on visits to the McKinney's, actually.

[00:28:16.02]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Really?

[00:28:17.01]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And we bought a house in Taxco, Mexico. And that was our second home from Chicago.

[00:28:23.91]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh, I see.

[00:28:24.24]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: But then when the war was over, we both went in—we went together in 1948 to Europe. And little by little, we became just enamored of living in Paris. So we fixed it so one year in Paris and one year in Chicago. And the year we were in Chicago, we'd go down to our house in Mexico for a few months. Painting there was wonderful because the light was so good. And we had an awfully nice place.

[00:28:52.50]

But then we spent so much time in Europe and became so much more oriented for that, we finally sold the house in Taxco, which, if we'd had lots of money, I would have kept just because I loved it so and thought maybe in some years, we'd use it more. But that was not sensible. So we had those wonderful years in Europe, which I, well, just adored. And he had exhibitions there and everywhere all over the world.

[00:29:28.97]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: How wonderful for you.

[00:29:30.91]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: It was a very wonderful life. We just had enough to live it, I mean, and to be able to.

[00:29:38.39]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yes. But here you are in Santa Fe. I'm curious about it.

[00:29:43.84]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, we—before he died, we had—before he had a stroke and had lots of troubles before he died, we had thought we'd give up the Middle West, and come here and live. He wanted to more than I did. But I was able—in the end, I would always have done what he wanted to do if it made sense. And so I liked it very much, too. And we came out here in the winter of '76, I think it was, and rented a house to see how we really liked living here.

[00:30:20.76]

And then he had the stroke and all that thing, all that happened. And for two years, he was so wonderful. He got—he had to lose a leg. Oh, it was just awful. I don't want to talk about it because it's not—it's very depressing. But—[Audio distortion.] [Inaudible]

[00:30:38.07]

[In progress]—marvelous qualities of humor and insisting on recovering, which most people with that kind of severe stroke would not have done. And then he died. And we had a beautiful house in Michigan right across from Chicago and a little apartment in Chicago, which we'd sold our regular apartment where we lived in so long there. And so I sold all that and came out here. Because I thought that a woman, a widow, would be much better off here than in Chicago. And I was right.

[00:31:18.74]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I should think so.

[00:31:19.16]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Very right.

[00:31:20.27]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Without knowing Chicago, I'd imagine that—

[00:31:21.71]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, any big city—

[00:31:22.62]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: —this would be a more compatible place.

[00:31:23.61]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: —any big city would have been the same. I adore Chicago and go there frequently and have still some friends. But I like living here. Living here has a lot to be said for it.

[00:31:33.98]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, I'm glad you feel that way. I grew up here.

[00:31:36.93]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: You did?

[00:31:37.64]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yes. So I'm here not through choice. I'm here because I just can't be anywhere else. And that makes me want to ask you a question. When you and Georgia were looking for homes for—

[00:31:50.17]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: For her.

[00:31:50.51]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: —Georgia and Alfred near New York City in 1940, my feeling—I'm doing research on the life of Rebecca James for a biography.

[00:32:00.86]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, how interesting.

[00:32:02.04]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: And I've been working on her primarily. She's been my central occupation for three years.

[00:32:07.39]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, how fascinating. Because I liked her very much.

[00:32:09.86]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, I'm glad to hear that. But my feeling in thinking about her visit with Georgia out to Mabel's in 1929, and Georgia's earlier experience coming through New Mexico with her sister in the late teens, and Rebecca's one visit with Paul Strand out to Taos in 1926—my feeling is that by 1929, no other place would have made either one of them happy.

[00:32:35.79]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:32:35.97]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Did you have a feeling that O'Keeffe was already somehow committed, emotionally, to New Mexico?

[00:32:42.38]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, I felt very strongly that she was. And this was just a last resort if it would be possible that she could spend one summer away from it with Stieglitz.

[00:32:52.26]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So she was really—although she felt the strong connection to New Mexico, she was trying to resist it, to accommodate for marriage.

[00:32:59.22]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: She was trying to—yes. And this is what I why I resented that it has never been mentioned more often. And I don't mean that I took her anywhere at all. But I mean that she had had—it wasn't that she just insisted on coming here without Stieglitz. She tried.

[00:33:16.07]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Not to come.

[00:33:16.69]



NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I think that's interesting that she tried.

[00:33:17.93]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I think it's very interesting that she tried not to come.

[00:33:20.49]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, I'm a living proof that she did. Because I can assure you that that was the reason. Otherwise, she would have wouldn't have thought of looking for houses around New York City.

[00:33:30.63]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Did you look in New Jersey and Connecticut and the typical suburbs in Long Island and all that?

[00:33:34.49]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, oh, spend the whole day.

[00:33:35.96]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Amazing. How many days do you think you spent?

[00:33:38.73]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, about two weeks—the weekdays.

[00:33:40.89]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Incredible. So you'd go out day after day searching for a place?

[00:33:44.87]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, have to go up at whatever hour it was when we decided, and went out. And I left it up to her. I said, "Where are we going today?" And I think one time, we even spent the night with some person, some friend of hers. I remember because we were on a beach. But I don't remember what it was. But I mean, that's what we—she really tried.

[00:34:03.69]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah. Why wasn't Lake George a suitable place for her by that time?

