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Oral history interview with Rebecca Reis,
1980

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Rebecca Reis on March 24, April 29, May 6, May 15, May 22, June 5, July 14, September 8, and September 9, 1980. The interview took was conducted by William McNaught for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Women's Committee.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

WILLIAM McNAUGHT: This is tape 1, side 1, William McNaught speaking to Rebecca Reis, Mrs. Bernard Reis, on Monday, March 24, 1980. Mrs. Reis, when was it that your husband died?

REBECCA REIS: It was a Sunday morning, December 3rd, 1978. And his death was one of the most tragic endings to a noble and very interesting life.

MR. McNAUGHT: He certainly did have a fascinating life, in view of the people you both knew together, the things he did, his varying interests.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Should we talk a bit about how those interests came to be? When was Bernard Reis born, and what was his schooling and background?

MRS. REIS: Right. He was born in 1895. His date is around May 27th, 1895. And we were married 58 years. And from the very beginning, for some strange reason, we both took a great interest in works of art. We determined then, from the very beginning, that instead of having wall-to-wall carpeting and yards of window drapery, we would concentrate on works of art which we found beautiful, gifted, interesting, and almost worldwide. We both seemed to like the same sort of things. So that was our beginning.

MR. McNAUGHT: How do you think it happened, I mean, that from a relatively early age, from the time of your marriage, you were interested, both interested, in art? Had either of you studied it, or had your families collected it? Or how do you think this came about?

MRS. REIS: Well, I think that's the most curious thing in the world because neither of us ever took a course in art in any of our schooling or university training. My husband's specialty was accounting, and that's how he earned his livelihood during all these years.

MR. McNAUGHT: Where did he study?

MRS. REIS: He studied at New York University. And he also, as a young man, went to med school and was a graduate lawyer. As for myself, I went to a variety of schools, and finished off at the University of Michigan, taking a degree cum laude at Michigan. I think it was the year 1919. We were married in 1920, and -

MR. McNAUGHT: In New York City?

MRS. REIS: In New York City, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: You were both New Yorkers. Is that right?

MRS. REIS: We were, except that my education was not concentrated in New York. I had gone to various boarding schools, and as I say, went to the University of Michigan because I thought I was discovering the West, I think. Then, upon our marriage, we got along so very well because we seemed to like the same sort of things. We seemed to like to have a capacity of aesthetic things in almost every field. I remember we were fascinated

by paintings. We were fascinated by sculpture. We were fascinated by the theater, which was very good in those days, and continued our interest in those fields. And then there were other fields in which my husband had a good deal to do with, and that is that he was one of the originators of Consumers Union. He always had an interest in the public good, if you know what I mean.

MR. McNAUGHT: When was this that he took this interest in -

MRS. REIS: That was rather early in our married life. I don't remember the date.

MR. McNAUGHT: In the 1920s, probably?

MRS. REIS: I would say so. Though I could give you the precise dates if I just -

MR. McNAUGHT: No. It's not -

MRS. REIS: It doesn't really matter. But he did have a very keen interest in the public good.

MR. McNAUGHT: Was he at this time working as an accountant; as a lawyer?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Yes. He had started as a young accountant with a then-famous firm, if they still exist, called Hoskins & Sells. And then he went out on his own and obtained some very important clients, among them Albert Lasker, who many people know as a very prominent businessman in the advertising field, and later, a very fine collector of very fine art.

MR. McNAUGHT: They had a great collection.

MRS. REIS: Yes. As time developed. He and Mary Lasker, once married, really built a beautiful, magnificent collection of paintings. The Lasker interest was really not only paintings, but in basic research to cure or to discover the cures for heart ailment and for cancer. And they established the now-well-known Lasker Foundation more than 30 years ago. My husband, being associated with Albert, became treasurer of the Lasker Foundation from the beginning and sat on the board. They valued him, his opinions and his knowledge, very much. And they were fond of each other. He contributed a great deal to the thinking and the development of that foundation. Now, in our private lives, we never did what most people do, go to restaurants and splurge or have a country home, which some people buy, or do the various meaningless extravagances that people indulge in. On the contrary, we were fascinated with the world and traveled a great deal, going abroad at least once or twice every year. And those trips abroad were not just casual. Since we liked art, we haunted museums. The unique quality Bernard Reis had was that he could tell when a picture was moved or removed in any museum he'd ever been to.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: He had an extraordinary memory, both visual and literary. I remember that when we would have [inaudible] and we wanted to refer to a particular thing, he could say to me, "Becky, in the library on the third shelf, you will find thus and so. Go get it." I would, and bring it down to the dining table. And he would turn to a given page in the very book he referred to, remembering precisely what he wished to tell.

MR. McNAUGHT: Extraordinary.

MRS. REIS: He had a magnificent memory. And as for his reading ability, which I always admired, he could read a page in one-eighth the time I could or most people could in a sort of triangular way. You would show him a sheet of figures, let's say, and he could go to the left - the top of the left page and read diagonally down to the bottom and get the whole sense of it in no time.

MR. McNAUGHT: Extraordinary.

MRS. REIS: Everybody admired him.

MR. McNAUGHT: Sort of his own kind of speed reading. Amazing.

MRS. REIS: It was amazing. He had a superb memory.

MR. McNAUGHT: It was - was it in the 1920s, right after your marriage, that you first started making these trips abroad?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: And abroad, you looked at museums and so on. Tell me, in New York, did you do the same sort

of things, going to the museums?

MRS. REIS: Absolutely.

MR. McNAUGHT: And did you go to galleries at that time, early on? Were you - did you go to Stieglitz and that sort of thing?

MRS. REIS: Yes. We did all of that because we really were interested.

MR. McNAUGHT: And did you collect at that early stage?

MRS. REIS: Very early. Very early. I'll tell you how that was, too. I remember that we used to go to galleries, sometimes separately, only to come home and compare our impressions. And invariably, we liked the same things.

MR. McNAUGHT: That was lucky.

MRS. REIS: So there was a great communication between us.

MR. McNAUGHT: What did - when did you first start buying works of art?

MRS. REIS: I believe that it was - let's see now. I believe that our first purchase was of a painter we had no idea about. I had been looking at exhibitions that afternoon - oh, that could have been, what, in the middle '20s, let's say - and I went up to the gallery owned by J.B. Neumann.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes?

MRS. REIS: Many people still remember him. He had great taste in art. As a matter of fact, I remember his telling us that Clifford Odets bought all of his art through him, and a lot of it was of Paul Klee. So J.B. was a known character. We knew him, how I don't quite remember. But I went up to his gallery that afternoon, and he had a show of a painter called Ben Kopman, K-o-p-m-a-n. And it struck me as being interesting. Strong, though unknown to me. Still, I was impressed by the show. So I phoned my husband and said, "Bernard, on your way home, stop off at J.B. Neumann and look at a show by a man named Kopman which impressed me very much." He did that. And came 8:00 at night, he appeared with J.B. Neumann and two paintings of the very man, Kopman, which he bought like on the spot.

MR. McNAUGHT: He bought them on the spot. How fascinating. Was this your first venture as collectors?

MRS. REIS: Yes. That was really our first - our first major acquisition, I think.

MR. McNAUGHT: And then you kept -

MRS. REIS: Previous to that, however, Bill, I think we had gone to a sale one night at the Park Benet, and it was a mixed sale. But in it were three Japanese prints by the famous Utamaro. We didn't know very much about Japanese prints except that we found them beautiful. And we did know that the modern French painter had been very impressed and influenced by Japanese prints, particularly, I think, Toulouse-Lautrec. So we bought them just because we found them aesthetically beautiful, and still have them.

MR. McNAUGHT: Still have them?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: How marvelous.

MRS. REIS: Well, so that was an incidental purchase. But after the purchase of paintings in the large, we seemed to keep on doing it. And when in Paris, we always subscribed to the main art publications that existed at the time. We found that very essential and very fascinating because they were fascinating. I mean, publications like the Caillé d'Art [phonetic] or Minotaur or 20th Century. These were French paintings - French publications which you scarcely ever saw in the States.

MR. McNAUGHT: They were difficult to get in New York?

MRS. REIS: Well, you scarcely ever saw them.

MR. McNAUGHT: So you subscribed, and they were sent to you?

MRS. REIS: And we resubscribed, and made contact with a very fine art book dealer in Paris with instructions that any good editions that would come out of a special nature, they were to reserve one for us.

MR. McNAUGHT: So your real network of travels took you mostly to Paris, where you got involved to a certain degree with the art scene. Did you meet any artists in Paris at that time, in the '20s, say, early on?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Yes, we did. The first artist we ever got to know was Jacques Lipchitz.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, really?

MRS. REIS: Yes. It so happened that we had a friend in Philadelphia who was an art collector, and a good one. He is now dead. He had known Jacques Lipchitz before anybody in the United States seemed to have known him. And as a matter of fact, I think it was due to his influence that Albert Barnes of the Barnes Foundation first got acquainted with the work of Jacques Lipchitz and looked him up in Paris when he went there. With us, our Philadelphia friend gave us a letter of introduction to Jacques Lipchitz. And we called him, and he and his wife invited us to come, oh, I think for a drink or whatever.

MR. McNAUGHT: Do you - do you remember what year this was?

MRS. REIS: I would have to look it up precisely to tell you because my years get very kind of mixed up.

MR. McNAUGHT: But do you think it was in the '20s or -

MRS. REIS: I think it was in the '20s.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. Yes. But in any case, you had a letter of introduction.

MRS. REIS: Yes. So we had a letter to his office. And when we went there, upon - after the telephone conversation, we somehow struck a common note and became friends from the very beginning. We immediately bought one of his works, and during our total stay in Paris that year we saw a great deal of Jacques Lipchitz and his wife. We really became friends. And we got to know also his dealer, who was Jeanne Bucher. I don't know whether you would know that name. I think you're too young, Bill. But it's still going. And Bucher is B-u-c-h-e-r. Jeanne Bucher was a Swiss, of Swiss origin, but had a gallery in Paris for many years and superb taste, and showed young avant-garde painters and sculptors, as you can imagine, because he did show Jacques Lipchitz.

MR. McNAUGHT: Jacques Lipchitz.

MRS. REIS: So we got acquainted with her gallery, with Lipchitz, with all the dealers in Paris on the Right Bank, on the Left Bank, and just had the time of our lives of discovery, as it were.

MR. McNAUGHT: It must have been a very exciting period.

MRS. REIS: It was marvelous because in those days, nobody, nobody at all, ever dreamt of buying art as a form of investment. You bought art because you fell in love with it. And luckily, prices were somehow acceptable. If you had any money at all, and we did, you were in a position to buy. Well, that's how we spent our money. We lived well when we were abroad, ate well, I assure you, because aesthetics even extended to good eating, and then we really haunted the museums. That was our major interest. A great many people go abroad to get the atmosphere, to sit at cafés, to have good food. But that's not the way we spent our time. We spent our time, without fail - after breakfast at the hotel, we would spend the entire day going to exhibitions or museums, and they're endless in Paris, or interesting areas in Paris, and of course every other city wherever we went, and took no social engagements at noontime.

MR. McNAUGHT: So you had the whole day free?

MRS. REIS: Yes. But then the evening, the dinnertime, was the social time for us and for whichever friends we made or had or found. Then this kind of life continued, and we got to know various artists, especially when we had any contact with them about buying.

MR. McNAUGHT: Well, if Jacques Lipchitz was the first artist that you really got to know - that was in Paris - what about New York, which is, after all, where you lived?

MRS. REIS: Right.

MR. McNAUGHT: How did you first get to meet the artists here? Was it through the galleries after, say, perhaps you might have bought one of their works? And who was it? Which artists in New York at that relatively early time did you get to know?

MRS. REIS: I believe the most active period was about 1940 and '41.

MR. McNAUGHT: What about before that? Were you active in the '30s in New York?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you know artists then?

MRS. REIS: I can't remember whom we did know. But we were very interested in the Museum of Modern Art.

MR. McNAUGHT: Do you remember when that opened? Were you involved in it in any way?

MRS. REIS: We were involved. We were involved with the Museum of Modern Art by contribution, by membership, and by a very warm regard for the whole idea because that was the unique period for American development and absorption with art in the right sense, in the big sense.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. Well, it's fascinating to me because one thinks of the Bernard Reis collection. One should say the Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Reis collection because, as you said, it was both of yours, a mutual taste. But one thinks of the important postwar painter, abstract American painters. And that's why I wondered if you could go back to the '30s and think what happened in the period. I mean, one thinks of Rothko, and I see a Gottlieb on the wall there, and those kinds of painters. Did you know them earlier in the '30s, or were you involved in other kinds of galleries, in other kinds of art, or was it not your main focus at that time in New York?

MRS. REIS: I am trying to remember chronologically, which I'm not sure -

MR. McNAUGHT: It gets difficult, I know. But I -

MRS. REIS: Yes. I'm not sure that I can.

MR. McNAUGHT: A sort of before the war kind of thing.

MRS. REIS: Yes. We seemed to get acquainted with a good number of the avant-garde American artists I think by virtue of the fact that we went to exhibitions always. And we were particular about the artists who interested us, which is important. Otherwise, your head gets into a muddle. So we had a - we had a tendency toward what we considered beautiful art and interesting art. Now, how - with whom it started, I cannot quite tell you.

MR. McNAUGHT: I just wondered if, for example, you had been interested in the American abstract artists, or if the galleries you visited in New York tended to be those that might -

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: - display Europeans, or if you were particularly friendly early on with Stieglitz, if you want to his galleries, or if it was just a matter of going where you went.

MRS. REIS: Well, I'll tell you. At that period, various galleries cropped up and we would always go to openings.

MR. McNAUGHT: See what kinds of things they showed?

MRS. REIS: To see, yes. We would go largely to galleries which concentrated on European art of the 20th Century. That does not mean to say that we didn't haunt with pleasure the Metropolitan Museum and the Frick Museum and of course the Museum of Modern Art, which was then located in a building at Fifth Avenue and, what, 57th, I think it was.

MR. McNAUGHT: 5th Street.

MRS. REIS: Yes, at the beginning.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: In a regular office building because they started quite modestly, as I think people remember who go back that far. And so we got to know - you know, we got involved in the whole - in the whole area. Who - which artist was our first acquaintance in America, I can't swear [inaudible]. But I do remember vividly that came 1940 and '41, after Hitler had entered France and it was essential to get the advanced artists out of France in order not to be subject to imprisonment or concentration camps by the Pétain regime at the time, the Museum of Modern Art raised a fund to rescue those people. And by slow degrees, they managed, by the most intriguing ways you can possibly imagine. I remember they sent over a man by the name of Varian Frey. He may still be living. But he was a marvelous person because he had a lot of ingenuity. He could forge passports. Maybe he stole a few. I don't know. But whatever he did was to the purpose of getting all of the advanced - the avant-garde painters out of Europe.

MR. McNAUGHT: And many of them indeed, as we know, came.

MRS. REIS: Oh, indeed they did. Oh, yes. They came -

MR. McNAUGHT: And did you get to know them then?

MRS. REIS: Yes, we did. Now -

MR. McNAUGHT: How did this occur? Because I know you also became very good friends with Peggy Guggenheim and all of -

MRS. REIS: Yes. Whenever any of them came, somehow we got acquainted. I think that when the exodus occurred from Europe in 1941 and thereafter, we of course contributed to the fund of rescue. That stands to reason. But whenever any of them arrived, for some strange reason they were always referred to ourselves from the very beginning by somebody or other, first because we were buying art; secondly because my daughter, who had been educated abroad and who spoke a very rapid and colloquial French, as it were, got to know them. She was only 17 when she came back from Europe. But she was a painter ever since she was a child of 3, and she got to know all the surrealists. I might tell you that we were also aware of the surrealists before this exodus because there was a gallery owned by Julian Levy on East 57th who, for the first time here in America, had shown the surrealists. And we as well as a number of imaginative people were very intrigued by that movement. It's something that tickles the imagination. And so that we had an acquaintance that way.

MR. McNAUGHT: And then all of a sudden you were meeting them when they came here.

MRS. REIS: And then we were - yes. And then we were meeting them. And since my husband had this bent toward the arts and toward the creative quality of the artist, whenever any of these men needed anybody to get them out of trouble - well, trouble is not quite the word, but to smooth out something that had to do either with contracts with galleries or, in one case, with government suspicion that one of them may be communicating with the Nazis, or peculiar little things like that, they always came to my husband because he knew the law and he had the ingenuity to get them out of any jam that did arise. And soon that there was a mutuality of interests and affection.

MR. McNAUGHT: And they probably also came here, and you cooked them wonderful meals.

MRS. REIS: Well, I'll tell you how that was. In those days, I assure you, you could scarcely get a decent French meal. I don't know why. But we've advanced hundreds of eons since that day. But for a Frenchman, what you could get in restaurants was really very - oh, how shall I say? Very disagreeable. Nothing that seemed familiar. It so happened that I had at the time a French cook, Madeleine, who was divine. And since my husband and my daughter loved company daily, nightly, I had these people, largely artists, come all the time, whenever, so that it was an open household. And they found that the art that we had acquired was beautiful. They found the arrangement beautiful. They found the food delectable. And they found us having a lot of fun with them.

MR. McNAUGHT: Where did you live at this time?

MRS. REIS: We had a large apartment at 91st Street and Central Park West overlooking the reservoir.

MR. McNAUGHT: Marvelous.