[00:34:06.84]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I don't know whether they got tired of it, or whether his family—well, it was such a complicated thing. And she didn't—we didn't talk much about his wife, his ex-wife and his children and—at all. But she never discussed him.

[00:34:22.77]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: She never discussed Stieglitz when you were on these little jaunts?

[00:34:25.75]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Very seldom. It was—she discussed—she did in one way. There was a woman—if you know all these things and you've read the books and so on, there was a girl, a woman, named Dorothy Norman. Does this mean anything to you?

[00:34:36.73]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yes.

[00:34:36.91]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, I've met her through other people entirely.

[00:34:39.02]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh, really?

[00:34:39.86]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: In New York at that time. And then I heard that she was very—she was carrying on with Stieglitz. And I was seeing Georgia, oh, maybe once a week. Or we'd talk on the telephone or something like that. But she didn't have many close friends. She wouldn't—a woman like that wouldn't have very close—many. And so she told—was glad to have me around. And we—because I was much, much younger. But anyway, she knew—she liked me, I think, because I wasn't impressed by her. I mean, treated her like a human being. Anyway. So I wasn't sure whether I could believe these stories about Dorothy Norman and Stieglitz. Because Dorothy Norman wasn't much older than I was. I was really quite young compared to these other—Mabel and Georgia and all those people.

[00:35:30.05]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Right, yeah.

[00:35:32.60]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: So I mentioned it one of the days on the drive. I said, "Do you know, somebody named Dorothy Norman?" She said, "Oh, yes." And she looked very cross. And she said—I said, is she—"Is Stieglitz crazy about her or something?" And she said, "Oh, I think so. But she's not going to get him."

[00:35:56.49]

[...]

[00:37:42.49]

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[00:00:04.41]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, Dorothy Norman, I think, had already come upon the scene by 1929 when Rebecca and Georgia came out to New Mexico.

[00:00:11.63]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Really? That, I didn't know.

[00:00:13.39]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: So it seems to be a relationship that persisted over time in one way or another.

[00:00:17.25]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Obviously about ten years, because this was '39 or '40.

[00:00:21.42]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah.

[00:00:21.88]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, I think I knew Dorothy Norman before I met Georgia, but I didn't know that anything about Stieglitz or anything like that.

[00:00:31.23]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Did Georgia—did you sense that she felt resentment that you asked her so openly about [Dorothy]?

[00:00:36.76]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Not a bit of a resentment to me, but a resentment—a great feeling

of dislike for Dorothy Norman. [Laughs.]

[00:00:41.56]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yes, as you can imagine.

[00:00:42.70]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, of course.

[00:00:43.92]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Who wouldn't feel that way?

[00:00:45.31]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes.

[00:00:46.29]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, I'm interested in another thing. You said that, of course, a woman like O'Keeffe wouldn't have many women friends. What do you mean when you say that?

[00:00:54.70]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, I don't mean—

[00:00:55.38]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: What was it about her?

[00:00:55.78]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: What I mean is that very often someone doesn't have many friends because they either can't get along with them, or they don't need them. Or certainly, an artist who works a great deal at his or her work, whether it's writing, or music, or anything else, doesn't have as many friends as somebody like you and I would, I feel. Now, I could be wrong.

[00:01:21.83]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: The thing about Georgia O'Keeffe being an uninteresting woman—what do you think it was about her that attracted people to her so compellingly over the decades?

[00:01:32.97]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, she was just a—how should I say? Well, first of all, thanks to Stieglitz, she was getting very well-known as a painter—

[00:01:49.30]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: As a celebrity.

[00:01:50.60]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: —as a celebrity. And she didn't like many people, wouldn't have anything to do with them. Now, I won't when somebody says—

[00:02:00.91]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I think that's incredible.

[00:02:01.78]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Don't you think it's funny?

[00:02:02.93]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, I like that. But I mean—

[00:02:04.54]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I don't. I think it's utterly—

[00:02:05.21]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I grew up out here, and I like directness.

[00:02:07.30]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, but you don't have to say—You don't have to answer a thing like that because you say, "Well, thank you very much," or "Thank you," and walk out.

[00:02:14.65]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Exactly.

[00:02:14.95]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: You don't have to—she made a point of talking like that to people. And lots of people didn't like it. Who would?

[00:02:23.32]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, it is hard to hear.

[00:02:24.89]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: But with her friends, she was just as simple, and nice, and sweet as she could be—not sweet. That sounds like saccharine, but just an awfully nice, nice friend.

[00:02:37.05]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: What was your sense of her friendship with Rebecca James in 1940?

[00:02:40.87]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: You see, that was so long, long—she said she'd known her for a long time. I think she felt—oh, I have to tell you, but turn off that thing. Rebecca's second husband or whatever husband he was, was alive when I—

[00:02:55.02]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Bill James.

[00:02:55.48]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, Bill James. And we were talking about O'Keeffe after I'd taken her down [to Ghost Ranch -Ed.] that time and came back to Taos and went around with Clinton. They invited me several times to lunch or dinners, and they were awfully nice. And I liked them, and I think they liked me. I know they did. And we were talking. We were having some drinks and talking about Georgia and Mabel. And Bill said—he got up in an exasperated sort of way and said, "O'Keeffe is the shits to me."

[00:03:29.77]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh. [They laugh.]

[00:03:33.02]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, I thought that was so funny.