MRS. REIS: So that from our apartment, from our windows, which stretched all along the front, it looked like the Italian lakes. And what had happened there, we lived there 20 years, and we happened to take that apartment because a year previous to taking the apartment, we had been abroad and had stayed in Florence, Italy, oh, for about four months at a stretch. We were in love with Florence. And while there, my husband was called back to New York on a case he had, so that I was there alone for, oh, I guess a stretch of two months, and fell deeply in love with antique Italian furniture in a curious sort of way. I knew a man, quite an old man, by the name of Bengujat who had owned, who had bought and owned, a beautiful little palazzo, as we call it, called the Palazzo Davanzati in a little square off the Via Tornabuoni called the Piazza Davanzati. And he took me to see it. And fell so terribly in love with that little palace. It was the kind of palace that any private family could easily live in with pleasure. However, Bengujat himself, being an unmarried man, I think, or a widow [sic] - in any case, not a married man, did not live in the palace because the government had declared it an historic monument. He couldn't touch a nail in it. I don't remember seeing a bathroom in the palace. I can't remember that. But it was so adorable, and just the size you'd like to have, that I would often say to him, oh, I'd like to see the palace again. And we went three, four, five times. And finally he gave me a set of photos of the Palazzo Davanzati just to keep as a memory, large photos, actually. He was awfully nice about it. And I began to look around for - among the art dealers, the antique art dealers, for antique Italian pieces. And during my husband's absence, I collected I can't tell you how many beautiful pieces, most of which we - some of which I gave to my daughter, some of which I gave to Jacques Lipchitz when he needed to have -

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: - a table and some benches up in Hastings. And then when my husband came, he returned to Florence. I said, "Bernard, I have collected some beautiful Italian pieces, and I think - if you like them as much as I do, I think we should ship them to New York and really get started with something." He looked a little amazed, I think. But he did look at the pieces and said to the dealer, who had now become a good friend of mine, "Well," he said, "Voltara [phonetic], if the pieces are genuine - that means to say that if the pieces are admitted to New York as being more than 300 years old, as you say they are - then that's fine. The check will be paid you upon admission." And so it happened that we acquired practically all of our basic furniture all at one - in one fell swoop.

MR. McNAUGHT: And those are still the pieces I see here now?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: In your house on 68th Street?

MRS. REIS: You see that beautiful, beautiful table.

MR. McNAUGHT: Marvelous.

MRS. REIS: And you see this beautiful predieu up here in the living room, and that marvelous credenza downstairs in the dining room.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes, I do.

MRS. REIS: And the chairs and the table in the dining room. Well, that was fine to have it come. But then I began to think what kind of space we would want in New York. So I returned home a bit earlier than I intended and began to look for space, and found, in an apartment house which belonged to Julian Levy's father, as it happened, at 91st Street and Central Park West, all of the windows giving out on the reservoir, which looked like an Italian lake. And so it happened also that a friend of ours had an apartment in that house. And I stopped searching then because I could see by the layout that that would be good space, provided we took out a lot of doors and impedimenta that I disliked. Well, we did it. And instead of having imitation French doors between the dining room and the living room - they came out - instead we built deep arches which were open. No doors, no gates, no anything of that kind, so that it was continuous space, and very handsome indeed. And I'll never forget that a friend of ours who designed the sets for the Theater Guild, namely, Cleon Throckmorton, he and I made the walls ourselves to look like the well-aged walls of the Davanzati Palace. How did we do it? First I had the painter give us a rough, undulating feeling in the surface of the walls. Then Throckmorton and I, with cloths, put in pale tones of pale blue, pale green, pale pinks, all blended so that it looked like nicely aged -

MR. McNAUGHT: Sort of mottled?

MRS. REIS: Yes. But it was done by hand and not by a paintbrush. It made all the difference in the world, and the result was absolutely beautiful.

MR. McNAUGHT: How long did you have the apartment on Central Park West?

MRS. REIS: Twenty years. Then the furniture began to arrive. And before the furniture came, we had to deal with the floors. Throckmorton and I said we cannot have parquet floors. That's out. So we began to treat the floors by first painting them a deep red, and possibly you could call it a Venetian red, but it was a deep red. Then, when that dried, we worked in, by hand again and with cloths, areas of black which would not give us a solid red surface, which would have been wrong. But we blended by our instincts so that after the blending and that was dry, we had it shellacked once, then rubbed down, shellacked again and rubbed down, and finally various coats of wax.

MR. McNAUGHT: It must have been like lacquer.

MRS. REIS: It looked absolutely beautiful. Really on the theory that the Japanese have of putting on one coat after another in the fashion of lacquer. It was a very beautiful floor as a result. And the floors were going to be very visible for the simple reason that we didn't want, as you remember my telling you, wall-to-wall carpeting. It would have been awful. So what we did have was a magnificent long rug which my mother had given me as a wedding present because she had asked me at the time, what do I most want? And I said we had seen a rug at an antique dealer by the name, I think, of Kevorkian, not existing any more, which was a beautiful shape, namely, about 7-1/2 feet wide and 13 long. It had a beautiful blue base, a lovely border, and long jewels of a delicious red on the blue surface. Well, you can imagine that rug on that kind of floor. It was absolutely stunning. That rug, I might tell you, Bill, now is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: I'll tell you how that happened. And this was some years later. I said to my husband one day, "Bernard, that beautiful 300-year-old rug has done its duty, and I don't know why we should wear it threadbare. Why don't we give it to some institution that wants it and get a rug which would be a 19th Century Persian rug but can stand the traffic of the art tours," of which we had so many, "and, you know, the general wear and tear of living?" And he said, "All right." And so I said, "But, you know, I don't know to whom to give it." And he said, "Well, the Cooper Union is known for its textiles section. Why don't you call someone there and see whether they would want it?" Which I did. And a man came. He said, "That's a beautiful rug." It really was a 300-year-old rug when I bought it, and it was older now that we'd used it. He said, "It's very beautiful but," he said, "you know, Mrs. Reis, we have a good textile section which we teach and accent, but we never - we have no collection."

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: "Oh, I didn't know that," said I. "Well," I said, "to whom shall I offer it?" And he said, "Well, I know that the Smithsonian in Washington would gladly take it because it's a unique piece." And he said, "Maybe the Metropolitan would want it." "But," he said, "you know, Mr. Hoving likes gift rugs to be in pristine order, condition, because - rugs that have never been stepped on, literally, because when he shows them, he hangs them, et cetera." So I said to myself, well, why not try the nearest place first. So I did call the Metropolitan, and they sent the head of the rug department, a lady whose name I've long forgotten. And when she came, she flipped again for the beauty of that rug. "Oh," she said, "I'd love to have it. But," she said, "you know, Mr. Hoving, he likes things that have never been stepped on, in pristine order." I said, "I know that, and I don't blame him if you can get them. But you tell him that since you like the rug so much, that if he'll allow you to accept it, it's yours. If not, then I'll offer it to the Smithsonian in Washington." Two days later she called and she said, "Mr. Hoving says okay." And the following day, they called for it. [Coughs] Pardon me. And two or three days later, I get a document declaring me a life fellow of the Metropolitan Museum for the gift of the rug."

MR. McNAUGHT: Really? It was that important a rug, obviously?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Yes, it was.

MR. McNAUGHT: How fascinating.

MRS. REIS: It was a perfectly beautiful rug. And its shape was so marvelous. You know, this 9 by 12 business was nothing for me. I can't bear the thought of a 9 by 12 anything. Well, in any case, that's the story of that rug. And the whole combination was simply wonderful. We didn't want to obliterate the view from the windows because we wanted the beauty of the lake, let us call it.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. The park there is beautiful.

MRS. REIS: Yes. So we didn't want to cover that with drapes. And besides, no one could look into the windows unless he had hawk's eyes from the east side across the park. So we had side drapes of fortuni material, and they did not at all interfere with the view. But then, having been going to Venice year after year - we always somehow managed to get to Venice in the course of our travels every year - I thought to myself, the next time we go to Venice, I'm going to take the measurements of the upper part of the window and the entrance door and have them make me leaded glass windows. Now, that was a pretty nice touch, wasn't it? And I did it. And then they did. And we had them installed in the upper part of the window so that we wouldn't have nearly an uninteresting modern window, but you know how beautiful those leaded [inaudible] are. I don't know how -

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. Yes. It must have been splendid.

MRS. REIS: It was splendid.

MR. McNAUGHT: Why did you leave that apartment to come here?

MRS. REIS: Well, I referred Julian Levy's father owning the building. Julian Levy was a friend of ours and the owner of a very important art gallery in New York.

MR. McNAUGHT: Uh-huh. Yes, indeed.

MRS. REIS: And then his father wanted to sell the building. I think he was retiring or something of that kind. And as he wanted to sell the building, he sold it to one man, and then that man would sell it to another man, I presume, at a profit, so that instead of having the house, the whole house, run beautifully and -

MR. McNAUGHT: As it had?

MRS. REIS: Yes, as it had been, it got to be so careless that I said to my husband, "Well, I really find that it's disturbing to me to have the elevator suddenly conk out when your guests are coming to dinner. And the general order of the house is getting to be worse and worse. We ought to find another way to live." And I said, "I wonder,

would you like it if I looked around for a private house?" And he said, "Do exactly as you like. If you find something, I'll come and see it and say what I think," and so on. Well, for two years I did look, and finally found this house that we have now. And that was in 1945. And it was a good year for buying houses. When we bought the house, it was in a rather good state but not our style. So we began to change. Took the stoop down. It was really a more or less ugly brownstone. We took the stoop down. We made the entrance on the level with the stoop, as you see it now. We took all the gimcracks off that the brownstones have, and we had a fine firm resurface the house, Getty & Lopez, the Tiffany of resurfacing houses on the East Side. And they gave us a beautiful beige surface, which made the house look very fine in its approach. And then came the time of moving. And the thing that puzzled me terribly was since the house was going to be conceived as a modern house, what about furnishing? We had taken all of the moldings off and made simple walls; converted the second floor, which is now our living room, from four rooms, which it was, into one. We never had an architect. Every one of our friends had another idea. And finally, I became the main architect, one room laid with a beautiful wide board oak floor with the pegs; and two beautiful fireplaces, which we had done in Belgian black marble. And in the dining room, we changed the fireplace mantle into an Italian terrazzo marble. We changed the back of the house, which had been merely a door leading into a back yard. We had the house shored, put in wide glasses, wide - totally wide glass, and just a door leading out into what became a very beautiful garden. We remade the garden. Mr. and Mrs. Perkins lived largely in the country at that time, and they didn't have a garden at all. They usually -

MR. McNAUGHT: Who were they? The previous owners of the house?

MRS. REIS: They were the previous owners. And it simply was a back yard, and ugly as sin, of course. So we remade that, and in due time acquired the beautiful Lipchitz sculpture which stands outside there on the blue pedestal, which was the centerpiece for the garden, and planted in relationship to it.

MR. McNAUGHT: But it was 1945 that you bought the house?

MRS. REIS: Yes. 1945.

MR. McNAUGHT: I didn't realize it had been that long that you lived here.

MRS. REIS: Yes. Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: So a great many of the artists and people that you came to know over the years, it was in this very room that you gave your dinner parties -

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: - with Mark Rothko or with Robert Motherwell or [inaudible].

MRS. REIS: Yes. With all the artists we knew, and we got to know them in a great variety of ways because for some reason, we were genial people. We knew good food and served it that way, and my husband was a great - a beautiful connoisseur of good wines, so that a nice atmosphere -

MR. McNAUGHT: People liked to come?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Which is what we had started talking about a bit before, of how your daughter particularly got to know some of the surrealist painters who came to New York during the war. And then you got to know them. They came here. Could we talk about some of them? Who did you get to know then?

MRS. REIS: Well, I'll tell you that happened.

MR. McNAUGHT: Max Ernst?

MRS. REIS: Since Barbara, my daughter -

MR. McNAUGHT: Barbara Poe?

MRS. REIS: Barbara as she now - yes, Barbara Poe - spoke French very well. It was an easy communication between her and the surrealist artists. And they eventually all gravitated here from Europe. And that was Max Ernst, André Breton, Duthuit - what is Duthuit's first name? Anyway, the son-in-law of Matisse. Kurt Seligmann. [Inaudible] we knew, but he had been resident in New York before that. And through them, we got to know Marcel Duchamp very well, though he had been resident here for a long time. He was not one of the 1940 imports.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. Yes. Did he used to come here, Marcel Duchamp?

MRS. REIS: A great deal. In other words, it was open house, and so that what - between the French artists whom we got to know so very well - Matta was one of them, too, you know, Matta, the Chilean who had been trained in France, had been painting and trained in France. Well, then who among the American artists we got to know first, I don't remember. We got to know Robert Motherwell very well because he was very intrigued with the French surrealist ideas. We got to know David Hare, who was also involved. In due time, we got to know Baziotes, who was a surrealist in his inclination. I'm trying to think of everybody quickly. Franz Kline. Jackson Pollock.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did he used to come here as well?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. I'll tell you a delicious story about him, Jackson Pollock. George Grosz, when he came to this country, though he came early in 1933.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you know him ever since 1933?

MRS. REIS: We met him at the boat through - we went down with - we had known his work and had some of his work, his European work. But we knew a man who knew him personally, and asked us whether we'd like to go down with him to meet him -

MR. McNAUGHT: How fascinating.

MRS. REIS: - coming in on the boat.

MR. McNAUGHT: This was in 1933?

MRS. REIS: 1933.

[END TAPE 1, SIDE A]

MR. McNAUGHT: This is William McNaught talking to Rebecca Reis. Today is Tuesday, April 29th, 1980. This is tape 1, side 2. Mrs. Reis, just being here for these several days over the last few months, I can't help but notice all the works of art you have. And of all the painters represented, it seems you have more George Grosz than practically anything. I'm sure you've got a fascinating story to tell about your relationship with that important artist. When did you first meet him?

MRS. REIS: Well, we knew his work through publications. And we recognized long ago that here was an artist of superb technical quality who recorded the German scene of the '20s and - you know, that wild period in Germany.

MR. McNAUGHT: Were you and Mr. Reis ever in Berlin at that period?

MRS. REIS: No. No, not at all. We only knew about it through publications. And in those publications, we admired the work of George Grosz because he really was outstanding. And we liked his point of view. We liked his style of expression. And he was not known very well in this country except by, I suppose, a certain number of people who know everything. And so it was not exceptional that when he was due to arrive because he had received a commission to teach at the school of art on West 57th Street - what's it called?

MR. McNAUGHT: The Art Students League?

MRS. REIS: New York Art Students League. Right. So he arrived on the ship, which I don't remember. But we had a friend who knew him personally and asked whether we'd like to go down to meet him at the boat. And we said, oh, we certainly would. Whereupon we went with our friend, and there at the customs was George Grosz, a fairly tall man, sort of round face but good-looking, and his wife and two small children. And so we all had the proper introductions, and he could tell, or we may have mentioned, that we admired his work. And then very shortly thereafter, we bought works from him. And it immediately established a friendship, sort of a spiritual contact which was very warm and loveable because we liked him right away.

MR. McNAUGHT: What year was it that you met him?

MRS. REIS: I think it was exactly 1933. And you see, as you can see by the date, he was not escaping the Nazis, but he came on a specific commission.

MR. McNAUGHT: To teach?

MRS. REIS: To teach here. And there's a wonderful story that lies behind that because a great man of the faculty of the Art Students League didn't approve of asking George Grosz to teach because of his very left point of view. But John Sloan insisted that he be asked to come to teach, and said that he would resign unless he were invited.

That speaks well for John Sloan. I didn't know him, but he was evidently a very good guy in our light. Well, as things went on, we got to see a great deal of the Groszes. They would come often to dinner, and we would go to see them.

MR. McNAUGHT: Where were they living? Do you remember?

MRS. REIS: I think they were living in - right outside of New York, later in Huntington, Long Island, but before that at Bayside, I think. In any case, he was - I speak about his wife, too, because she was really very sympathetic. And he used her many, many times as a model so that she's not to be disregarded. But the electricity that existed was between ourselves and George Grosz. So what was delightful about them when they came to dinner was that he enjoyed every moment. He enjoyed what he considered, and I hope was true, a cultivated household with works of art accented in the house. And as a matter of fact, at that time it was really an apartment, which was also very handsome, accenting works of art.

MR. McNAUGHT: Was this at Central Park West -

MRS. REIS: Yes, it was.

MR. McNAUGHT: - that we'd spoken about earlier?

MRS. REIS: Yes, it was. But when - we had hanging on the walls even there a magnificent Modigliani, a wonderful figure piece of Soutine, you know, important people of that kind. And, well, of course that was George Grosz's dish, you know. Well, in any case, whenever they came to dinner, we always had company that they'd enjoy. And their pleasure and the conversation was always so animated and agreeable and so lovely and full of tales of one kind or another, and natural, his art situation in this country. At that time, he did - first of all, he was earning a livelihood by teaching at the Students League, Art Students League, which was fine.

MR. McNAUGHT: Were many people buying his work here?

MRS. REIS: Not at all. Not at all.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did he have a dealer?

MRS. REIS: He had a dealer, and I believe the dealer at that time was the - oh, dear, don't let me hesitate - an American - if I may come back to it, I'll get you the exact name because they're still in business. But they were more interested in works of art than in setting big prices, which is the common factor at the present time. In any case, his dealer seemed to want him to paint nudes, largely, because he did them very well. And those were the things that sold more readily than anything else. But we were interested in his drawings he made in Germany on the German scene. As you can see, these café scenes were these typical German types. And you see one which is a beggar with a little boy at his feet. This was the underside of life in Germany. And in one of his large portfolios, of which he made many great ones, you could also see the large rich businessman taking advantage of the poor fellow who was applying for a job or something of that kind. Now -

MR. McNAUGHT: Were pictures of that sort or drawings of that sort things that he had brought with him here, or did he continue to do those kinds of works once in New York?