[00:03:35.06]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: You know, that's so interesting. Georgia O'Keeffe, when Bill James had his stroke in 1967, traveled from Abiquiu up to Taos to accompany his body to the

crematorium in Albuquerque. And in my work on Rebecca James, I'm interested and curious because I do feel that in the early '20s, Rebecca, before and during her marriage to Paul Strand, had an intimate relationship with Stieglitz. And—

[00:04:07.46]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: With Stieglitz?

[00:04:08.30]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yes.

[00:04:08.61]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And not Georgia?

[00:04:09.79]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: And that Georgia was upset by it, appropriately so, although there had been—there's a certain amount of belief that O'Keeffe had an intimate relationship with Paul Strand in the late teens that famous summer when he went down to Texas and fetched her to New York.

[00:04:29.31]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I don't know. I'd never even heard about any of these escapades.

[00:04:32.17]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: And so we have two couples. And then we have Rebecca at one point looking at great deal like O'Keeffe, resembling her in a lot of ways, according to a lot of people who knew them both. Did you have that impression?

[00:04:44.52]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Not at all. Well, the wonderful white-haired and stunning, stunning woman that Rebecca was when I met her. And they had adopted a little girl, whom I befriended. And King and I took her horseback riding, I remember, because it was—Taos at that time of year had—the fields were just filled with iris. And it was the most beautiful thing. And we would gallop through the iris.

[00:05:09.79]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: That would be Vera.

[00:05:11.20]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And it was just King, and me, and little—her name was—I've forgotten her name. But she got killed in an automobile accident. Did you know about her?

[00:05:19.30]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah.

[00:05:19.54]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Anne Vera. But that was just a very short, small incident in my life and in certainly my life with either of those people, any of these people, because after that, I never saw Rebecca again.

[00:05:33.90]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Really?

[00:05:34.44]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Never.

[00:05:34.79]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Despite your visits here in the summer and so forth?

[00:05:36.69]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, we never did.

[00:05:37.84]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: So it was that one wonderful summer where Mabel got sick, and Rebecca had a cocktail party in honor of Georgia.

[00:05:45.43]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, yes, yes.

[00:05:46.64]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: And invited Clinton King.

[00:05:47.94]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And then for just a few weeks, I saw something of Rebecca. And, oh, she'd say to me—she implied that it was a mistake to depend on either Georgia or Mabel, that they weren't—and I didn't give a damn. I mean, it was just a very small incident in my life. And I was off to other things, and people, and so on. But I did feel that the closeness, for whatever reason, husband swapping or whatever, made them very good friends, even though they might be cross at one another.

[00:06:32.68]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I think that there was that time in the early '20s when Rebecca and Alfred Stieglitz might have had a close relationship that bothered O'Keeffe.

[00:06:40.91]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:06:41.37]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: And then I believe that later on in the late '20s, when Rebecca joined forces with Dorothy Norman to raise money for a gallery for Stieglitz, that that—

[00:06:50.79]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Is that how all that happened?

[00:06:51.96]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: —may have driven a little bit of a wedge between her relationship with Georgia. But by 1929, when they came out here together for that summer of Mabel's compound, everything that I've been able to locate indicates that they were good friends.

[00:07:08.17]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I felt that they were all good friends, though they might have—whatever they were up to, it wasn't my business.

[00:07:13.58]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I don't think that they—I mean, my sense of it, they weren't involved in husband swapping so much. And I wondered if you had a sense about the whole situation in Taos, whether there was that kind of an open love or sexual element. Did you feel it?

[00:07:27.40]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, you see, I might have felt it had I been staying with Georgia—I

mean, staying with Mabel, if that had worked out. But it didn't. And therefore, I didn't have any feeling at all like that.

[00:07:38.51]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah, because I haven't been able to pick it up. I read a letter recently that Rebecca wrote to Paul Strand. She was still married to him in 1929. They divorced in Mexico in 1933. And then Rebecca came back to Taos and was involved with Bill James, who she had met a couple of summers earlier.

[00:07:55.96]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes. He always surprised me. It surprised me that they were married because he seemed so completely un-the-kind-of person that she would marry. I could imagine her—I never met Paul Strand, but he was a marvelous artist. And so was Rebecca. And Bill James seemed to be so non-fitting into that bunch.

[00:08:20.50]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I've never been able to understand it, although they seem to have had a wonderful relationship with one another.

[00:08:25.51]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, probably the maleness of him or the—yeah, I can understand that.

[00:08:29.63]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: So you did feel that sense in him of—

[00:08:32.32]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, I just felt that—

[00:08:33.40]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: —a sense of maleness in him?

[00:08:35.17]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, I certainly did. I mean, that was the first thing I felt in him. I think he was very obviously macho.

[00:08:43.48]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Really? And Rebecca was working as an artist in Taos then and taking her work seriously?

[00:08:49.58]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes. When I was there, she was.

[00:08:51.55]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Was that perception shared by her friends that she was a serious artist?

[00:08:55.36]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, you see, I didn't meet any of her friends, except—I don't know. Whenever I was invited there, it was just me.

[00:09:02.15]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I see.

[00:09:02.69]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: So I really—I knew more of King's artist friends. Of course, she knew them, too. But I would be with him and, oh, I forget that secretary at that time—of the writer.

[00:09:14.74]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Spud Johnson?

[00:09:15.74]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, Spud. We saw Spud all the time. But [this man -Ed.] was Mabel's secretary for a while, and he wrote a lot of books that I didn't think were very interesting. You would know him because he was—you'd know him well. He was kind of the writer of Taos, I think.

[00:09:34.33]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Frank Waters. That was Frank Waters.

[00:09:36.62]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, yes.

[00:09:36.91]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yes.

[00:09:38.53]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: But I didn't see any of those people lived at the James's house.

[00:09:42.90]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I see.

[00:09:43.59]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: But that doesn't mean they weren't seeing them. But they didn't—

[00:09:46.16]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Right. It just didn't happen while you were there.

[00:09:47.93]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: See, it was a very short time.

[00:09:49.47]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yes, we're talking about a very short period here.

[00:09:51.24]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Very, very short period.

[00:09:52.76]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Sort of an important period, though. So much happened in your life then.

[00:09:56.61]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, the fact that, yes, of course that. And I was grateful to Mabel for having been ill and not being able to have me and not be there. But well, that's about it.

[00:10:10.01]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: When you say that Georgia O'Keeffe wasn't in very good health when you traveled out to New Mexico, was it the flu kind of thing?



[00:10:17.84]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: It was some stomach—it was just some stomach—

[00:10:20.10]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Just not going—

[00:10:20.85]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Something that wasn't really serious.

[00:10:22.47]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: It wasn't like an attack of a cold or flu or something?

[00:10:24.32]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: No, no, no. She just had been told to just take it easy on the groceries and drink the powder and water. [Laughs.] And it was very—she'd sit there and pour, and I would be eating and drinking to my heart's content. [Laughs,]

[00:10:37.91]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: How funny. My research indicates that there was an awful lot of preoccupation among Rebecca, and Paul, and Alfred, and Georgia about their health.

[00:10:48.95]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Kind of hypochondriac?

[00:10:50.28]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Always involved. I mean, Stieglitz made a statement once that in seven years of their marriage, at least one of them was sick every day. And that is an exaggeration, but—

[00:10:59.31]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, I know what I meant to interrupt you and tell you, that I thought Stieglitz was so unattractive.

[00:11:06.02]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Really?

[00:11:06.33]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I mean, he was fascinating perhaps as a mentor or something like that. But, I mean, he was a little bent over, terribly unattractive person. I could imagine in bed or anything would be just the last thing anybody would want to do.

[00:11:20.13]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Isn't that amazing?

[00:11:21.12]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes.

[00:11:21.66]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Because he seems to have attracted a lot of women.

[00:11:24.03]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, I know. Or at least, if you can believe all that stuff unless you know it for sure. I can't imagine a woman being attracted to him at all except much attracted to him as a person. But sexually, ooh, yuck. [Laughs.] Is that all going on that?

[00:11:42.51]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, yeah. You'll be seeing a transcript if you find that something needs to be dealt with. That's not—You're not saying anything that I think would shock or offend anybody. There's just a lot of—I think what we're trying to do at this point is to sort of straighten things out and get away from the mythological base of our understanding of these events and people and make them into the human beings that they deserve to be—

[00:12:10.65]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes.

[00:12:10.97]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: —and are entitled to be considered. And that's one of the reasons that we're doing this project is to bring the human dimension—

[00:12:20.34]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, that's a very nice project to be doing, I think.

[00:12:22.65]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: —into the lives of these people that—I think they deserve to be thought of as human beings and not goddesses, or all good or all bad.

[00:12:31.73]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, I think they deserve to have the truth set about them and not a bunch of sexy lies that who these people are that carry on about their nakedness and carry—well, do you think they all were naked? Not that there's anything against it.

[00:12:47.03]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I know that one day in the summer when Rebecca and Georgia were staying in the pink house at Mabel's compound, they washed the car. And then they got naked and hosed each other down, too, on a hot day. But, goodness, I haven't been engaged in situations like that, too.

[00:13:03.35]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Why, I don't think anything of it at all.

[00:13:05.51]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Two mature women in their forties.

[00:13:06.39]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Why wouldn't they—no. But the way these the things that I read, and maybe you didn't see them either, from a paper or a book that they used to just lie around in the nude and carry on and so on, which I don't believe one word of.

[00:13:21.99]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I have read those things, and I haven't found anything in my research to support any of those assertions.

[00:13:27.32]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Why do you suppose they're doing it? Just to sell a book or—I didn't know that there was that much interest in it. Well, have you gotten onto the Juan Hamilton bit with Georgia?

[00:13:42.21]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, I'm not getting involved in that. My research has to do with Rebecca because I'm not—

[00:13:48.62]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Ah. Then you must be seeing a lot of that charming, darling man, Bob Ewing.

[00:13:52.61]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Bob Ewing, yes, indeed.

[00:13:53.60]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Isn't he a darling?

[00:13:54.39]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: He's lovely. We're doing a show of Rebecca's work at the Fine Arts Museum.

[00:13:58.65]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: When will it be on?

[00:13:59.57]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: It will open on November the 16th—

[00:14:01.47]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, good.

[00:14:01.55]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: But we're having our big opening celebration on Rebecca's 100th birthday anniversary, which is December 21st.

[00:14:08.01]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Really?

[00:14:08.36]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: This December.

[00:14:09.45]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Gosh, that's a long—

[00:14:10.47]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: 1991. And the show will be up until April. But Bob Ewing has written a little statement for the show that we're going to put on the brochure and parts of on the wall. And he owned two of her reverse paintings on glass. And he was also the director of the Fine Arts Museum when she died—

[00:14:28.79]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, I know.