MRS. REIS: No. Things he had brought with him. And, well, we acquired a great many of those things. And everything we acquired he would always write a special inscription in his magnificent handwriting, which he colored as well, making even of his inscription to us a work of art.

MR. McNAUGHT: A work of art.

MRS. REIS: It was marvelous. And so what was interesting was that my husband, as usual, wanted to make it possible for the artist to earn a decent living. And we did everything we could to sell works of his, especially the works he made in this country, because that was now difficult. The works he made in this country were largely watercolors of the American scene, as he would, but not in that critical, harsh, disapproving attitude that he had toward the German scene.

MR. McNAUGHT: His things were less caustic here? Less satirical?

MRS. REIS: Oh, far less. Because he told me many times that he fell in love with America. And for years while living in Germany, he even used to buy those tan or yellow shoes with the big bows in the front. You know the kind of thing that we used to see people wear? "Well," he said, "they were American shoes, and just because they were American, I used to buy them." Then he said - so that his attitude toward America was one of love. It was far different from Germany. And here was a free country with types which interested him. But he rendered them sympathetically and lovingly - not sweetly, but sympathetically. You understand. So we bought a great many. Whenever he made watercolors of that kind, we bought from him. And we have quite a large number. We

may have as many as ten, if not more. And I used to get friends to buy them as well. And we used to try to get publications, such as Esquire, for example, to commission him to do work. In other words, my husband Bernard, growing up a poor boy himself, realized that the artist is the most unprotected creature in the world, especially the artist of great ideas and difficult for the common herd to get to understand or to love or to want, so that it reflects on my husband's character throughout his total life. I remember his telling me that as a little boy, though his father was in business running a sort of a stationery shop on East 10th Street, that he himself when he was a little boy of maybe 8 or 10 used to earn over the weekend a salary. He would take care of the umbrellas on wet days, and he received 5 cents a day. So that you can understand that he knew the substance of life. And since he was in love and admired artists and their ability and what they have that is so intriguing, he always sought their protection and gave them help in every possible way. It was not only for Grosz, but it was for even Chagall, who didn't - who wasn't too difficult to sell, you understand, or among the Americans -

[Audio Break.]

MR. McNAUGHT: Did Mr. Reis act as accountant or advisor for George Grosz during the years he was in America?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Or was it merely a personal sort of friendship?

MRS. REIS: No, he did everything possible. He took care of his income tax matters. He took care of any kind of business matter on which he needed help. And he always did, of course, because -

MR. McNAUGHT: He didn't understand the system here?

MRS. REIS: Well, no artist really is equipped. At least no artist had been equipped to take care of his financial complications or whatever you wish to call them. Oh, I'm sure that there was a time when Rubens didn't need anybody's help. He was ambassador and became a very great, rich man and all that. But that was not quite true of the modern artist as we knew him. However, with Grosz and with all of the other artists we knew, that meant to say with Lipchitz, with Max Ernst, with Miro, among the fine artists; with Kline, the American, Franz Kline, with Philip Guston, with - I'm trying to think of all of these famous names - Baziotes. I'm trying to think of all of them, in God's name. I haven't mentioned Helen Frankenthaler, Marca-Relli, almost all of the young American painters making - oh, with Rothko, of course - making a career for themselves in difficult times when people were really not buying art. And the way he concerned himself with them was that he not only advised them when they came to any problem whatsoever, whether it was financial or whether it was a gift they made or whether it was a decision to make, you know, yes or no or what to do, because he somehow always could find a solution. And it was great for them because otherwise, they really were puzzled. And in Bernard, they had a wise and completely informed and a loveable human being who understood the problem of living, and loved and understood their talents, their position in life - which was of course not easy at all then - and their ambitions toward continuing their arts. That's what they wanted to do and should have done.

MR. McNAUGHT: So he would take care of their financial affairs?

MRS. REIS: Their financial affairs.

MR. McNAUGHT: He would prepare their income tax?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. Without charge, by the way.

MR. McNAUGHT: Without charge?

MRS. REIS: Without charge.

MR. McNAUGHT: I was going to say, did they -

MRS. REIS: Not at all.

MR. McNAUGHT: - pay him by works of art?

MRS. REIS: Occasionally, but no demands were made. It was only a question of sometimes yes, sometimes no. But it was -

MR. McNAUGHT: And one artist would refer another artist, presumably?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. Yes. You know, that goes around like wildfire. Why don't you ask Bernard Reis? He'll tell you what to do. And then he did other kinds of things that were very helpful and sympathetic. I remember that the first public show Helen Frankenthaler had was at the Jewish Museum. And her then-dealer, John Myer, Myers,

said to Bernard, "Bernard, if you would buy one of Helen's paintings and make it a gift to the Carnegie Institute, I could interest them in wanting it because I think they would want it. And that would put her - give her a first step into a museum." And by Jove, he did it. The tax advantage thing was very trifling because, you know, he paid \$1,000 for it. So his tax advantage was not a great deal. But he liked the idea of getting the artist recognized, getting the artist whom he liked placed in museums or in prominent collections, bringing everything to further their [inaudible], you know, their professional life. Well, in any case, we knew the dealers of all of them. And whatever - any kind of problem you can possibly imagine, whether the dealer or the artist himself, he somehow always had a way out. And it was the greatest comfort to them in the world. Max Ernst had a problem, he would take it to Bernard. Jacques Lipchitz had many problems, he would take them to Bernard. Bernard was a sort of oracle.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did he act as a lawyer to them, or just a financial advisor, or the actual accountant?

MRS. REIS: I believe that's not the essential thing. He acted as a very knowledgeable friend.

MR. McNAUGHT: Who understood the art world?

MRS. REIS: Who understood the artist's career, how to further it where possible, what kind of arrangement to make with his dealer. Because the dealers were not the most honorable of people for the artist to deal with. That you can understand. And he would very often oversee their contracts with dealers and make suggestions which would work preferably -

MR. McNAUGHT: Benefit the artist?

MRS. REIS: Preferably for the benefit of the artist, of course. So that when I say he was an oracle, he was. Any problems they had he took as seriously as if it were his own life problem, in fact, better. I'm sure that Bernard neglected many of the things that he could have paid attention to in his own affairs, but really devoted himself and helped in any way the artist considering, as I told you before, that the artist was a helpless man in matters of practicality and needed a guiding spirit and a lovable one, one who really cared for them.

MR. McNAUGHT: Getting back to George Grosz, which is how we started this -

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: - he was in New York for a certain amount of time, during which time you bought works from both his earlier German period and things he was doing while in America.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: And Bernard Reis was acting as a financial advisor and helped him with - helping him with taxes and so on.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Then after the war, he went back to Germany. Is that correct?

MRS. REIS: Well, wait a minute. Before he went back to Germany - yes, that is correct. But before he was going back to Germany, his whole life here was fascinating. I'll tell you a few incidents. This is one small incident, but I'll tell you a better one in a second. One incident was that Fortune magazine asked for - asked us for the privilege of reproducing one of Grosz's drawings.

MR. McNAUGHT: One that you owned?

MRS. REIS: Which we owned.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: And we said, "We" - I remember saying to Deborah someone - I don't remember her last name - but I remember saying to her, "We don't object to your reproducing it. But we do think that rich Fortune magazine can well afford to pay the artist for the privilege of reproducing his work." And Deborah, a nice woman indeed - she doesn't work there any more, even if she's alive - saw that. And I remember to this day she sent him a check for \$150 for the privilege of reproduction.

MR. McNAUGHT: What do you know.

MRS. REIS: That was pretty good. And that was our feeling, that it was not the owner who counted in these matters, but it was the man who produced them. And he needed it anyway very much. Now, another delightful

incident was this one which I think everybody will love. One day we had a large cocktail party right upstairs in our living room here. And among the guests was Jackson Pollock and his wife, Lee Krasner. And in some way, Grosz attached himself - gravitated toward Jackson. And they were getting on very well in conversation. They both were rather shy people, by the way, but they clicked. And finally - and they must have stood talking to each other for a good three-quarters of an hour, if not longer. And Jackson was not known, really. Peggy Guggenheim had exhibited him, given him his first show.

MR. McNAUGHT: When was this? About the early '40s?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Should have been 1942, roughly. And so Grosz and Jackson were hitting it off very well, whereupon the last remark I heard said was that Grosz said, "I hope we can meet again." And hearing that, I said, "Well, that's the easiest thing in the world. Why don't you all come and have dinner together right here." And that pleased them. So we immediately made a dinner date. And the dinner date was for something a week or ten days away at 8:00 for dinner. Well, on that day, Grosz and his wife came in from Huntington - they were then out on Long Island - for dinner and were here well ahead of 8:00. But came 8:00, and no Jackson and no Lee Pollock. And just then, the telephone rings and it's Lee Pollock on the wire saying, "Becky, Jackson has just come into the door, having been out with his cronies drinking at the" - oh, there was a bar called the Cedar Bar, I think, yes - "all afternoon. He's as tight as a coot. And I don't think we can make it." And I said, "Oh, Lee, you're taking it all too seriously. Put Jackson on." And he gets on the phone, and I said to him, "Jackson, Grosz came in from the country purposely to have a chance to see you again, and I don't care whether you feel like it or not or are able to or not, why don't you and Lee get into a taxi and come?" He said, "Okay." And in 20 minutes they were here. The minute they came to the door, Jackson said to me, "Becky, give me a good swig of whiskey." And I said, "Just a minute, young man." And I did. I gave him, I think, a quarter of a glass of Scotch. And he throws it right down, he came in, greeted everybody very civilly, not really - not gaga at all. And the whole evening was enchanting. He was not one bit drunk. Now, explain it.

MR. McNAUGHT: Extraordinary.

MRS. REIS: Extraordinary. Because I think that with Jackson as I knew him, since we used to talk a lot together, you know, about personal matters, I always said about Jackson that he was so shy and so afraid that people may not be sympathetic to him that he would drink to overcome that feeling. But I never, honest to God, saw him drunk.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did he and Grosz get on well that night at dinner?

MRS. REIS: Oh, my God, we had a delicious time. They all liked the dinner. We always had a superb wine because Bernard somehow thought a superb wine - if not two, because I used to say a fish course first with a fine white Burgundy, and the meat course would come with a very fine old Burgundy or Bordeaux, whichever Bernard thought was more suitable for the dinner. And they all enjoyed it, particularly Grosz, who knew a good deal about both eating and drinking. His mother had been the cook for a famous military regiment in Berlin.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: Yes. That's how she earned her livelihood. And you were not careless about how you fed the military in Germany, as you can well imagine. And she held that position for many, many years. I think she had the ambition for her son not that he be restaurateur but maybe a mailman, something connected with the government with a good, steady salary. She little suspected that he was going in the direction that he did go.

MR. McNAUGHT: To become an artist.

MRS. REIS: Well, and by the way, he painted his mother very often. I don't think we have a portrait of his mother, but I remember seeing at his home drawings he made of his mother.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you keep up with him when he went back to Europe?

MRS. REIS: When he went back to Europe, he went not because he wanted to go. His wife Eva had family in Germany whom she hadn't seen ever since they were here.

MR. McNAUGHT: More than ten years.

MRS. REIS: Yes. And it was now the end of the war. And she had a yearning to see them again. So we saw them off. Again, we saw them at a steamer. And I said, "George, I hate to see you go." And he said, "But I'll be back in the spring. I have a new contract with the Art Students League, so I'm bound to be back in the spring." In the course of that time, he never did get back in the spring. In the course of time abroad back to Germany, his wife died, and he fell down - as I'm told, though I can't verify everything - it appears he fell down a staircase and was dead when he landed, so that we really knew nothing about his return to Germany except that was one of the

things he hated to do. But he expected to be back again, so it wasn't as painful as it might have been. He certainly never thought he would want to spend the rest of his years in Germany.

MR. McNAUGHT: No. But in any case, during that period of his life here, you and Bernard were amongst his closest friends.

MRS. REIS: Very good friends. He adored us because we thought we were civilized people. We adored going to him because it was a delight. Always good company. And he and his wife were the most remarkable hosts in the world. Bernard used to send them cases of wine, so the wine was taken care of easily. But his wife knew how to cook, and we never could understand how people who had very limited sums of money and two children to bring up, how they could produce such delightful food. It wasn't that it was extravagant, but it was extremely good. I remember that Eva, if you don't mind my telling you that, used to do what the Swedish call a gravlax. What is a gravlax? A gravlax is smoked salmon, which the Swedish do at home. In other words, they buy the fresh salmon and they cook it with herbs, with the liquor called - you know it - liqueur, and salt, a little sugar. That would get wrapped, and it would stay in a cool place in the house with a heavy instrument on it, heavy, to sort of press it. And then the second - it took about three days. The second day, you would turn it to the other side and put the heavy weight on it again. And by the third day, it became smoked salmon done at home. Now, how did Eva know that? She told me that Flechtheim, the famous, famous, famous German dealer, who had perhaps the most important gallery in Berlin, represented George Grosz when he was living there. And he told Eva that in his will, he was going to will her the recipe for gravlax. So she could do that. And to buy a smoked salmon - to buy a fresh salmon was nothing, nothing as expensive as buying a smoked salmon.

MR. McNAUGHT: Of course.

MRS. REIS: So she would have that. And then she would have some - everything she did was so very good without a terrific costliness, if you understand. And it was feasible in those days to do a roast or a stew or what have you without spending a fortune on it. But it all turned out that the food was good, the drink was good, the company was good -

MR. McNAUGHT: They sound like marvelous people. Some of the other artists who came here from Europe, amongst them were Kurt Seligmann.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Can you tell me about your relationship with him?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you collect any of his work? Do you have -

MRS. REIS: We had no previous introduction to Kurt. What happened one night was that we had gone out to the World's Fair. There was a grand World's -

MR. McNAUGHT: So this would have been '39?

MRS. REIS: Yes, I think. I guess so. You know the date better than I because I never remember precise dates. And it so happened that we were seated at the same table at the Brazilian building having coffee. And in the course of conversation, without introduction, we learned who he and his wife was, or were. And they got to know us.

MR. McNAUGHT: So it was completely by chance?

MRS. REIS: Completely by chance. We had no intermediary at all.

MR. McNAUGHT: Fascinating.

MRS. REIS: And then they both - his wife was French; Kurt, as you know, is Swiss. And his wife, I believe, came from a wealthy family. So later, as I thought about it, I don't think that Kurt had a financial problem here. And he had a marvelous studio, as we learned later, in the building that's now gone at 40th Street and 6th Avenue, then called, a marvelous large studio. Well, that we learned later. But we seemed to invite them to dinner right away. And when they came, there may have been company with them. I don't remember quite. But anyway, they came as dinner guests, and we had a very harmonious good time. And I think my daughter Barbara had by that time returned from Europe, from her school, the famous school in the French part of Geneva called école Internationale, just in time before the war started. And she was here, but at school in Philadelphia at Temple University. As we were talking about her, I remember that Bernard, my husband, must have suggested that I show Kurt Barbara's childhood work because she painted remarkably, both as a child and as she developed in years, from the time she was 3. And we always kept every smidge of things she did because we were fascinated.

And so - whereas, by the way, most parents in the same class at school must have thrown them away.

MR. McNAUGHT: Threw everything away.

MRS. REIS: Well, we never saw those at all. But we kept everything, and we still had them. So for some reason, Bernard must have suggested it. And I showed Kurt Barbara's work from age 3 on to age 17. And at that time at Temple University, it was a very run-of-the-mill art school. By that, I mean they were training or teaching, whatever you call it, art students to do - to work in a conventional manner. And when he saw something that she had painted at Temple as contrasted to her early work, he said right away, "Take her out. They'll ruin her." Now, you must forgive - Temple will have to forgive me, but that was really the way it was. He said, "They'll ruin her native imaginative talent."

MR. McNAUGHT: This is Kurt Seligmann, you said?

MRS. REIS: Yes. And by Jove, we did, almost immediately. And he said further something that was extremely wonderful. He said, "I have no desire to be an art teacher." As a matter of fact, he didn't need to be. "But I have a studio where someone else can paint. Barbara can come to my studio, work in her own fashion without my instructing her at all unless she asks me something, and I'm not in a position of teacher to her. There's no money involved. She simply will have a place to paint in an agreeable atmosphere, in a studio atmosphere." And we certainly took him up on that. And he extended the same generous offer to Bob Motherwell, whom he got to know, I believe, through - I'll have to fill in; terribly [inaudible] - who, as you know, is a scholar and very -

MR. McNAUGHT: Were Robert Motherwell and your daughter Barbara -

MRS. REIS: Friends?

MR. McNAUGHT: - friends owing to Kurt Seligmann, or did they know one another before that?

MRS. REIS: They knew each other before that.

MR. McNAUGHT: But did they in fact both go to Seligmann's studio and paint?

MRS. REIS: Constantly. Every day.

MR. McNAUGHT: Both of them?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Were they the only two young artists that he took up?

MRS. REIS: Yes. The only two.

MR. McNAUGHT: How fascinating.

MRS. REIS: And it occurred because, in the first place, he was very intrigued with her early work. And then he knew Bob Motherwell through -

MR. McNAUGHT: Well, when you think of the person, we can bring that up again.

MRS. REIS: I'll put him in, yes. But everybody knows him now. Well, and that went on for a long time so that it meant quite a warm relationship between the Seligmanns and ourselves also. And as a matter of fact, Kurt and his wife and we had two summer holidays together.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, really? Where?