[00:14:29.03]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: —and left her collection to the museum because of his involvement in friendship with her.

[00:14:33.77]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I didn't know that, but I knew that he had been the curator of the museum here.

[00:14:38.76]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah, yeah. So he's wonderful man.

[00:14:41.01]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Awfully nice person and very amusing and very—I think the world of him. I think he's terrific.

[00:14:47.58]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I haven't gotten involved in the Juan Hamilton stories. I can't stay away from it in my research on Rebecca because their lives were so intertwined.

[00:14:57.55]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes.

[00:14:58.03]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: But I have a feeling as a woman myself that they had a seventeen-year relationship and that it was satisfactory to them.

[00:15:06.09]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Gosh, I think she was the luckiest woman in the world to have a Juan Hamilton.

[00:15:11.07]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I can imagine myself wanting a meaningful relationship.

[00:15:15.01]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: If anybody walked in and said, I'd like to be your whatever—and I'm not talking about sex at all.

[00:15:21.20]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Companion, or whatever.

[00:15:21.87]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I'm talking about a close, close friend relationship, why, I'd be the happiest woman in the world. I think she was very, very lucky.

[00:15:28.60]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Seventeen years is, to me, a test that the relationship has meaning for the two people involved.

[00:15:34.35]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And at that age, I mean, it's terrible to grow old. It's just awful. You haven't gotten there yet, but I can assure you.

[00:15:40.17]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh, it is. I can understand something about it.

[00:15:42.01]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: It's terrible.

[00:15:42.91]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: And it's lonely.

[00:15:44.11]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Very, if you're a widow as I am. Are you a widow or divorced?

[00:15:47.68]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, I'm divorced. I'm a mother and a grandmother, and I'm fortunate to have my children and my grandchildren here. But I think that women want the kind of meaningful companionship that a man can offer—

[00:15:59.29]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Of course, they do.

[00:15:59.83]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: —another adult.

[00:16:00.79]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Of course, they do.

[00:16:02.22]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: So I really—my feeling about O'Keeffe and Juan Hamilton is that I wish the world would leave that alone.

[00:16:08.70]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: The only thing—the reason that when I came out here—well, King had a show at the Seth Gallery several years before we came out here. And Jean said Georgia said she's so glad you're coming, because she hasn't seen you for a long time. And I think the last time I'd seen her was in Paris or something years before, and we hadn't kept writing or anything like that. And so I thought, well, it'll be nice to see her again, interesting. And then something happened, and she didn't come. It was to the Vernissage of King's show. This wouldn't be interesting, I don't think, for you.

[00:17:02.59]

But I didn't look her up or try to see her because I was told that that man controlled every one of her movements, I mean, whether she answered the telephone, whether she got a letter or anything. But I'll be damned if I'll be treated like that. And the time I had with Georgia was delightful, really fun. And I'm glad I had it because she was an interesting person.

[00:17:28.72]

And I loved coming out here and all that. But I certainly didn't want to see her in a different position than being—how should I say—in the—what's the word I want? But he just—I was told by people who saw them together that she didn't do a single thing that he didn't want her to.

[00:17:56.59]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I see.

[00:17:56.71]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: He wanted to be in complete control of her—or her friends, who she saw, who she talked to on the telephone, and so on. And I was damned if I'd—and I thought, if she really wanted to see me, she could find some way to call me up if she wanted to, out of curiosity. But it never happened, and I never made the slightest attempt to have it happen.

[00:18:15.67]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I see.

[00:18:17.33]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: At first, right after we were married, King and I, I know one time we were spending New Year's holidays with the McKinney's. And they had to go to a party. And they invited O'Keeffe to come down to spend the night to be with us.

[00:18:36.07]

We had a very nice time. And she said—I never forget when she walked in and saw their salon. "Good heavens." It was not a bit New Mexico. And she was just shocked—not shocked in an unpleasant way, but just sort of shocked because she liked everything—she didn't like anything that wasn't just absolutely black and white.

[00:18:58.77]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I see.

[00:18:59.72]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: She didn't like any decor of any kind. I remember she was having a trouble getting some china that wasn't, in some way, had some something on it. And I found some sleek white china, which I gave her as a present, I think, for the car or something.

[00:19:22.55]

No, that—[inaudible] because she didn't have her house in Abiquiu at that time. Well, anyway, in the early years when we came out here more often, we saw each other. But that was long before Juan Hamilton came on the scene. And then it's just the way life is. You have certain times with people and other times—and then, for some reason, you don't.

[00:19:51.89]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Right. Well, I think it was a very interesting chapter in your life.

[00:19:55.05]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: It certainly was.

[00:19:56.22]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: And I'm delighted to—

[00:19:57.00]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Very amusing. And Mabel, I never got to see enough of Mabel because I found Mabel far more interesting than Georgia.

[00:20:05.55]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Did you?

[00:20:06.06]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, yes, mainly her terrible meanness, and her devilment, and all of the husbands she had and all the—oh, I thought she was fascinating.

[00:20:20.90]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: That's interesting to hear. I don't hear that many people say that about Mabel.

[00:20:25.34]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, she, of course, made a lot of people very unhappy.

[00:20:29.46]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: She must have had attractive qualities as well, or she—

[00:20:32.09]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: She wasn't the least bit attractive. She looked like a little, old maid. I was so surprised when I met her. I thought she'd be fascinatingly attractive. And this was in New York. And of course, she was no longer young by any means. And she wore her hair in

bangs kind of like that. And she was very demure. And she wore old lady's clothes.

[00:20:54.37]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Really?

[00:20:54.79]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes. And I thought from all her books about her beaux, and her lovers, and her carryings on that she would have been very attractive. She was anything but attractive, except being attractive as an old nanny. I mean, you know, a coziness.

[00:21:10.75]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: How interesting.

[00:21:11.99]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: That's what she was like.

[00:21:15.02]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: But you found her fascinating.

[00:21:16.88]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, no, I found—from her books, I found her fascinating.

[00:21:19.77]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh, I see.

[00:21:20.84]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I thought she'd be that way. And you see, if we hadn't been cut off by her illness, I would have known her very well because I'd have been in the house with her for a week maybe. But that never happened. And then she got mad at me because she didn't introduce me to King and was out of that picture completely. And she ate her words in a year or two.

[00:21:44.41]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: So you knew John Evans, her son?

[00:21:46.21]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, we knew him quite well and his Scottish wife. What was her name?

[00:21:51.91]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Claire? Was it Claire?

[00:21:54.47]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, it was Claire. I knew them in New York. And she never wanted to have a salon, as I said. That's why she came to New York, and she rented an apartment way down on Fifth Avenue, the beginning of Fifth Avenue—1 Fifth Avenue, I think it was. And she invited me. And the opening of it all, she had Thornton Wilder giving a speech on James's—James—who is that famous Irish writer? It's a household word.

[00:22:32.96]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: James Joyce.

[00:22:33.61]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes. The book he wrote after he wrote the *Ulysses*. I've forgotten the

name of it.

[00:22:42.53]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: *Ginger Man?*

[00:22:45.09]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: No, it was after *Ulysses*. Well, anyway, it wasn't as successful as *Ulysses*, but it was successful at the time as anything he did, as you know. Well, anyway, it happened, as it turned out, that I had been in a class of Wilder's at the University of Chicago. And he was a great friend of my uncle, and I really knew him quite well for a while. And so he was overjoyed to see me. Mabel had a crowd of people you wouldn't believe. It went from, well, from Wilder himself, of course, to Gene Tunney, I remember was there—Gene Tunney!

[00:23:31.23]

And he was very pretentious about poetry, Gene Tunney. You were too young to remember all that, but it was very amusing. And we all thought he was the pits because we liked Dempsey. And of course, he beat Dempsey because there was something false about the count. He didn't really win it, but we thought. Anyway.

[00:23:52.89]

So he made a big fuss over me. Then we had to sit in seats, and he got up, which wasn't very salon-ish. As I am told, salons usually were just informally little groups here and there talking about this, that, and the other. This was, you were going to listen to this. You're going to listen to Thornton on this book. And I wish I could remember it. It was very well-known at the time.

[00:24:16.22]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I'll find it, and we'll plug it into the tape here.

[00:24:18.78]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh, well, anyway, I sat in the front row, and he just talked. He really—as all lecturers do, they find one person to look at and talk to that person. He talked to me. This impressed Mabel to no end. And this was—just happened like that. So she said, "You have to come to all my salons." I said, "Well, I'd love to. I said, but I like to bring a friend or a friend along." I don't like to come alone anywhere.

[00:24:45.43]

So I brought a man who—one of my beaus whose name was—his father had been president of a bank in New York, and he was very well known. He had a wonderful mother whose name was Narcissa—the only person I've ever met whose name was Narcissa. And she was dying to have me marry him. [...]

[00:25:44.67]

I was only impressed by artistic people or self-made people. I wasn't at all impressed by the people I grew up with.

[00:25:52.44]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: On the basis of money, business.

[00:25:53.97]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, yes, yes, or position in the city, not political, but I mean—

[00:26:00.69]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: When Mabel was in New York in the '40s with her salon, where was Tony? Did you see Tony at all?

[00:26:06.27]



NARCISSA SWIFT KING: He was there. Now, was he there or wasn't he there? I know Frank Waters was there. I think Tony was there part of the time. But so was Gene Tunney. And so were all these people that she invited to these places—I mean, to these occasions.

[00:26:22.34]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I think that's fascinating.

[00:26:23.84]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: But of course, it wasn't a success at all, and it wasn't the way she remembered it from being a very young and fascinating person. She must have been because she attracted so many interesting people.

[00:26:35.92]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, I guess in the teens when she had the original salon before she came out to Taos, the whole milieu was different socially and culturally. And here she is trying to recreate something twenty years later.

[00:26:48.29]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes.

[00:26:49.09]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: It's be a little hard to do.

[00:26:50.44]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, I admire her for trying.

[00:26:53.36]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I do, too. I have always admired Mabel.

[00:26:55.40]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes. Well, I admired her.

[00:26:56.95]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I thought she had a courageous life.

[00:26:58.76]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: She did. She did. And my husband had—he had been here many times before I did. And when he lived first in Santa Fe, he was just very young. And the people he knew then were Peach Mayer, Alice Rossin. Well, and Santa Fe apparently was very small in those days. Well, I met Peach Mayer just before he became ill and all that.