MRS. REIS: One was in Vermont at a farmhouse, and another was in Mexico City another year. And in both instances, we liked the same things at the farmhouse. It was a question of getting sort of acquainted with American farm life. And besides, it was not far away from Tchelitchew's home up in Maine, I think he was, so that he would come over for lunch and we would go walking in the woods around the house. And Pavel Tchelitchew was not only witty, but he was somehow a typical Russian despite his long years in America. And something delightfully childish remained in him so that I remember when we were walking through deep woods, and he and I together, he said, "Oh, Becky, hold on to me. I'm scared of the mystery of what might be in deep woods." It was charming, you know.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Laughing.]

MRS. REIS: Well, that was that summer. Then -

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you buy Seligmann's work?

MRS. REIS: Yes, we did.

MR. McNAUGHT: You did?

MRS. REIS: Yes. And quite a number of things [inaudible].

MR. McNAUGHT: Was he having a success here as an artist?

MRS. REIS: I don't think Seligmann had great success, either. I must say that I think that none of the artists, none, had what you call success.

MR. McNAUGHT: Real success?

MRS. REIS: No. They had to rely on people like James Sweeney, like James -

MR. McNAUGHT: Sobey [phonetic]?

MRS. REIS: Sobey, yes, or other people like that. Ourselves. The Museum of Modern Art's interest in them. The museum was then something marvelous for new talents. But success didn't exist in the vocabulary at all. Minor approval or acquisition by people who liked them was as joyous as money. It so happens, I think, with Seligmann that his wife's family had money. I never talked with him about that.

MR. McNAUGHT: Bernard and he weren't - he did not come to Bernard for [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: He may have. I don't know that specifically. I think that - if he needed it, he did.

MR. McNAUGHT: He might have?

MRS. REIS: He might have.

MR. McNAUGHT: How long did Barbara stay working in his studio?

MRS. REIS: Oh, I don't know. Two, three years.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, that long?

MRS. REIS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. It continued.

MR. McNAUGHT: At which time did you all become closer to Robert Motherwell owing to this?

MRS. REIS: Well, that - I believe it was not that. I think that we became close with the interesting American painters when the surrealists and the advanced painters came out of France by virtue of a fund which the Museum of Modern Art raised to rescue advanced painters who had been clapped into concentration camps in France during the Pétain government. And I remember they did a remarkable job. They sent over a man called Varian Frey, F-r-e-y, who was lovely in every way. And he and his wife devised such means of getting these men out of France by hook or crook - false passports, bribes, anything you can think of. I never knew all of his techniques. But he succeeded.

MR. McNAUGHT: It worked.

MRS. REIS: It worked. So when they came here, not that the surrealists had not had some previous representation through the Julian Levy gallery I talked about previously.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: But here they were on our territory. And that made a them resident now. And we got to know them for a variety of reasons. One, we were an artistic and sympathetic household. Two, I had a French cook, and in New York City at that time, I don't think there was a single veritable French restaurant. Three, they were working at very modest pay, some of them, as interpreters of the American scene for the French radio.

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: They got some income that way. And then whatever they could sell, that was all to the good. But it was all a modest affair. And our household was open to them all the time. That meant Marcel Duchamp would have been here a long time, anyway. And it meant André Breton, who was really the pope of the surrealist movement and a wonderful man and a fine writer as well. And Matta, who was a very good painter. Though he

was born in Chile, his artistic life took place in France.

MR. McNAUGHT: In France?

MRS. REIS: Yes. And Marc Chagall, who had come over as a rescued painter, and his wife and his daughter. Now, wait, I've got to think of everybody.

MR. McNAUGHT: Max Ernst?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. Max Ernst, absolutely. Peggy Guggenheim, of course. And somehow, I was given to giving parties. I don't think I'd have the energy again to do what I did then. But it so happened that people enjoyed them.

MR. McNAUGHT: It must have been a marvelous time and a marvelous house for you to have all these people here.

MRS. REIS: Yes. It was fun because we always had people who kind of mixed well together. And that included the fine artists and most of the advanced American artists, people with whom we had grown to be friendly in one way or another.

MR. McNAUGHT: So you would mix the two groups?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Which was quite a contribution in the sense of their getting to know one another.

MRS. REIS: It was very fine because I think that the surrealists had enormous impact on the American painter.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.] I think one of the most intriguing thinkers at this time of this whole group of people was Peggy Guggenheim, who I know that you and your husband Bernard knew terribly well.

MRS. REIS: Very, very well.

MR. McNAUGHT: And I wondered if we might talk a bit about her.

MRS. REIS: Well, I'll tell you -

MR. McNAUGHT: When did you first meet Peggy Guggenheim?

MRS. REIS: I don't remember the occasion. All I can tell you is that she came over from France in a private plane she had commissioned, a private plane carrying, I believe, 13 people, her own family - herself, her two children, her divorced husband Laurence Vail, his new wife - now, the name - a well-known writer of short stories. But these names escape me. But I'll supply you with them.

MR. McNAUGHT: When we think of them, we can add them.

MRS. REIS: Yes. And, well, there was Max Ernst. Anyway, there was an assemblage about 13 in the private plane. So Peggy gets to New York. Now, it had been her intention before the war to establish a Peggy Guggenheim gallery called Guggenheim Jeune, J-e-u-n-e, Young Guggenheim, in London.

MR. McNAUGHT: In London?

MRS. REIS: Yes. So Peggy had made quite a fabulous collection in France with the advice of Marcel Duchamp, than which you could not have had better. And she had to stop operations, the war having broken out. Her director of the London museum was the Sir Herbert Read. He was not knighted then, but as you know, a famous critic and poet of modern paintings.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: And it didn't occur. So when she came to New York, her paintings were shipped to New York, quite miraculously, and she determined to open an advanced gallery here. And she took space on the second floor on West 57th, right above Hicks Fruit establishment. Hicks was a famous fruiterer, you know, who made those fancy baskets that go to the sick and the departing.

MR. McNAUGHT: Exactly.

MRS. REIS: Well, she wanted it designed in a modern way. And she engaged Frederick Kiesler, whose name you may or may not know.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes, indeed.

MRS. REIS: But he was a known name. Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Certainly.

MRS. REIS: And he designed the gallery for her, which was certainly very far out, very avant-garde. And he introduced the idea of no frames on paintings. He had the walls done - in the exhibition rooms - done in wood. He had invented a chair which is now very rare, though I think a few artists own them, which could be converted into a chair, into a table if you turned it another way, into nearly a bed. You know, that was Kiesler. He always had inventive ideas. And the whole atmosphere was really very unique.

[Tape stops, restarts]

MR. McNAUGHT: This is William McNaught talking to Rebecca Reis. It's Tuesday, May 6, 1980. This is tape 1, side 2, continued. We were talking about Peggy Guggenheim, Mrs. Reis. Could you tell me when you and Bernard first met her?

MRS. REIS: I think not until she arrived here sometime between the end of 1941 and early 1942. I'm not dead sure of the date, but it was in that area. Are you listening to me?

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. It's on.

MRS. REIS: And did you know her first through her gallery, or did you meet her through friends and get to know her personally that way? Was it Peggy Guggenheim the gallery owner and friend of artists, or was it -

MRS. REIS: For some reason, I think we knew her from the moment she arrived here and planned her gallery in New York. I don't quite remember the occasion.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you buy things from the gallery?

MRS. REIS: A lot.

MR. McNAUGHT: The Art of This Century?

MRS. REIS: Yes. All of her artists were very avant-garde. She was the first one to show, for example, Joseph Cornell's boxes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you buy Cornell boxes from her?

MRS. REIS: Many of them.

MR. McNAUGHT: You did?

MRS. REIS: In fact, all that we ever owned we bought from Peggy.

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: She was the first one to show Jackson Pollock. As a matter of fact, she commissioned him on an annual salary to paint and to let her have the paintings of the year.

MR. McNAUGHT: How fascinating.

MRS. REIS: If I remember correctly, she gave him \$2500 a year, on which he and his wife Lee Krasner managed somehow to live. Those were other days.

MR. McNAUGHT: Had you known Jackson Pollock before that, or did you meet him through Peggy Guggenheim and her gallery?

MRS. REIS: I think through Peggy Guggenheim and her gallery.

MR. McNAUGHT: When you first started going to her gallery, did you just start talking to her and then become good friends? Or what was the connection that made you and Peggy Guggenheim such good friends, and was it an initial connection or was it in later years that you became very close?

MRS. REIS: No. I think that the surrealist artists had already arrived before she turned up on the scene. And unless I'm very wrong - it's a long time ago; what is it, 20, 30 years, 35 -

MR. McNAUGHT: Forty years.

MRS. REIS: Forty years ago? How time flies.

MR. McNAUGHT: Indeed.

MRS. REIS: I think we got to know her through the surrealists who came from France.

MR. McNAUGHT: And she became a good friend right away?

MRS. REIS: We became good friends right away because we did see eye to eye. And when she commissioned Kiesler to design her gallery, I'm pretty sure she sought Bernard's advice, my husband's advice, on all sorts of business.

MR. McNAUGHT: I wondered if he had helped her with financial and business -

MRS. REIS: He not only helped -

MR. McNAUGHT: - affairs in establishing that gallery.

MRS. REIS: Right. He not only helped her then, when she needed help, of course, as so many of these American people did need, and he advised her and cared for her artistic setup and artistic interests, and the whole negotiation with the Italian government as to the gift of her collection to the government. He attended to practically everything of an artistic nature.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really? But this was in later years, more recently.

MRS. REIS: All the way through from the time -

MR. McNAUGHT: From the time you got to know her, Bernard Reis was active in her affairs?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. Very.

MR. McNAUGHT: How fascinating.

MRS. REIS: He was probably the only advisor on how to do things she practically had. She had other advisors, but they were of a different nature. But when she - even when she purchased her palace in Venice, after 1945 had gone back to Venice to live, it was Bernard who told her how to go about it.

MR. McNAUGHT: Even the purchase of the palace?

MRS. REIS: The purchase of the palace and how she was to raise the money to buy that palace. And she - and it worked.

MR. McNAUGHT: How fascinating. And did he draw up her wills and that sort of thing as well?

MRS. REIS: No. No. That was not what she needed at all because there is a firm, a law firm, which handled her mother's estate, out of which Peggy lived.

MR. McNAUGHT: I see.

MRS. REIS: Yes. That firm -

[END TAPE 1 SIDE B]

MR. McNAUGHT: This is William McNaught talking to Rebecca Reis Tuesday, May 6, 1980, the continuation of the tape. This is tape 2, side 1. We were talking about Peggy Guggenheim and about -

MRS. REIS: Our association with her.

MR. McNAUGHT: - the association of the Reises with her, and how Bernard Reis handled Peggy Guggenheim's affairs. And you were talking about her family lawyer and how he handled her basic day-to-day affairs, I gather.

MRS. REIS: Her basic money - business affairs. You know, whatever income she was to receive from her mother's legacy, I guess. But the artistic matters he never had anything to do with. But there are a lot of amusing incidents about Peggy and her artistic matters in New York. When she received the bill from Frederick Kiesler, the architect, it was a bill of \$6,000.

MR. McNAUGHT: A considerable sum in those days.

MRS. REIS: A considerable sum, but really terribly inexpensive even for those days. As she said to my husband Bernard, "He's robbing me. Kiesler is robbing me. What do you think, Bernard?" And he said, "Peggy, this is not a big bill. He did you the whole job, a very unique job, and you should not object to paying it. He did not rob you, I assure you." Well, every matter of that kind of thing that related to the gallery she discussed with Bernard. Now, finally the gallery was completed, paid for, and I remember that she took great pleasure in charging a fee for admission. And that fee was 25 cents a person. And it was something that would kill you with laughter because, Bill, she enjoyed so taking in those quarters and counting them over, which I presume was the only money she ever earned in her life herself -

MR. McNAUGHT: How fascinating.

MRS. REIS: - that she couldn't give up the thought of charging a 25-cent admission. Whereupon Bernard and Lawrence Vail, her first husband and father of her children, incidentally, convinced her that it was very penurious attitude to take, that she ought to forget about those quarters and have people come in. And I do remember that occasionally I would sit for her in the gallery.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, really?

MRS. REIS: Yes, when she was either bored sitting there herself or when she had something else she wanted to do. So I would substitute for her. And I must tell you this nice little tale. One day at about 12:00 noon, a young man comes in and gives me his quarter. Then, in about half an hour, he comes racing out. And I said, "What's the matter? Don't you like the exhibition?" He said, "No. It's a wonderful exhibition. It's fascinating. But I have to rush back to my job." And I said to him, "Now, what is your job?" He said, "I pack hats for" - then he gave me the name. I don't remember. But it was a well-known men's hat establishment. I was very touched by that. I said, "Now, look here. If at any time you wish to come back and look at the exhibition again, no matter who sits here at the desk, you are to say that I said" - and I gave him my name - "that you are not to pay an admission charge, that I allow you to come back whenever you have the time and look at the exhibition again. Well, that's the way I thought about those quarters.

MR. McNAUGHT: Marvelous.

MRS. REIS: Well, finally Peggy reluctantly gave up those quarters and people were admitted free of charge. Now, of course I think, though, many people who found it a little far out, if you know what I mean, in the setup and the design, the fact that the pictures had no frames at all, that he had - that Kiesler invented a wheel on which were placed maybe twelve small Schwitters, valuable paintings. And heaven's name, it was too tempting to people. Two of them disappeared.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: Which Peggy never regained. Well, that was changed. Somehow they were finally attached to the wheel more safely, more protectively. And then she continued to show always the young, avant-garde painters. Robert Motherwell was shown there. She had a show - I'm sure she had a show of Max Ernst, who then was her husband to come. And as I mentioned, Jackson Pollock was first shown there. Cornell. Motherwell. Then she had a show that was very interesting of 30 women painters, in which my own daughter Barbara had one of her paintings. And instead of 30, it developed into 31. The 31st one turned out to be Dorothea Tanning, an American surrealist painter who later became the wife of Max Ernst. In the interim somewhere, Peggy had married Max. He was very good-looking. Charming to a degree.

MR. McNAUGHT: Had you known him well at this point?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes?

MRS. REIS: And so now we were a gang, as it were. And actually, he was so attractive that women would come up to him who never knew him at all - would come up to him in a restaurant at his table, introduce themselves just to meet him. He had blue eyes, very blue, I mean, really sky blue eyes, a big nose, a slim face, a wonderful slim figure. Looked grand when he used a lorgnette which Peggy gave him, a diamond-studded lorgnette which had belonged to her mother. And she gave it to Max. She was terribly in love with Max, as you can imagine. She gave it to Max as a gift. I don't remember whether after the divorce he had to give it back or not. It wouldn't surprise me that he may have had to. But he looked pretty grand, as you can imagine.

MR. McNAUGHT: I can.

MRS. REIS: And he certainly didn't hesitate to use that diamond-studded lorgnette. Now, after they were married - and I can't give you the date; I don't remember precisely the date, but somewhere around 1943, shall I say - they went for a honeymoon trip to the Southwest. And Max loved that kind of terrain, that kind of landscape. And essentially, some of his most beautiful paintings were landscapes. Oh, he did so many imaginative things as you can't imagine. But landscapes fascinated him and he loved them. And the strangeness of the American Southwest was something he never put out of his mind.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you ever travel with Peggy and Max Ernst on any of these outings [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: No. No. No.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you collect Max Ernst work at this time?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Yes. We bought from Peggy. We always liked Max Ernst and bought a number of very handsome canvases, large canvases, lithographs, drawings, books.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you discover a lot of artists through Peggy Guggenheim and her gallery?

MRS. REIS: I think so. I really think so.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you put any artists her way? Were you and Bernard responsible for her showing any particular artist?

MRS. REIS: I don't think so. I can't remember, in any case. I only know that we were in accord with the sort of -

MR. McNAUGHT: Work she was showing?

MRS. REIS: - work she was showing. Yes. And -

MR. McNAUGHT: It must have been an extraordinary time in New York, with all the artists here and that gallery and -

MRS. REIS: It was fascinating. It was somehow the most vibrant spot.

MR. McNAUGHT: Do you think, of all your careers as collectors and important figures in the art world, that that was one of the most exciting periods? Or do you think -

MRS. REIS: Oh, absolutely.

MR. McNAUGHT: - the period of the '50s or [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: Now, mark you, previous to knowing Peggy and the surrealists, we had already a very fine collection. By that, I -

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. I know.

MRS. REIS: Yes. By that, I mean we owned a very beautiful Modigliani, which - a large one, a portrait he made of his own mistress and later wife, I think, called Madame Hébuterne.

MR. McNAUGHT: Where is that painting now?

MRS. REIS: We sold that painting to Norton Simon I think in 1972, and it now hangs looking -

MR. McNAUGHT: In Pasadena?

MRS. REIS: In Pasadena at his museum, looking absolutely beautiful.

MR. McNAUGHT: Marvelous.

MRS. REIS: So that every time I am in that gallery, in that museum, it seems to me that my heart bleeds. I can't bear the thought that it's away from us. But one sells occasionally, thinking what? Thinking that if you get a great big price for something, you should sell and use the money in the stock market, let's say? Well, evidently a mistaken notion, if you ask me. We also owned one of those beautiful figure pieces of Soutine. He was called Le Chasseur. That is the little fellow who always gets you a taxicab in Paris. That was a beauty. Now, what else did we own? Yes, we owned a lovely Clay painting, quite a good size, called The Green Shepherd. Well, as you see, we owned certain -

MR. McNAUGHT: A substantial collection.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Major pictures.