[00:27:31.67]

And we became fast friends. I had a letter from her after my husband died, and she said, I don't think you'll know it yet, but my husband died three days after yours, by his own hand and so on—told me all about that. And we became such friends, as you rarely do in this life. We were suffering the same horror, which is a horror, a terrible horror. And never got over it. Well, she died before she got over it. And I'm here and alive, but I have not—far from over it, far from over it.

[00:28:06.34]

The bereavement of it all. No, I'll never get over it. Oh, I—well, that's just what I'm saying. And this brought us together, that fact that we both had lost our husbands. But we just became terribly good friends and terribly fond of one another. And she became more and more ill. And it ended up by my being the only person that she was allowed to go out with because I was big and strong, and she didn't fall down when she was with me. She had some nice friends who took her out and were too weak to hold her up. It was terrible how ill she

became.

[00:28:43.42]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yes. Well, I went to school with her sons, and so I knew her as—

[00:28:47.84]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I don't know one of them at all, but I know Jim very well.

[00:28:51.02]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Jim is the doctor. And Tom is a writer.

[00:28:54.40]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes.

[00:28:54.84]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah. And I went to school—Tom and I were in the same grade all the way through school.

[00:28:58.75]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: What was he like?

[00:29:00.24]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: You know, I have such a hard time remembering, because when I knew these people, they were children. And boys were horrible, and then they were wonderful. And then we all went our separate ways. I never knew him as an adult. But as a kid, I really liked him. We ran in the same circle.

[00:29:16.11]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, when she wrote me this about her husband having died just so shortly after mine, and I was very busy doing things, going places. I was much less unhappy when I was either visiting somebody, or had somebody visit me, or when I was traveling. And my husband and I very often went to the Shakespeare Festival up in Ontario, Canada.

[00:29:41.24]

And I wanted to go. And I said, "I think it would do you a lot of good to get out of Santa Fe, where all these terrible things happened to you. And come with me to the Shakespeare Festival, which would be something you've never done." And she wrote back and said, "I got your letter. I said, of course I won't do such a thing. And then I thought about it, and I said, that's what I want to do."

[00:30:01.65]

So she came, and I met her in Michigan where—and I took her to the festival. And while we were there, we were talking about lots of things and about Europe, where I spent so much time. And she said she'd never been anywhere but I've forgotten what—very few places—two cathedrals or something like that on a sightseeing thing. So I said, not ever dreaming that it would come about—I said to her, "Well, if you want to go, you'd make a mistake if you didn't come with me because I've probably spent a night in every town in France."

[00:30:38.36]

Of course, that's an exaggeration, but I had spent many, many a night in many a town. And I didn't even know that I was going to be over there that summer. But as soon as I got over there and knew I was going to be there for about two weeks in the autumn, I wrote her and said, "Well, little did I know, but I'm inviting you to come and take a motor trip with me for two weeks in France." And she came right over.

[00:31:08.34]

And she was so tired, and she was completely different than she was on the trip to Shakespeare. And she smoked like a fiend. She always did. And she coughed so terribly. And it didn't ever occur to her that she might have TB or anything, but I thought that she was ill. And her disposition had changed. Lots of things have changed. I said, "Peach!" Well, she got home and found she had cancer of the lung.

[00:31:36.96]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh, dear.

[00:31:38.24]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And had the terrible operation. And that was just before I came out here to see whether I wanted to live here or not. And so she was just so good to me and so nice to me. And I was so fond of her.

[00:31:55.41]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: That's wonderful that you were able to find this friendship.

[00:31:57.81]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: All very well, but I miss her to this day.

[00:32:00.07]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I'm sure you do. It's hard when we lose good friends.

[00:32:04.27]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: She certainly had a lot of friends, and a lot of enemies. Apparently, she was—

[00:32:10.20]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Don't most interesting people?

[00:32:11.30]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, of course, they do. Of course, they do.

[00:32:13.37] [...]

[00:32:44.19]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: [...] Tell me about Clinton's impression of the artists out here in those early years that you were—did he think this was a dynamic, artistic milieu?

[00:32:55.04]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, he was much more interested in the French school and the Europeans, although he had friends here. I remember we spent a couple of nights with a very attractive man and his wife who came from Paris. You would know right away. He moved to Austin, Texas. His name was—well, anyway. It's a name among the bunch. And let me see. And I'm bad with names. Well, you see, he didn't stay there very long at one time. But he knew the profession, and the other one, Gaspard.

[00:33:35.72]

And the man whose wife is still—who—the woman who married his son—Dasburg, Dasburg. He knew Dasburg quite well. Well, in those days, they all knew one another. But he wasn't part of them because he didn't stay there long enough to become part of them. He'd been in Paris, and he liked that better.

[00:33:58.26]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I was just wondering if you had any memory of his impression of these. Did he take them as serious artists?

[00:34:06.74]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I think he did. But he just wasn't one of them.

[00:34:09.48]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Just wasn't involved in that sense.

[00:34:11.48]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And in fact, when he came out just before he had the troubles and we rented the house that winter, he didn't react to the scenery or anything very much.

[00:34:23.66]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Really?

[00:34:24.41]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, he was crazy about European scenes. He was crazy about the towns, and the streets, and the—he wasn't crazy about—like so many artists, he said that mountains were for postcards and not for painting and things like that. It was silly things that were not true. But for him, they were.

[00:34:43.54]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Perceptions are important.