MRS. REIS: Yes. Those pictures were French paintings which belonged to the great period of French modern art. And what we acquired from the surrealists really took place in this country.

MR. McNAUGHT: And in this particular period [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Yes. I think largely, then, from then on we never stopped. We bought Ernst, as you - as I said. We bought Masson. We bought Tanguy. Beautiful painters and very imaginative, as you know.

MR. McNAUGHT: You bought Cornell, you said?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you ever buy Jackson Pollock? I know you were friends. Did you ever own any Pollocks?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. We owned - oh, we must have owned one, two - we must have owned at least six Pollocks.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Now, I'm trying to remember what else we owned. But this period was very fascinating to us because it was a fascinating period. The surrealists, you know -

MR. McNAUGHT: And you were at the very heart of the group.

MRS. REIS: Yes. Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: As you were such close friends with Peggy.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: And that really blossomed in New York after she arrived. And do you actually remember how you met?

MRS. REIS: Now, let me explain something. I think the surrealists reached New York before Peggy did, unless I'm mistaken about dates. I don't - I never kept a diary, alas. But in a rough sort of way, it's my recollection that they were rescued and brought to America before Peggy established her gallery here. And we had known surrealist work at least ten years previous due to the fact that Julian Levy, a very excellent dealer who was then on West 57th, showed the surrealists. He started with Dalí and went on with others. And we knew Julian Levy and his gallery very well. And that was a long time previous to Peggy's gallery here and previous to the arrival, easily ten years previous to the arrival, of the surrealists here. Julian Levy made a private association of people at the tremendous cost of \$10 a year who were privileged to see surrealist moving pictures, which could not be shown publicly. And they were shown by him to members, which makes the difference, you see.

MR. McNAUGHT: You were members?

MRS. REIS: And of course we were members. And a lot of other interesting people were members. It was always exciting. And we saw those marvelous Dalí and Buñuel early surrealist films, marvelous things, so exciting and so beautifully done, so that we knew Buñuel. We never knew Dalí, curiously enough. But we knew - got to know Buñuel very well.

MR. McNAUGHT: How fascinating.

MRS. REIS: There was a man to be proud of because there's nothing that was so - there was no person, it seems to me, that had such integrity as Buñuel. He did everything in movies with a conscience. He never played to the public. When he and Dalí did - I think the first one they did together was called *Un Chien Andalou*, and then later did he do it alone or did they - did he and Dalí do it together? And it was called - if only I could be sure. I'll have to try to remember and fill this in for you. But it was a very controversial film, very - filmed with remarkable sex episodes, and shown privately, as I explained, so that we always continued to follow Buñuel no matter -

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you see him in later years?

MRS. REIS: We kept seeing each other the whole time until he went to Mexico to do films independently because in this country, the only job he succeeded in getting was re-setting from the French into English with one of the film companies in Hollywood. And of course, that was no job for a man like Luis Buñuel. So he decided - but we

kept knowing him all that time. And my daughter, who lived in California, saw him constantly while he was working for, what, the United Artists, I think it was. Then he decided that he and his family were going to Mexico for him to do original films. He stayed there a number of years, and some of his finest were done there. I would like to supply you with all the names of the ones that were so great, and -

MR. McNAUGHT: Well, those can be found.

MRS. REIS: Those we'll find.

MR. McNAUGHT: I must say I've seen quite a few of his films. They are marvelous.

MRS. REIS: We never miss them if we can.

MR. McNAUGHT: If we took all the surrealists, do you think - who would you think is the best?

MRS. REIS: Well, you may remember that I mentioned André Breton previously.

MR. McNAUGHT: Certainly. Yes.

MRS. REIS: Breton was trained as a psychiatrist, and I don't know whether he was trained as a doctor as well. I don't quite know the whole background of his medical training. But he was a surrealist heart and soul. Wrote a marvelous surrealist book called - that I'll supply you with; I've got it upstairs. And he somehow had the respect and the love of all of the surrealist group. He was a man of great integrity and felt that none - no surrealist painter had the privilege of being needlessly outrageous. Can you understand what I mean?

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: He felt that the actions, the morality - I don't mean in a strict sense but I mean in a deep sense - were never to be taken lightly or abused. And I must tell you something that I found marvelous about him. I'll mention names because it'll interest you. When our good friend Matta - Matta was a Chilean who was brought up artistically in Paris - when Matta divorced his first wife, an American girl, she had just then given birth to a pair of boy twins. He divorced Ann without cause, I assure you. There we have Matta. You know, he was something special. But he did that, and he married an American girl, I think of a good deal of wealth. Something like that may have influenced him. She later became the wife of Pierre Matisse, incidentally. But when he divorced his wife and mother to his two children, Breton was so outraged that he said to him, "Matta, that was an abominable thing to do, and I'll never talk to you again." For more than a year, he did not talk to him, and I don't know how they resumed relationship. I don't remember that. But Breton was that kind of man.

MR. McNAUGHT: And you knew him very well.

MRS. REIS: Terribly well. He had a wife and - Georgette, I think her name was - and a little daughter about 5 years of age called Aube, A-u-b-e, meaning in French "dawn." And they would come to dinner many times with other of their friends, many times, and enjoy their dinner because you couldn't go to a French restaurant in New York in those days. They just didn't seem to exist.

MR. McNAUGHT: The best French food was probably right here.

MRS. REIS: The best French food was right here in our house, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Were you at 252 then?

MRS. REIS: No.

MR. McNAUGHT: In those days, or Central Park West?

MRS. REIS: We were on 315 Central Park West.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: Well, they liked the atmosphere. At that time, I didn't know how to cook, but I had a marvelous French cook, Madeleine, who still comes to see me.

MR. McNAUGHT: Still now?

MRS. REIS: Yes, though she is nearly entirely blind, but was a wonderful person and a wonderful cook. Well, in any case, our home meant a great deal to them, and the freedom here; the atmosphere of art, which they liked; the books, which they liked; the very fine wine my husband always had, which they liked; and not to mention the

fine cooking and good conversation, so that it was a kind of -

MR. McNAUGHT: It was the real meeting place, this home.

MRS. REIS: Yes. It was a retreat. It was a great retreat. I remember that I wondered at the time how they earn money to live because you couldn't take money out of France in those days. And they largely earned money by translating the American radio into French for the French public.

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: And they were paid, I think, small amounts. I don't think they received a great deal of money. I don't know what it was. One doesn't ask. But that was the main source of their support. Nevertheless, they knew and were involved in all sorts of wonderful American Northwestern art. When Max Ernst walked by Carlebach Gallery, which at one time was very well known but in its infancy then, it existed on the second floor of a gallery somewhere, I think, on West 56th Street. And he had in his window some of those Northwest American Indian masks. When Max Ernst saw those, he flew in. How Carlebach procured them one never knows because the dealers wouldn't tell you. But we think somehow that it was in exchange for one thing and another with the High Foundation, which contained both the aesthetic and the ethnographic work of the Northwest American Indian, largely old pieces and marvelous pieces, complicated masks that opened, vivid color.

MR. McNAUGHT: Being from the Northwest - I grew up in Oregon - I recognize the things you mean.

MRS. REIS: You know something about it.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you ever buy those kinds of things?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: You did?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. We had masks. We had objects, carved objects of utility. Oh, yes. We fell in love with that entirely. They're marvelous pieces.

MR. McNAUGHT: At the same time?

MRS. REIS: All at the same time. And as for Max, he made a vast collection of those things because he said to Carlebach, "Can you get me more of those?" And Carlebach said, "I'll try." Now, I don't know how he arranged with High, with Mr. High, who was then living, a very old man. But he certainly didn't steal them, you understand. But some arrangement seemed to have been made between him and the High Foundation.

MR. McNAUGHT: And Max Ernst would then buy them?

MRS. REIS: Max bought them. Max earned very little because he saved very little. But every penny he earned, he bought. He bought vast things. I remember he once bought a thing that looked like a bathtub but which was half the size of this room. He was then married to Peggy Guggenheim. They were living in a lovely triplex house, the triplex of a house.

MR. McNAUGHT: Where?

MRS. REIS: On the corner of 50th Street and Beekman Place, a beautiful house. They had the triplex with balcony. Clifford Odets had the apartment above them. And I don't remember who went on. But it was a house of possibly five stories, a private house. And I've always regretted not having bought the house when it came on the market. But that was our mistake because at some time later, it did come on the market. It needed a lot of things done to it, but nevertheless, we really should have bought it. That's our major mistake.

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: Well, in any case -

MR. McNAUGHT: In any case, this whole [inaudible] was over, basically, after the war when they went back to -

MRS. REIS: Yes. After the war, they practically all went back, with the exception of Tanguy, who had been in this country anyway before the rest of the surrealists. A beautiful painter, married to an American woman and also a surrealist painter, namely Kay Sage. And they lived in Connecticut, a converted prison, which they did beautifully. And Tanguy stayed here because he had become resident here. But Chagall went back. Masson went back. Max Ernst did not go back. He was here, married and later divorced right here in America. And instead of staying in New York, he went out to Sedona, Arizona, where he lived after his marriage to Dorothea Tanning.

And there he bought a piece of land with \$5,000 which he won in a competitive painting exhibition done for one of the large moving picture firms, and it was - the subject of it was The Temptations of St. Anthony. It was just -

MR. McNAUGHT: A very traditional subject.

MRS. REIS: Yes. Just his dish. He won \$5,000, and that he used to buy land in Sedona. Then he, with the help of one worker, a local worker, built himself a house for residence, a studio for himself, and a studio for his wife Dorothea.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you ever go out and visit them?

MRS. REIS: No. We've never been out there. It must -

MR. McNAUGHT: It must be a marvelous place.

MRS. REIS: Yes. Max later, when he went back to Europe - that was a number of years later - left that house to his son Jimmy Ernst, who lives in this country and is a painter.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes indeed.

MRS. REIS: And Jimmy sold that house to someone I don't know. but the sculpture which Max had made and had shown on the out-of-doors, the grounds of his house, Jimmy removed, naturally, and I suppose put them in storage. I haven't seen Jimmy in quite a while. He doesn't live in town.

MR. McNAUGHT: He lives in East Hampton.

MRS. REIS: Yes. And I never knew quite exactly what became of those really beautiful and unusual sculptures. I'm sure they must have been sold by now. But that was the end of the house in Sedona.

MR. McNAUGHT: When Peggy Guggenheim went back to Europe, did you start going right away to Europe on a yearly basis or something?

MRS. REIS: No.

MR. McNAUGHT: Or less often than that?

MRS. REIS: No, Bill. We always went to Europe every single year.

MR. McNAUGHT: Every year you went?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: And did you stay with Peggy?

MRS. REIS: After we got to know Peggy so well in New York, and she returned to Venice where she always wanted to live. And my husband Bernard made it feasible by his plan for her to buy the Palazzo Non Finito, as it's called, because it was never finished.

MR. McNAUGHT: Never finished?

MRS. REIS: No.

MR. McNAUGHT: He made it possible, made it feasible, by a plan. What was that?

MRS. REIS: That plan was an interesting plan.

MR. McNAUGHT: It was Bernard's idea?

MRS. REIS: Yes. He said, "Peggy, the only way you can do it is to get your children to allow you to use the money which was in trust for them, and for you to pay them back out of your income that you would receive from the trust left to you." Because her income came yearly, not in a volume, not in a volume enough to buy that palace. I believe that palace cost in the area of 80,000 American dollars. And as soon as she had that palace, in fact a year or possibly two years previous, she would rent one floor from an American family who had quite a handsome palace in Venice, and she would rent the main floor, the living room floor. But the Italians call it piano -

MR. McNAUGHT: Piano nobile?

MRS. REIS: Piano qua -

MR. McNAUGHT: Nobile, is it?

MRS. REIS: I don't remember the next word, though I would remember if we said it right. But I don't - it could have been piano nobile. But it was the main floor. It was the entertaining floor in the palace. She rented that floor, I think, for two successive years while looking for a palace to buy. And when she finally - and we spent summers with her those two years.

MR. McNAUGHT: Even while she looked?

MRS. REIS: Even while she looked. Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, how fascinating. Well, you must have seen some interesting Venetian real estate.

MRS. REIS: You have no idea, all the way down the line of the Grand Canal, down as far as the Rialto, if not further down. But in any case, she finally had the palace her heart desired, and had very little to do with it to convert it, very little, because it was ideal for her inasmuch as you could enter the front of the palace by gondola. And there's a series of handsome steps going onto a large terrace and then into the house. And you go through the house into the garden. You went from canal through the house right into a very handsome garden. Well, it couldn't have been better.

MR. McNAUGHT: Were you with her when she first saw it?

MRS. REIS: No. I think not. No, I think not. But later, when we saw it, we [inaudible] on the spot.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: Well, in any case, she - I remember she had very little altering to do, very little, because it was - no structural changes at all. And it was - had been owned by an English lady who had installed in her day even black marble bathtubs. All of that was very [inaudible], as you might know. I don't say the water flowed very rapidly, but the black bathtubs were there.

MR. McNAUGHT: You stayed there many a time, I suppose?

MRS. REIS: We stayed there for years, one summer after the other, I can tell you.

MR. McNAUGHT: I remember seeing when we were going with photographs so many photographs of you with Peggy.

MRS. REIS: [Laughing.] And it was really marvelous because not only did we see Venice at leisure and repeatedly, the other palaces, the homes of friends that she made there, Peggy then owned a car and we used to motor along the river - called the what? Or we would go visiting Betty Landsburg in the Palazzo Malcontenta, a famous place.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, marvelous. One of the great Palladian villas [inaudible].

MRS. REIS: Yes. Marvelous. We would - oh, where else would we go? Oh, we would go by her motorboat to Chioto [phonetic], they call it. That's a fishing port not far from Venice. Then a few years later, two or three years later, she ordered a private gondola. The gondola was a traditional gondola, but built by a very fine gondola builder, shipyard, and it was just a little longer than the traditional gondola.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, really?

MRS. REIS: So that as we were riding in the gondola with Peggy to go to one palace or another or to explore all the waterways of Venice -

[Tape stops, restarts]

MR. McNAUGHT: This is William McNaught talking to Rebecca Reis. It's Thursday, May 15, 1980. This is tape 2, continuation of side 1. We were talking last time about Peggy Guggenheim. And you had just started telling us a story about her gondola and the fact that it was longer than most gondolas.

MRS. REIS: Yes. Well, that gondola is now, I'm sure, willed to the city of Venice. And I would - that was her intention, in any case. And I would be certain that they would always keep it as a special museum item - not to be put in the museum, of course, but undoubtedly maybe in their - down, down toward the arsenal, in the arsenal down toward the Lido.

MR. McNAUGHT: Where they have the Museum of Venice, perhaps, or the Gondola Museum?

MRS. REIS: Where they have kept all of their traditional old boats, you know, which they bring out once a year for the ceremony - called the what, now? Well, I'll introduce that some other time. And these old boats that they keep in the arsenal are rowed by possibly 20 or 22 men at one time. And when the - when that event takes place, all the ordinary citizens get dressed up in costumes of the - what, the 16th Century, that is, Venice in its heyday. However, about Peggy's life in Venice. She loved it and we loved it because for years we would spend two, three months with her at a time.

MR. McNAUGHT: You stayed that long at a time?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: How long ago was your last visit to Venice with her?

MRS. REIS: Well, probably six years ago, before my husband was too ill to travel, to terribly ill to travel. But it was always great fun.

MR. McNAUGHT: You were obviously very familiar with her art collection.

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you and Bernard have much to do with the actual formation of that? Did you ever look at pictures with her before she decided? Did you ever influence her buying in any way, do you think?

MRS. REIS: That's a good question. But I think, by and large, it wasn't so because her collection is very longstanding and was bought from 1940 on. And the only time Bernard tried to influence her toward the good was to buy Picasso's Fishing by Night, which is a beautiful canvas. And I think she could have bought it for something like \$15,000, some ridiculous sum through our eyes today, of course.

MR. McNAUGHT: But she did not buy it?

MRS. REIS: She did not buy it because she said she didn't have the cash.

MR. McNAUGHT: When was this? Was this early on in the '40s or later?

MRS. REIS: Well, it was - it had to be -

MR. McNAUGHT: Was it in New York?

MRS. REIS: No. It was in Venice.

MR. McNAUGHT: In Venice?

MRS. REIS: Yes. And there was one other instance that was very interesting, and that was that a man from Belgium, from Brussels, had offered her \$2,000 for her famous Brach [phonetic]. And she had verbally sort of agreed. And when she told Bernard about that, he said, "In God's name, stop it, if you can. That's no price for a great Brach, and stop it." The man sued her a bit, but somehow she wormed out of the bargain, which was of course wonderful.

MR. McNAUGHT: Bernard did help her with various financial -

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. He always did. Whenever she was in doubt about anything at all, she resorted to Bernard's advice. And he always seemed to give her good advice, and she appreciate that. She relied on - she would show him from time to time paper figures relating to taxes or what have you. And looking very distressed, she would say, "What does this mean?" And he would take one look at it in his way of seeing things quickly, that diagonal way that he had of reading. "Oh," he said, "that's all right, Peggy. I'll take care of it. It's nothing. Don't worry about that." Well, then she'd laugh and say to me, "This puzzled me for weeks before your arrival. I'm sorry relieved Bernard said it's nothing serious."

MR. McNAUGHT: Well, was he actually just giving advice, or did he actually handle her affairs?

MRS. REIS: He would handle it. Not all of her affairs.

MR. McNAUGHT: But some of - whenever she would specifically ask him about -

MRS. REIS: Whatever puzzled her.