[00:34:44.59]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: And I got him to—because I was so crazy about the mountainside. I used to seriously climb mountains. And I asked him several times through our hotel windows to paint whatever—not paint, but draw. And they were marvelous drawings.

[00:35:01.51]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Oh, wonderful.

[00:35:02.11]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: [Inaudible.] But yes, he did take them seriously, but he just wasn't attracted by what they were doing.

[00:35:10.48]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I understand.

[00:35:10.96]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: He thought they were very talented. And indeed, they were, some of them.

[00:35:14.54]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I think so, too. I want to thank you very much for talking to me this morning. It's been a wonderful conversation.

[00:35:21.11]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, I hope you got something out of it.

[00:35:23.18]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I think we have.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_king91\_4805\_m]

[00:00:04.92]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Let me make sure, yes, this is working. It's January 20, 1992. And I'm again, in the home of Mrs. Clinton, Narcissa Swift King. And I've been asked Mrs. King to ask you to tell me the story of "Narcissa's Last Orchid," the painting that Georgia O'Keeffe painted of you.

[00:00:29.82]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes.

[00:00:29.84]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I brought the book, *One Hundred Flowers*, but I'm sure your memory doesn't need much refreshing when it comes to remembering the piece.

[00:00:38.81]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, but I didn't remember. What happened was that I was going to Canada for a weekend, a long weekend to visit a friend. And I'd been sent an orchid by another friend. And it came just as I was about to leave. And I thought it'll be no good when I get back. And I wonder if Georgia would like it.

[00:00:58.62]

So I called her and said, I have this orchid. Would you like it? And she said she'd love it. So I dropped it off on my way to the station or whatever, however I went. I've forgotten. And when I came back, the next time I saw her, I said, "You haven't mentioned your orchid. And I think that's very rude. But did you like it?" And she said, "I painted it. I liked it very much. I painted it." I said, "Well, anyway, it's the last time I'm going to give you an orchid." [Suzan laughs.] And so she called it "Narcissa's Last Orchid."

[00:01:28.47]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Is that right?

[00:01:29.24]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: That's how that happened.

[00:01:30.33]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, this is a beautiful painting.

[00:01:32.35]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, I remember seeing it now.

[00:01:37.26]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah. Well—

[00:01:38.67]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: That's all there is.

[00:01:39.35]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: That's all there is to that story. That's a pretty short story.

[00:01:42.93]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: It's a short story. That's what happened.

[00:01:43.11]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I think the O'Keeffe—it's a very interesting story. I think several people had thought that there was some kind of a more dialogue between the two of you concerning that.

[00:01:54.13]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Well, there might have been a little more berating on my side and half in fun, you know.

[00:02:03.45]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah. Well, if that's all, then we're just going to end this little snippet. When they read the transcript, they realized that I had failed to mention this to you. The O'Keeffe Foundation is doing a catalog raisonné of O'Keeffe's works. And that's going to be a multiple-year project. And they wanted to gather as much information about every painting.

[00:02:24.52]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: [Inaudible.]

[00:02:24.60]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Do you know that must have been in—this was painted in 1941, so that —

[00:02:29.94]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: It was before that I gave her the orchid, long before. I was married in '41. It was in '39 or '40, maybe.

[00:02:41.70]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: I see. So did you see the painting?

[00:02:44.77]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I did. I think I did somewhere in a show or something. I wasn't interested in it. I mean—

[00:02:50.71]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: But at the time that she told you that she had painted the orchid, this was before 1941.

[00:02:55.45]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, it was. It was whenever I came back from Canada, which was just a few weeks later. And it must have been late ['39] or early '40.

[00:03:07.23]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Late '39 or early 1940. Well, that's going to be very useful. In this book, *One Hundred Flowers*, the date on the painting is 1941. But if she told you it was painted in '39 or '40. Then it must have been—

[00:03:20.16]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: She said she was going to paint it. But she must have, or unless she bought another orchid.

[00:03:24.10]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: She must have painted it.

[00:03:25.33]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: I think she did.

[00:03:25.99]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah. Well, that's very useful.

[00:03:27.85]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: She may not have remembered when she painted exactly the year. I mean, I have no idea.

[00:03:32.55]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, that's why this kind of little piece of information is useful. Because this will help us get the right date on the painting.

[00:03:38.44]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Yes, well, unless she was telling a lie, which she might well have done. I mean, it's a lie, that wouldn't have been much of a lie. If she hadn't painted it then and just got another orchid and painted that, I don't know. But that's how the "Narcissa's Last Orchid" came.

[00:03:51.55]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Well, I really appreciate hearing that story.

[00:03:54.66]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Lots of people have asked me, and it was just as simple as that.

[00:03:57.58]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Is that right? Yeah. Well, there's something about a title, "Narcissa's Last Orchid," that one could make it think that it was the last orchid you'd ever receive, you know?

[00:04:08.02]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: Oh yes, yes, yes, yes.

[00:04:08.25]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: So there's that a feeling there of closure that is sort of disconcerting.

[00:04:14.23]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: It was the kind of thing you'd say to anybody who hadn't thanked you for something that you'd done—something nice that you had done. That's all.

[00:04:21.49]

SUZAN CAMPBELL: Yeah. Exactly, well, thank you very much.

[00:04:23.26]

NARCISSA SWIFT KING: You're very welcome.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_king91\_4806\_m]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]