MR. McNAUGHT: - he as a lawyer and accountant could do it?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Whatever puzzled her, she'd always show it to Bernard, and Bernard would seem to solve it in no time. Well, now, I don't know what else to tell you about.

MR. McNAUGHT: When was the last time you saw her? Was it that time in Venice six years ago?

MRS. REIS: About. I think we were there about six years ago. I'm very bad on dates because I don't keep a diary, which is a great mistake. And yet I remember the incidents without ever remembering the precise dates.

MR. McNAUGHT: Exactly when. Well, we talked about Peggy, and I wondered if we should stay in Europe for a bit and talk about an artist I know who was another great friend of yours, Marc Chagall.

MRS. REIS: Well, with Marc Chagall, that was a delightful experience.

MR. McNAUGHT: When did you first meet him?

MRS. REIS: We met him when he came to America in 1942, I guess, when he was one of the rescued artists out of Paris.

MR. McNAUGHT: What a time for you. That's when you met so many of these people.

MRS. REIS: We met so many of these famous and delightful people.

MR. McNAUGHT: And how did - do you remember the circumstances of your meeting Chagall?

MRS. REIS: I think we knew his daughter first. And I remember well -

MR. McNAUGHT: This is the daughter - what was her name?

MRS. REIS: Ida. The French say Ida. It's I-d-a. And his wife Bella was still living. And he had an apartment, I remember, on Riverside Drive overlooking the river. And I know that we did so many things together. If there was one of those boat regattas on the Hudson, we would be there to watch it from his balcony. Well, it got to be a lovely, intimate relationship.

MR. McNAUGHT: I suppose you were very familiar with Chagall's work before he came here.

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Had you it collected anything by Chagall before his arrival?

MRS. REIS: Yes. We had several - we had a great many of his books, many of which he had almost forgotten he'd ever done. And when he would see them in the library, he was so enchanted that he would take - after coming to dinner here, he would take one home at a time and always make a lovely drawing on the frontispiece and dedicate it to us.

MR. McNAUGHT: How marvelous.

MRS. REIS: He did that any number of times because, as you know, artists somehow don't seem to keep their own books.

MR. McNAUGHT: They lose track [inaudible].

MRS. REIS: Yes. And when he saw them and he recalled the memory of when he did them and why he did them and so on, it just delighted him. So that's -

MR. McNAUGHT: Do you still have those books?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. Well, now, our acquaintance here was extremely friendly and extremely intimate.

MR. McNAUGHT: How did it happen so quickly? Were you - you just hit it off, basically?

MRS. REIS: I believe we struck the same note somehow, and - he never spoke English.

MR. McNAUGHT: He never spoke English?

MRS. REIS: No.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you and Bernard both speak French?

MRS. REIS: I spoke French, and Bernard comes from two German parents and speaks German very well. So between Chagall's Yiddish and Bernard's German and my French and Chagall's French, we managed to talk very well.

MR. McNAUGHT: Fascinating.

MRS. REIS: The charming thing was that whenever he came to dinner, he would invariably - always, as a matter of fact - sit to my right. And it was I who not only served him but cut his meat for him. He loved that kind of motherly or womanly attention. It just charmed him.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: Absolutely, in the whole company. And, well, we always had a very good time without any strain. They'd come often; we'd go often to them. And I can't tell you how often, but it was so often that there was a sort of interchange of households, if you know what I mean.

MR. McNAUGHT: You were very good friends, then?

MRS. REIS: Very good. And we liked each other very much.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did Bernard act as advisor to Chagall at all?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. Whenever Chagall had any financial matters, any sort of legal matter - which was not very severe, naturally - but whatever puzzled him, particularly about - I think about money matters and sometimes a matter of residence in this country, you know, these odd things that arise, Bernard always could solve everything, made it very simple for him. And he liked it very much indeed because, as you knew Chagall, you'd realize that worldly things bored him to death. They puzzled him. They bored him. He wanted somebody else in the world to take care of them. And all he wanted to do was to have the leisure to paint without any sort of disturbance, just to paint. He once told me that he enjoys having somebody, and in large measure while his wife and daughter - well, when his wife was alive and his daughter taking care of his worldly matters, more or less, he was at liberty - he was relieved of any disturbance at all. And he once told me that's all he wants in life, to have somebody else care for everything and just let him paint.

MR. McNAUGHT: Marvelous.

MRS. REIS: Now, after he returned to France, which was -

MR. McNAUGHT: After the war?

MRS. REIS: After the war - 1945 the war finished, and between 1945 and '46, a great number of these people, of the surrealists and the painters, returned to France. And we always would visit Chagall, somehow in our travels managed to spend ten days, two weeks, visiting at his home, with -

MR. McNAUGHT: Where was he living then?

MRS. REIS: It was in the town of - oh, it's a famous town.

MR. McNAUGHT: But was he in the South of France?

MRS. REIS: It was - yes. It was in the South of France. And it's - you really -

MR. McNAUGHT: I should know, too.

MRS. REIS: No, no. If I mention it, you'd know right away. And he lived a little outside of the town. And we would all assemble for breakfast. And coming down for breakfast, I remember so well there was a marvelous painting hanging which we saw full view as we came down the stairs. And it was a glorious large angel in flight. And I would say to Bernard secretly, "I wonder whether we would ever be able to succeed in buying that painting." And Bernard said, "I would doubt it." Well, Bernard was perfectly right because that painting still is in the possession of Chagall.

MR. McNAUGHT: Still in the same position?

MRS. REIS: No. He's moved from time to time. But he doesn't live at Vence. Vence was the town I'm talking about.

MR. McNAUGHT: It was Vence.

MRS. REIS: He doesn't live there any more. He now lives at Saint Paul de Vence, which is another town not far from the Maeght Gallery at Saint Paul, on a beautiful estate, I must say. He has a marvelous place. And a Russian architect did them a home on one level so that he could go from his breakfast table straightaway to his studio without even stepping out of doors. Well, we have visited him there, of course, many times also. But somehow, we managed to be there easily once a year.

MR. McNAUGHT: Once a year? As often as that?

MRS. REIS: Yes. And generally in the summer.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you continue collecting his work?

MRS. REIS: Always. We always went on with him. Now, I've got to remember what I want to tell you. Yes. When Chagall - at a period when Chagall had a large show in Basel, a retrospective - well, quite a large show; not comply a retrospective, but a large show in Basel - we get a telegram from him saying, "Don't come to Vence. Change your tickets and come to Basel instead because they forced me to come for the opening. And if you come to Basel, then after the festivities there, we'll all motor back to Vence. And then you will spend the two weeks extra with us there." Well, we immediately changed tickets. It seemed not to be difficult in those days somehow. And we did arrive in Basel. The car was at the airport. It whisked us to the restaurant where they were having lunch in his honor, so that we didn't miss a thing and had a great time. And I remember that that evening, they gave him another party, and that was a dinner party in a restaurant. And there was a band playing, a drum and some other instruments. And after - when the dinner was just about over, everybody wanted Chagall to autograph the menu. And he did it with the greatest glee, but he hadn't a pencil. And I remember his daughter Ida handing him her lipstick, and he made a deduction to everybody on the menu with Ida's brilliant lipstick. Then all of a sudden comes over the drummer with his big drum, and he said he'd like to have an inscription as well. And you may not believe it, but Chagall made him a whole thing on the top of his big drum. Whether that man kept it or not, I don't know. But I think you could get a fortune for it today. [Laughing.]

MR. McNAUGHT: Absolutely. You knew his wife and daughter well. What was his wife's name?

MRS. REIS: Bella.

MR. McNAUGHT: Bella?

MRS. REIS: Bella.

MR. McNAUGHT: Bella.

MRS. REIS: She was - she is described vividly in a beautiful autobiography Chagall wrote in the year 1920. He wrote it in Russian, a very small book. It's one of the most exhilarating biographies I've ever read. I read it in French, and later it was translated - some years later translated into English right here interest his country by a press called the Orion Press. And then of course I read it in English as well. The reason why I say it was so exhilarating is because instead of giving you that dull, chronological style of saying, "I was born on the 18th of July at 8:00 in the morning," or something of that kind, and trace it historically, he doesn't do that at all. That little biography is like a painting because he remembers a flashing incident in his life and describes it, and then he introduces some background material about it. And it's as if he was speaking, not writing at all. It makes it a fascinating sort. He tells everything. But in that way, it's I think a modern living picture technique, quite unconsciously.

MR. McNAUGHT: Fascinating.

MRS. REIS: I love that little biography. It's one of my favorites of all books that I know. Now, I wonder where I was because there were many delightful incidents. I might tell you before forgetting that while he was still living in this country, he liked living in the country, so he took a house, a small house, up in a town called High Falls, New York. And we spent many weekends up there. At that time, his wife Bella had already died. She died in this country.

MR. McNAUGHT: She died in America?

MRS. REIS: In America. Within 18 hours of her illness, she developed a streptococcus throat. And I don't think penicillin was in use. They had a very - she was very ill one night, and Chagall took her - they were driving from the country to town to get into a hospital. And he tried to get her into many - several hospitals en route, and told me later that they simply did not admit her.

MR. McNAUGHT: Why was that?

MRS. REIS: Now, I'll tell you why. Chagall spoke very little English. He was not at that moment very impressive to look at. He was noticeably a Jewish man, and hadn't the - hadn't any glorious good looks to impress anybody. And I believe when the hospitals, whichever they were, said they had no room -

[END TAPE 2, SIDE A]

MR. McNAUGHT: William McNaught speaking to Rebecca Reis May 15, 1980. This is tape 2, side 2, continuing. We were talking about - when the tape ran out, we were talking about Chagall and his driving his wife down trying to get her into the hospital.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: And what happened? None of the hospitals they stopped at would admit them?

MRS. REIS: No.

MR. McNAUGHT: Which is shocking.

MRS. REIS: It was the worst thing in the world because she died within 18 hours of her illness. You know that Bella, his wife, had written a book on her own called Burning Lights, which Marc illustrated. She wrote it in English and describes in that book the Friday night ceremony of Jewish - of a Jewish meal, Jewish dinner, and gives a very fine flavor to the ceremony involved. And she did a good job of it. As you would learn from his autobiography, she was a young girl when he first met her in Russia, I think probably Witebsk where he was brought up. And he thought that he was engaged to another girl entirely when Bella walked in to see the girl as a friend, and he fell head over heels in love with the friend, with Bella, who just stepped in to say hello to her friend. And from then on went the romance. She was very beautiful and wise in the ways of the world. She came - as you again would learn from his autobiography, she came from a very distinguished and wealthy Jewish family. Her people were dealers in precious gems and jewels, and they were a rich family. By contrast, Chagall came from a terribly poor family. His father used to work in a food shop, and Chagall mentions in his autobiography how swollen his father's hands were because he would often have to put his hand into the brine which kept the pickles which were being - oh, what do you call them - cucumbers being pickled, pickled cucumbers. And he remarks with sadness in his autobiography the look of his father's swelled hands, swollen hands. But, he said, there was never a time that his father, a simple man, evidently, didn't bring something good home to the family, something good to eat, that he had the character of always pleasing his family. And Chagall in retrospect pays him homage for that and pity for the kind of work that he had to do. So the contrast between the two families was enormous and -

MR. McNAUGHT: Did Chagall marry again?

MRS. REIS: Chagall is now married to someone quite different. After Bella's death - oh, I should say three years later - he was living abroad. He was living then - where would that be? Yes, he was living in the house outside of Vence, and at that particular moment his daughter Ida was on the verge of marriage to Franz -

MR. McNAUGHT: Engaged to Franz -

MRS. REIS: To Franz Myer.

MR. McNAUGHT: Myer.

MRS. REIS: Yes. The son of a very wealthy Swiss art collector, who himself was intrigued by modern art. And the difficulty there was that it would leave Chagall alone. And that was a serious matter because he was not the kind of man to be living alone. So Ida, his daughter, and her friend - oh, married to a prominent man - and her intimate friend decided that maybe they could get somebody to come and simply take care of Chagall so that when she married and went off, he would not be abandoned. And they did know by association his present wife, Vava. What was Vava's last name? Vava - now, that will have to come to my memory in a few minutes, too. Well, she didn't exactly agree. She was living in London, and being a witty woman, she used to entertain with great delight many young people.

MR. McNAUGHT: Was she English or French?

MRS. REIS: No. No, no. Russian.

MR. McNAUGHT: She was Russian?

MRS. REIS: Russian.

MR. McNAUGHT: Living in London?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: And they just - they knew her before?

MRS. REIS: They knew her -

MR. McNAUGHT: Ida knew her.

MRS. REIS: - vaguely.

MR. McNAUGHT: Vaguely. And finally, Vava's brother Michel introduced her to do that for a famous man, to come over and just take charge of things. Well, in due time, that resulted in a marriage, and she has been a very good wife to him. She is clever. Beautifully educated. Speaks I don't know how many languages superbly well. Came from a very fine family. And I think that he has lived this end of his life, since their marriage, he has lived very agreeably and happily because he was not - Vava was the kind of woman who could take care of everything for him, and he had no concern about the ordinary events of life.

MR. McNAUGHT: What a marvelous thing. Did you used to come and stay with -

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Well, you said you did. With Vava.

MRS. REIS: We stayed with them, and with Vava as well, yes. Now, let's see where we - the most amazing thing about Chagall is that though he seems a person sort of existing outside of the ordinary affairs of life, he has a wonderful sense of the correct thing to do. It seems to come to him naturally. And he has enormous gratitude for anything wonderful done for him. And there are two instances which show it magnificently. The first is that he painted a ceiling, a new ceiling, for the Paris Opera. Luckily, we were invited to come for that opening night when the musical performance was Mozart's The Magic Flute. The ceiling was in place. The house was packed. And all of the idea was created in the first place by André Malraux, who was the art advisor to de Gaulle.

MR. McNAUGHT: He was the actual Minister of Culture.

MRS. REIS: Minister of Culture. You're quite right. He suggested that to de Gaulle, and de Gaulle liked the idea and said, "Yes. Let's ask Chagall to do that." Chagall said he would do it, but he didn't want the original ceiling taken off. He said, "If the French do not like my ceiling, I want them to have the privilege of taking it off and having the one they liked in the first place.

MR. McNAUGHT: Marvelous.

MRS. REIS: Then instead of considering that a commission, he made it a gift to Paris.

MR. McNAUGHT: How marvelous.

MRS. REIS: And such a ceiling as you cannot imagine [inaudible].

MR. McNAUGHT: I've seen it.

MRS. REIS: Oh, I'm so glad. I think anyone going to Paris, whether you can bear their performances of opera, which I can't, ought to go to the opera only to look at that ceiling, it's so magnificently beautiful. And the French have not taken it down.

MR. McNAUGHT: Indeed. Speaking of commissions by Chagall, he certainly had done major commissions here and elsewhere. Did Bernard ever have anything to do with helping arrange those kinds of things or not?

MRS. REIS: I don't think so. He had a commission to do those three windows at the Opera House in Lincoln Center.

MR. McNAUGHT: That's a great mural at Lincoln Center.

MRS. REIS: Yes. And the one at the U.N., the mural at the U.N.

MR. McNAUGHT: And also up in Pocantico Hills.

MRS. REIS: Up in Pocantico Hills. Oh, you know that, Bill? That's interesting. Most people don't know about that.

MR. McNAUGHT: I visited it a couple years ago.

MRS. REIS: Well, at Pocantico Hills there is a small church which was built by the Rockefellers as a deduction to Nelson's mother, Mrs. John Rockefeller, what, II. Yes. I guess so. And they commissioned him to do windows for that little - it's really a chapel. And he did six windows which are utterly beautiful. We've gone often to see them. And they're very - the church is very proud of them. And people who know about it usually travel to see those ceilings - those windows. Now, those were commissions that we just mentioned.

MR. McNAUGHT: But I wondered if Bernard Reis had anything to do with commissions in this country, if he helped Chagall still in the '50s, the '60s, the '70s -

MRS. REIS: He always -

MR. McNAUGHT: - the way he had in the '40s.

MRS. REIS: He always did help Chagall. But specifically, I don't know how. Not in these instances.

MR. McNAUGHT: Not in these instances.

MRS. REIS: To my knowledge or my recollection, I don't know. But generally speaking, if there was any question in Chagall's mind about anything, then he always asked Bernard.

MR. McNAUGHT: Even in later years?

MRS. REIS: Always.

MR. McNAUGHT: So there was a constant correspondence?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Now, when he had finished the window - the large mural for the U.N., Bernard - oh, yes. The U.S. issued a sheet of stamps, and Bernard bought several sheets to send to Chagall in Paris or Vence, wherever he was staying then. And what Chagall did - that was enchanting - was take one of those sheets and make a lovely drawing on the stamps and send it back with a deduction.

MR. McNAUGHT: I see it here.

MRS. REIS: It's so charming.

MR. McNAUGHT: Marvelous.

MRS. REIS: It's really, really a painting, isn't it?

MR. McNAUGHT: Really marvelous.

MRS. REIS: Now, just to continue, one other great incident to show Chagall's sense of gratitude and largesse. He made, I believe, some 20 paintings on the Old Testament in brilliant colors, and he gave all 20 to the French nation with the sketches from which he worked. Made it a gift to the French nation in gratitude for their harboring him all these years, and making it possible for him to mature as an artist. Because he never could return to Russia after the Revolution. His autobiography would explain that in detail. But that gift you could not really evaluate, it's so enormous. And the French government built a special museum for that alone in the hills above Nice. And they call it, I think, Homage to the Bible, but it contains only those works which Chagall did for - of the Bible and which he presented -

MR. McNAUGHT: To the French nation?

MRS. REIS: - to the French nation in gratitude. I find that a very marvelous story because I've never heard of any artist having that deep sense of gratitude for what the French are noted for, namely, that they welcomed the artist no matter where he came from. And though he may have lived in poor circumstances in Paris - because most of them came, Lipchitz from Lithuania, Soutine from some little town in Russia - all of them, all these painters came from some remote spot which was not an art center. And when they came to Paris, that's where they grew artistically because it was the hub of the 20th Century art.

MR. McNAUGHT: Exactly.

[Tape stops, restarts]

MR. McNAUGHT: This is William McNaught talking to Rebecca Reis May 22, 1980. This is the continuation of tape 2, side 2. We've been talking about a lot of major artists who you knew well and your relationships with them, and you've gone into detail with several artists who were particularly important to you such as Lipchitz and Chagall. What I thought we might do now is, at a relatively quick pace, talk about certain important 20th

Century artists who you knew, and you can tell how they interacted in your life, how well you knew them, et cetera. And I thought we might begin with Larry Rivers, who I saw just the other day, which is why I'm thinking of him now.

MRS. REIS: Yes. But among the fine artists, I can't remember whether I gave you very much on Max Ernst and Man Ray. Did I?

MR. McNAUGHT: We talked about them, yes.

MRS. REIS: I told you enough about them?

MR. McNAUGHT: We can always - we can go back and talk about them more when we get to the end.

MRS. REIS: Right. Yes. Are we ready for Larry Rivers?

MR. McNAUGHT: Okay. You are. The tape machine is on. I know that you knew him because I think we saw a letter or two from him when we were going through your papers.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: I just wondered how well you knew him and when you first met him.

MRS. REIS: We knew him very well, but I cannot quite remember the occasion by which we met him. It may have been through - he was one of the artists Marlborough, and may have been our knowledge of him through Marlborough. But -

MR. McNAUGHT: So it would have been slightly later in his career. You didn't know him - did you know him in the 1950s or -

MRS. REIS: I don't think so, Bill.

MR. McNAUGHT: - was it later?

MRS. REIS: I don't think so. I think it was later.

MR. McNAUGHT: But I think he was at Marlborough later. He was - previous to that, he was with John Myers, I think. [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: Well, that was a long time ago. Yes. But -

MR. McNAUGHT: But he knew Pollock and Krasner and that - those people because he also went out to the Hamptons. But you didn't know him in those early days?

MRS. REIS: I think not in the very early days.

MR. McNAUGHT: So he was fairly established when you met him. Is that right?

MRS. REIS: Fairly established, but not as he is today.

MR. McNAUGHT: I see.

MRS. REIS: Well, that's true of most of the artists, anyway. But with Larry, we clicked very easily, and he would come up here to our house quite informally many times to ask Bernard various questions and advice about a variety of things in his artistic life. And we got to know each other so well that he'd come here quite informally for lunch whenever he was around. And then we would spend several weekends with him from time to time out at Southampton. He owned a house out there. He was then married, had already two children, two girls, who are quite grown by now though I've not seen them lately. And even now, after Bernard's death, Larry and I remain good, warm friends.

MR. McNAUGHT: He's a nice man.

MRS. REIS: Yes. I'm fond of him because he's imaginative. He's fun. He's out of the run of general people. For some reason, Larry is a special item. Whatever relationships he's had with other people doesn't matter. With us, it was great.

MR. McNAUGHT: Fantastic. Did you ever collect any of his paintings or drawings?

MRS. REIS: Yes. We have a lot of Larry's things.

MR. McNAUGHT: You do?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Yes. We have watercolors. We have a large book he made. I think it was called One Cent Life [phonetic]. And - I think so. I hope I'm right. But we would go down to his studio on West 14th Street - no -

MR. McNAUGHT: East 14th Street. That's where he is now.

MRS. REIS: East 14th, an enormous studio. And it was always great fun because, my dear, the kind of construction that went on because he was at that time doing a project that related to the Negro population - the black population, I suppose I should say. And it was later than his Daniel Webster series, if you know what I mean. But everything about going to the studio was - gave us a kick. And there was always good conversation and a lot of fun.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did Larry Rivers rely much on Bernard for -

MRS. REIS: I think -

MR. McNAUGHT: - advice, or was he actually his accountant or [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: I think that he relied on Bernard for a great deal of advice.

MR. McNAUGHT: For how many years was that?

MRS. REIS: Oh, dear. I don't know.

MR. McNAUGHT: The last ten or fifteen?

MRS. REIS: We've known him ten and more years, I'm sure.

MR. McNAUGHT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: But Bernard was his mentor, and that means to say that whenever a problem arose, Bernard had the solution.

MR. McNAUGHT: As had happened so often with so many other artists in so many ways.

MRS. REIS: Absolutely. Absolutely, because whether you're an artist or not an artist, but particularly when you're an artist, your inclination is to be somehow flabbergasted by what were not simple problems but problems. But they did disturb most of the artists. And of course, Bernard knowing the ins and outs of so many things, as to the advice of what kind of paintings to give to museums, what to retain, all sorts of - and certain legal matters. I don't know what they were precisely, but nearly anything that you can think of that would concern an artist. I do know one amusing and interesting incident. I remember his telling Bernard that he has done something which was not in his contract with Marlborough, namely that he had saved things out of his studio, which he was not supposed to do by his contract. And he said, he doesn't know - he's embarrassed by having done so. But you know most artists aren't so inclined anyway, but so that it disturbs him. Now, "Bernard," he'd say - he did say - "what should I do about it?" Bernard said, "Do something very simple. You go to see Frank Lloyd and you tell him exactly what you sold and why you were tempted to. And I'm very sure that by your candor and honesty, he will not chastise you or demand that you reimburse him with a fee" - you know, what [inaudible] -

MR. McNAUGHT: Leave the gallery.

MRS. REIS: Leave the gallery. And he did exactly as Bernard suggested, and it worked exactly the same way. Well, of those things were very nice with Larry because he was a bit of a boy, if you - he remains that way. One very charming thing I'll never forget was when he had his first one-man show, it happened to be at the Jewish Museum up in the old Warburg House, which is -

MR. McNAUGHT: In the '90s?

MRS. REIS: - in the '90s, on Fifth Avenue. And it was an evening opening and a very exciting one. His parents came, and all of a sudden he brought them over to us and he said to his parents, who were rather typical bourgeois parents, he said to his mother and father, "I want you to know that these are the two people who have had the best influence on my life." What that influence was, I don't know, but indeed -

MR. McNAUGHT: How marvelous.

MRS. REIS: He did somehow credit -

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: Yes, credit us. I was surprised and delighted. He credited us with having somehow a steadying, loving influence on him. And I guess that's true. But I wasn't quite aware that he knew it.

MR. McNAUGHT: How fascinating.

MRS. REIS: Now -

[Tape stops, restarts]

MRS. REIS: Yes. I was going to tell you that Larry had two sons before his marriage to Clarice, who was the mother of the two daughters I referred to.

MR. McNAUGHT: Right.

MRS. REIS: One son was an adopted boy, and the second, Steve, was his own child with his first wife, by his first wife, I should say. And they were not easy children to bring up. His wife had left, and they were subsequently divorced. But her mother, Bertie, as she's known, stayed with Larry to bring up those two boys. And Larry had made portraits of his mother-in-law. He loved her because she was so good to him and fitted into a situation which he could never have handled himself. He used her as a model, and he made a portrait of her in the nude.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: An aged woman, but he made a portrait of her in the nude. Then he also made a sculpture of her in the nude, and you will see it right there sitting on the table.

MR. McNAUGHT: Is that the sculpture you have there unique, or did he do a lot of her?

MRS. REIS: No, not at all.

MR. McNAUGHT: That's the only one?

MRS. REIS: I'm dead sure it's the only one because it's not exactly the kind of thing that sells. You don't make a great many casts of that, do you? But he gave us this one.

MR. McNAUGHT: How marvelous.

MRS. REIS: Because I'm sure he realized that nobody would treasure it because it is so very personal.

MR. McNAUGHT: Very.

MRS. REIS: Now, Larry had to go abroad on a show, what year I can't -

MR. McNAUGHT: He travels a lot, of course.

MRS. REIS: Yes. What year it was, but it was quite a while ago. And the boys were - they were difficult boys, if I may tell you that. His son Steve, his own son, took drugs to a great degree. And when Larry went abroad, he asked Bernard to be in charge of those boys, particularly of Steve.

MR. McNAUGHT: How long ago was this?

MRS. REIS: Oh, this could easily be twelve years ago. And Bernard - he asked Bernard to see to it that whatever Steve needed by way of money, that he take charge of the matter. And so it was. Steve often wanted money for drugs, and he'd come to Bernard. And Bernard understood the situation and gave him money. He never denied him money. In due time, as time went on over the last years, Steve has been entirely off drugs, and it's a miracle. I think it was due to the fact that Larry had Steve help him with his things in the studio, giving Steve some purpose in life and a devotion to Larry, who was really a very understanding parent despite the trouble that it caused him. But it worked. Steve is off drugs.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.] Did you ever know Steve well, or was it just during this period when Larry was away?

MRS. REIS: I have seen Steve since, but not for quite a long time. But Larry assured us that he was all right.

MR. McNAUGHT: Good. What about Philip Guston? I know there's a work hanging right in this room as we talk. How well did you know him?

MRS. REIS: Very, very well.

MR. McNAUGHT: Had you known him from early on? His name wasn't originally Guston, I think.

MRS. REIS: I don't remember.

MR. McNAUGHT: Nor was Rivers Rivers, for that matter.

MRS. REIS: That could be. We didn't know them under their family names.

MR. McNAUGHT: No. But he was a friend, Philip Guston, from the old days?

MRS. REIS: Philip Guston has been a friend of ours for I cannot tell you how many years. What I don't know is again I don't know how the first connection took place. But if you know Philip Guston yourself -

MR. McNAUGHT: Do you think it was before the war or after the war?

MRS. REIS: Oh, after the war.

MR. McNAUGHT: After the war?

MRS. REIS: I think so, yes. If you happen to know Philip Guston -

MR. McNAUGHT: I don't. I'm sorry.

MRS. REIS: - you would admire him. There's something that is so basically moral and decent about Philip. He at first, you know, was a realistic painter and painted beautifully. Then - and we knew him in those days. Then in that period, shortly thereafter, he decided to do his paintings in a more abstract manner of abstract expressionism. And since he's a man with a very fine brain, that's what we liked about him because Philip has not only a moral character but a brain character, if you know what I mean. He doesn't do anything willy-nilly.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: He thinks things out. For example, everything you see in this room is beautiful, though abstract. Beautiful. You can't explain why they're beautiful, but they're beautiful. So that we saw him concentrate through that whole period, and he got better and better until he got very fine recognition from the whole art world. And I can tell you, Bill, that Philip is the kind of man who is greatly admired by - I think by his artistic friends and literary friends. They always referred to him as being metaphysical, which you can't explain it, but what I think they have in mind when they say that is that he's thinking. He's in depth and not -

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: - and not shallow. And we feel that way about Philip. At the present time, you may know, he is painting in a totally new style using visible subjects - shoes, all sorts of paraphernalia that refer to the human - to one's human needs. And he is respected for it though they are not easy. But when he composes a canvas of all of these things, it's a very fine canvas. You simply have to get accustomed to the idea -

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: - that it's a departure from the no subject matter. But his departure is very unique.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did he have a similar relationship with Bernard in terms of, again, business advice?

MRS. REIS: And personal life.

MR. McNAUGHT: And personal life?

MRS. REIS: [Laughing.] He even asked Bernard whether he should divorce and marry a lady who was pursuing him.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: Yes. And -

MR. McNAUGHT: So they were very close, and [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: They were very close, yes. And Bernard advised him not to do it, and gave his reasons. But Philip followed it.

MR. McNAUGHT: Fascinating.

MRS. REIS: And he lives up in the country. He comes to town when he has a show. He came to town not long ago when he was given the senior award by the Arts Committee of the Jewish Museum - no, I beg your pardon, not of the Jewish Museum at all, but of the Brandeis University.

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: Excuse my making that error.

MR. McNAUGHT: I thought next I might ask you about Robert Motherwell and Helen Frankenthaler.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Both separately and together. We've mentioned Motherwell before because I remember you said he, I believe, worked in -

MRS. REIS: Seligmann's -

MR. McNAUGHT: - Kurt Seligmann's studio at the same time your daughter did.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Was that when you first got to know Motherwell, or had you known him before that?

MRS. REIS: Either one?

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: We knew Bob Motherwell before, when he was really a very young man. And we got to know him possibly through my daughter Barbara at the time, or better still, through Matta, the surrealist painter who was living here, who had then close relationships with all the current avant-garde American artists and was like a bombshell. I talk not about Bob Motherwell but about Matta.

MR. McNAUGHT: Matta.

MRS. REIS: And Matta was a very good friend first with my daughter and then later of ourselves, a very good, intimate friend. In fact, Matta and his wife Ann and my daughter Barbara -

MR. McNAUGHT: Barbara Poe, that is?

MRS. REIS: Barbara Poe, yes - spent a summer in Mexico, that lovely town - well, it'll have to come -

MR. McNAUGHT: Cuernavaca?

MRS. REIS: No. Not the town. Taxco, I think.

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yes, in Taxco, I think. And they took a house together and spent three months gather painting and being Mexican. And as a matter of fact, I'll never forget the letter I received from Matta saying, "In God's name, Becky, send me earplugs and eye dimmers" - you know, a mask for -

MR. McNAUGHT: A mask.

MRS. REIS: Yes. "My sleeping is terrible down here. Though it's a lovely church in the heart - in the main square of Taxco, but it rings the bell all night long and I'm certainly not sleeping. And those earplugs would be a great help." Of course, I immediately sent [inaudible]. But they had a great time that summer. And it was through him we met a great many of the American painters, I think, with Bob Motherwell. And that was, I think, the origins of our knowing Bob Motherwell. He was young. He was not particularly well known as a painter, and was making his way, as it were. Later on, he told me - oh, I might tell you that he married a Mexican girl. Not in Mexico, maybe it was here. She was a very beautiful girl. They got along very well for a time, but in due time, they didn't. However, he told me once - and that was, I don't know, two or three years ago - that in a year when he had saved practically nothing and was short of money, the greatest blessing in the world was that at Christmastime I sent him a marvelous Smithfield ham. Now, I hadn't remembered that. I'm sure I did it because they'd enjoy it, not knowing that they had money or not money. I always thought he had money because his father was a wealthy man.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, really?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. His father was connected with Wells Fargo, and - out on the West Coast. And so I always - and Bob was always really very well dressed, very particularly, individually elegant. And I always thought he had plenty of money from home. However, he never admitted that then. He has since had to admit that he inherited a lot since his mother's death, so he's well off. But he's well off in every way. When we first got to know Bob, we then got very intrigued with the surrealist painters who came from Europe in about 1941 and '42.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: And when they wanted - the surrealists of Europe wanted to publish a magazine which would be in the nature of that famous French magazine called *Minotaur*, with which they had been connected in France, they were all here. That means to say that Max Ernst and Breton and Matta and Frederick Kiesler and David Hare, an American. Bob Motherwell. They were all involved in that effort. And I remember they were all here at the table at our house, and Bernard was discussing with them what method should be used to raise money to publish a magazine of that kind.

MR. McNAUGHT: In New York?

MRS. REIS: In New York because it was not - it was to be a surrealist magazine of fine literary merit with interesting reproductions. And you needed money, some money, to start it. Now, so they finally made up their minds, all of them together, I think at Bernard's suggestion, to have a portfolio of ten original works by all of these surrealists that included Tanguy as well. It included Marc Chagall, strangely enough. But there were ten in a folder which David Hare designed the box. And the idea was to sell that to sympathetic and friendly people for \$100. We of course were subscribers to that, and managed to sell - oh, I wonder how many? I don't know. We may have sold 50 of them, something of that kind. But in any case, there was money in the pot. And so we got started. They all got started on making an original work for this portfolio. And then they wanted a printer who would not be expensive so that they could foot the bill and would do exactly what they wanted in the makeup of the magazine, which was important. The name of the magazine, they decided, was to be VVV, V-V-V. And -

MR. McNAUGHT: Why did they choose that?

MRS. REIS: I haven't the faintest idea what it stands for. I don't remember. And I think it just was in the air somehow, enigmatic, I presume. It was fine. That magazine got to be very well known, though difficult to sell. I gave them an inexpensive printer, an Italian man. And the press was called the Liberal Press. I knew about them because in some of my own charitable ventures, we always were looking for an inexpensive printer. And by Jove, we found the Liberal Press. So that - he became the printer. However, these men were so meticulous about their ideas and the layout and the reproductions of everything. My daughter Barbara Poe was included in the reproductions because she -

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: Yes - because she was of surrealist state of mind of also. Well, today you scarcely find a complete set because -

MR. McNAUGHT: That must be rare. Do you still have yours?

MRS. REIS: We still have ours. We never threw anything worthy away.

MR. McNAUGHT: Well, you wouldn't throw that away.

MRS. REIS: Certainly not. It was a beautiful publication, absolutely unbelievable. The printer did not contribute ideas to it because how would he know? But these men would spend hours with the printer planning the layout so that it was their achievement. And it turned out to be so good-looking that one day I personally get a telephone call from the man at Willingstein who said to me, "Will you please tell me who the printer was of VVV? It's so beautifully done." And I - yes. And I said to him, "Now, I must tell you, we were looking for the least expensive printer in the world because there was very little money, and I knew this printer. However, it was not his work that produced this magazine. It was the ideas" -

MR. McNAUGHT: That the artists had given to it?

MRS. REIS: The layout that the artists put into it. And the printer was so flabbergasted by these worthy people coming down and spending hours with him that he did everything they wanted. Nothing was neglected. He never made a single error.

MR. McNAUGHT: The perfect relationship.

MRS. REIS: [Laughing.] Well, now, who was to sell that magazine? The magazine, as I explained, I think you can realize, was not a popular item. It was an art item. And so - and to sell for \$1 a copy. So I said, "I'll undertake to sell these copies." And Bill, I used to take those copies to all of the special book shops that I saw in New York. By special, I mean book shops which were not one rack sellers. Wherever I saw a book shop that -

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: - that looked like an intellectual area - the Gotham, the Washington Square; oh, there were - there was a very good art department at Brentano's, and we knew the Russian who was in charge, I did, in charge of their art department. And I used to literally force them all to take a few copies. And the few meant they would take only two or three at a time.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, really?

MRS. REIS: And then in due time - I think the whole edition was about a thousand copies.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you put them on news stands, at news dealers?

MRS. REIS: It wouldn't have worked.

MR. McNAUGHT: Wouldn't have worked?

MRS. REIS: No. So then, still having copies to sell, every three weeks or every month I'd go back to these very shops and induce them to take a few more copies whether the others were sold or not. Well, the struggle finally ended up that they - the edition was sold out.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really? It must have been [inaudible] a job on your part. How many issues came out?

MRS. REIS: Well, I believe it was an edition of a thousand. I think so.

MR. McNAUGHT: In one edition. But was this as a portfolio or as a magazine?

MRS. REIS: A magazine.

MR. McNAUGHT: And how many issues did the journal - how many years did it last?

MRS. REIS: Only - there were three issues.

MR. McNAUGHT: Three issues?

MRS. REIS: Yes. But I just remember -

MR. McNAUGHT: It must be really rare to come upon now.

MRS. REIS: Now. People destroy things.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: And if anyone has the completed set, it's worth a lot of money today. But we managed. And it was considered of great artistic achievement, which it was. Now, if you want to stop your machine -

[Tape stops, restarts]

MR. McNAUGHT: How many of the people involved on this magazine, VVV, were American, other than your daughter, of course?

MRS. REIS: Yes. I think only Bob Motherwell and David Hare.

MR. McNAUGHT: And so you got to know them very well?

MRS. REIS: Oh, very well. Well, we got to know the whole crowd very well.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: Because all of the Europeans came here so frequently. Well, so we knew Bob then extremely well through his marriage with the Mexican girl, Maria. And then after she left him - they were divorced - where did he live? Oh, I don't remember where his studio was. He used to paint a lot in Kurt Seligmann's studio, of course, as I told you once before. But I don't quite remember where he was living. But then I got to know - I think I got to

know, or was it Bernard - oh, yes. We both got to know Helen Frankenthaler very well. Helen -

MR. McNAUGHT: And when was this?

MRS. REIS: This was somewhere after the surrealist era that I was talking about. We got to look her through John Myers because he was her dealer, as we had just begun to -

MR. McNAUGHT: Would this have been in the '50s or in the '60s?

MRS. REIS: I think in the '50s.

MR. McNAUGHT: In the '50s?

MRS. REIS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. McNAUGHT: In the early '50s?

MRS. REIS: I think so, yes. I'm so bad on dates. Isn't it sad? But in any case, John Myers had suggested to my husband to buy a painting of Helen's out of her first show, which was given at the Jewish Museum on Fifth Avenue. And Bernard did that. And then he presented it to the Carnegie Institute for the purpose of getting Helen into -

MR. McNAUGHT: Into the museum?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Into a good museum.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: And I think that was really the first foot in the door, as it were.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you know John Myers very well?

MRS. REIS: Yes. We knew John for ages. I don't know how many ages, but ages. And he always had very interesting painters.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes, indeed. He was a very - one of the very important dealers during this period.

MRS. REIS: And one of the very early ones for the people we now consider the masters of modern American art.

MR. McNAUGHT: Is that so?

MRS. REIS: Well, then, since we got to know Helen very well, it was a very warm personal friendship. And I remember that one day at a cocktail party right here in our house, with a lot of people here -

MR. McNAUGHT: In this very house?

MRS. REIS: In this very house - Bob Motherwell was here and Helen Frankenthaler was here, among the others. And I think that was the first time they met each other.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, really?

MRS. REIS: Yes. I think I'm sure. And Bob was then alone, having been divorced. Helen was just recovering from a recent love affair which didn't end up in marriage or anything of that kind. And Bob and Helen clicked, and that's how the marriage came about.

MR. McNAUGHT: It happened right here?

MRS. REIS: It started, certainly, right here.

MR. McNAUGHT: It started right here.

MRS. REIS: And in due time, maybe less than a year later, they were married. I think it was in the lovely month of May. Now, the year I'll never remember. But they gave their wedding party at a restaurant at 54th Street and Third Avenue called Amerique. It no longer exists. But it was a French restaurant, very decidedly French. And we must have been 20 or more guests at that wedding lunch. And it was one of the most charming events you ever want to know because Helen had devilish humor in her. If I'm not mistaken, it rained like cats and dogs. But Helen was there in a great big hat and full of the devil. And everybody was in great humor. It was one of the events I shall never forget because it was so -

MR. McNAUGHT: Who else was there?

MRS. REIS: I can't remember.

MR. McNAUGHT: But it was marvelous?

MRS. REIS: Oh, it was marvelous. Helen's sister, Marjorie, of course, and mostly the artists that we all knew. It was just one of those -

MR. McNAUGHT: One of those days that -

MRS. REIS: - delicious events that scarcely could be repeated by anybody. Well, after their marriage, they went to live in the house that Bob owned up on 94th Street East. Is it 94th or 95th?

MR. McNAUGHT: I'm not sure.

MRS. REIS: Oh, well. Anyway, that house belonged to Bob. But they transformed it and made it really marvelous. And of course, we went there for every possible event and they came here, of course, for every possible event.

MR. McNAUGHT: So you saw them on a very regular basis?

MRS. REIS: All the time.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: And when they would take a house somewhere in the country, we always were visiting them weekends in the country, so that all the photos I have of our relationship are very loving ones. Much embracing - a New Year's Eve embracing party, and the usual warm and amusing kind of relationship that I like to think of. Now, then, as you know, in due time they divorced. Bob was doing very well in his painting. He became one of the clients for the Marlborough. And Helen was beginning to do extremely well, and she became a client of -

MR. McNAUGHT: Emerick?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Of Emerick, and still is. Bob is no longer a client of Marlborough. He is -

MR. McNAUGHT: Knoedler?

MRS. REIS: - with Knoedler, yes.

[Tape stops, restarts]

MR. McNAUGHT: After their divorce, who did you keep up most with, Helen or - Frankenthaler or Motherwell?

MRS. REIS: After their divorce, I think with Frankenthaler. I think so.

MR. McNAUGHT: But did you still see Bob Motherwell?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: And do you still see him now?

MRS. REIS: Whenever he's in town. He lives out at -

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: - at - a nice town.

MR. McNAUGHT: In Greenwich?

MRS. REIS: Greenwich, I think. Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Is it Greenwich? I'm not sure.

MRS. REIS: He bought - yes. He bought - I couldn't - the carriage house of an estate and made it into - I've never seen it. But I understand it's very beautiful. And if gossip is correct, I think he made himself three studios in the place.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Now, you had to know Helen Frankenthaler well because I remember some of the photographs. I think didn't you travel in Europe with her, or did you?

MRS. REIS: I don't -

MR. McNAUGHT: Maybe it wasn't her.

MRS. REIS: I don't think so. I don't think we were ever abroad together.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you ever collect any of her work?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you ever own a large Helen Frankenthaler painting or a big Motherwell?

MRS. REIS: We owned - yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: You did?

MRS. REIS: Yes. We owned a large Motherwell, and we owned several Frankenthaler, one very large watercolor that was a beautiful one. And the date would be not a current date, but - oh, I don't know. One of these - one of the early paintings, I think. Now, who else shall I tell you?

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. I just - we've been looking at drawings just here on this wall, and there's a marvelous one by Baziotes.

MRS. REIS: Oh, we knew -

MR. McNAUGHT: He was a friend?

MRS. REIS: We knew Baziotes so well. This was an adorable person, very modest, very surrealist in his painting. I think he will be treasured in due time, much more than he is today. He died -

MR. McNAUGHT: He has a solid reputation but not - he's not that well known.

MRS. REIS: He's not -

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. Not in general.

MRS. REIS: He died at too early an age. But he was a very good painter. He came from the same town - city, town - as Franz Kline.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, really?

MRS. REIS: They both came from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and -

MR. McNAUGHT: Pennsylvania. Did they know one another?

MRS. REIS: I'm sure they did. Whether they knew each other in Wilkes-Barre or not, I wouldn't - I would suspect not because Franz was a good bit older than Baziotes. But both of them were marvelous characters. Wilkes-Barre could well be proud of them. Now, Baziotes painted, as you see, purely out of a surrealist subconscious. That was not true of Franz Kline. Franz Kline seemed to have in his blood the - and expressed it in his art - the feeling about industrial America. That's the way I always reacted to Franz Kline's work.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you ever tell him that?

MRS. REIS: Well, in a way. One day he and Rufus Zogbaum, the son of his mistress at the time before his death, came with Rufus's mother for dinner. And they arrived in a beautiful - are we all right?

[Tape stops, restarts]

MRS. REIS: As I was saying, they arrived in a beautiful fine car, namely, a Ferrari, which as you may know is meant for racing and not for just stop/go signals in the city of New York.

MR. McNAUGHT: Exactly. Exactly.

MRS. REIS: And after dinner, Franz said to me, "Becky, would you like to have a drive in my car?" Now, I said - I certainly said yes. And -

MR. McNAUGHT: Who wouldn't?

MRS. REIS: Yes. And Rufus and I went with Franz for a drive on the East River Drive. And as we were driving on the East River, you know that the structures along the East River, if you pay attention to them, are very industrial. Did it ever strike you that way? Going from - let us say you enter here at 63rd Street, let's say, and go south, you find that something about the East River is very industrial, looks very industrial. And I remember Rufus saying something to Franz about this subject matter of what he painted, asked him what subject matter inspired him to paint. And I remember saying, "Well, Rufus, just look around you and you'll see what inspires Franz," meaning to say that it was the industrial thing in modern life that made him do what he did. And Franz, I must say, said not a word, but he smiled from ear to ear.

MR. McNAUGHT: Hold on.

[END TAPE 2, SIDE B]

MR. McNAUGHT: William McNaught talking to Rebecca Reis May 22, 1980. This is the continuation of our conversation, and this is the beginning of tape 3, side 1. We were talking about Franz Kline, and it ended us as you were saying, when talking about his subject matter with Rufus Zogbaum, that it reminded you of -

MRS. REIS: Industrial.

MR. McNAUGHT: - of something industrial. And you said Franz Kline said not a word but smiled from ear to ear.

MRS. REIS: Yes. So that gave me the impression that I wasn't far wrong, you understand. I don't know whether he impresses you that way. Do you get the industrial -

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, I think it - I see what you mean. I see what you mean.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: It's sort of the strength [inaudible].

MRS. REIS: Yes. It's very strong, and it suggests to me, well, you know, the strength and the blackness and the kind of America which is not soft in any way. It's the virile side, if you know what I mean.

MR. McNAUGHT: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yes.

MRS. REIS: Well, Franz painted largely, as you remember, always in black on white.

MR. McNAUGHT: I see one right here as we're speaking.

MRS. REIS: That's right. That's right. Now, and we have an enormous one which he painted - a very large one which he painted black on white, a very good, full one. Now, then later Sidney Janis became his dealer. And I do remember that at the last one Man show of Franz Kline at Janis's, Franz wanted to include paintings, and very large ones, into which he had introduced color. I remember his telling me that Sidney Janis didn't want anything in color in the show. Franz, however, insisted. And I want you to know they were beautiful. One extraordinary one was called something about New Year's Eve in New York or something like that. And for all I know, and maybe I'm right, it's the one which Charlie Egan owns today because Charlie Egan was Franz's first dealer. And Franz, remembering that - and he never forgot; he was - he never forgot to be grateful for big events in his life and who -

MR. McNAUGHT: To people who mattered? He didn't forget them?

MRS. REIS: To people who made big events for him in his life - so that in Franz's will, he specified that Charlie Egan shall have first choice of any canvas he wanted in the show.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really.

MRS. REIS: In his whole estate?

MR. McNAUGHT: In his whole estate?

MRS. REIS: Right. In gratitude for his having been his first dealer. Now, we don't hear of Charlie Egan much today, do we?

MR. McNAUGHT: No.

MRS. REIS: He may do selling out of his living quarters, but he's not known to have a gallery in the usual sense today, so that I don't know what he's doing. But he was an amusing Irishman who drank far too much. But -

MR. McNAUGHT: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But he was Franz Kline's first dealer?

MRS. REIS: Oh, indeed he was.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you know Franz Kline in those days, or was that - no, you wouldn't have, because you said you met him in Venice.

MRS. REIS: No. I didn't - no. I didn't know him in those days.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you - you met him probably while you were staying with Peggy Guggenheim?

MRS. REIS: Peggy. But we knew him very well ahead of that. We knew him very well. And as a matter of fact, we visited Florence together. Betsy Zogbaum was with Franz, and Bernard and I were together. And we went to Florence together. Franz had a great taste in the classical, in the great arts.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: For example, one day Mary Lasker said to my husband Bernard, "Bernard, would you take me to the studios of some of your favorite artists?" And Bernard said, "I gladly will." Then she called up and said, "Would you mind if I brought along -

[Tape stops, restarts]

MRS. REIS: "Would you mind if I brought along Adlai Stevenson?" And Bernard said, "Of course not." So those three, Mary -

MR. McNAUGHT: Mary Lasker, Bernard Reis, and Adlai Stevenson?

MRS. REIS: Yes, went -

MR. McNAUGHT: A fascinating threesome.

MRS. REIS: Yes, went to visit - I think they went to three studios. They went to Gottlieb's studio, they went to Franz Kline's studio, and I think to Larry Rivers'. I think so. I'm not too very clear on that, but I think so. Anyway, Franz had - Franz Kline's studio then was on West 14th Street, a very helter-skelter looking studio. But there's where he was. And that was more or less how he liked it. They arrived before Franz got back from lunch. The door was open. They walked in. And Bernard later told me that Adlai Stevenson saw a reproduction over Franz's desk of a Velásquez painting. And so Franz came in very shortly thereafter, and Bernard said Adlai Stevenson said to him, "How does it happen that you have a reproduction of a Velásquez painting over your desk and you paint so differently?" And Franz Kline made, of course, the most beautiful answer. He said, "I have that reproduction because to me Velásquez was one of the great giants of painting and I like it." Well, this was rather puzzling to Stevenson because I don't think that he had an eye for visual things. I think he was decidedly a verbal man. And -

MR. McNAUGHT: It's astonishing how many people -

MRS. REIS: Of great intelligence.

MR. McNAUGHT: - brilliant people have a visual block of some sort.

MRS. REIS: It's very true. And I think nothing can overcome it.

MR. McNAUGHT: No.

MRS. REIS: Well, that was his trouble. But he was a very genial person to have around with you, as -

MR. McNAUGHT: Stevenson?

MRS. REIS: Yes, as you can well imagine. And he was very receptive to everything he saw. Something tells me that they went not - the third studio was not to Larry Rivers but to Mark Rothko.

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: Yes. I think, as my memory comes back to me, I think they then went to Mark Rothko's studio, which was located here on East 69th Street in [inaudible].

MR. McNAUGHT: So right near your house?

MRS. REIS: Now, shall I go on?

[Tape stops, restarts]

MR. McNAUGHT: This is William McNaught talking to Rebecca Reis, continuation of tape 3, side 1. It's June 5, 1980. We were talking about Franz Kline, and I think you had a couple more things to say, one particular story.

MRS. REIS: Well, Franz and Betsy Zogbaum were living very far east on - very far west, rather, on 42nd Street. And we knew that Franz was ill, so one Saturday night we went over to see him. And he looked so ill and was dragging his feet as he was walking about. And we said, "Betsy, what do you know about Franz? What is it the doctors say?" And she said, "The doctor says it's a virus." This was one of these homegrown doctors, if you know what I mean. And when we left them, Bernard said to me, "I don't like doctors who attribute everything to a virus. He ought to be seen by a top man." And we immediately phoned Mary Lasker, who happily was in town, and said to her, "Mary, can you get Dr. Reich" - who was a great heart specialist - "to get Franz entered into the hospital where he serves?" Which was - which one was it? I think it was the New York Hospital on East 68th Street. And Dr. Reich came the next morning, which was on a Sunday, and examined him, and must have found him very seriously ill because that night Mary Lasker called us and said, "You know" - she spoke with me, as it happened - she said, "You know, Becky, the fact that a great doctor is seeing Franz and diagnosing the case doesn't mean to say that he can save his life." So I realized that it was probably too late.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: And later, Dr. Reich told us that he had never seen so enlarged a heart in his whole practice. This was a great heart specialist. Well, that meant to say that Franz had very little longer to live, and he really died within a day or two after that.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, really?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: That soon?

MRS. REIS: Yes. He was very sick. Well, Franz had always - this is so interesting about Franz. Though he was a strictly modern man -

MR. McNAUGHT: He was a very nice man, was he not?

MRS. REIS: Oh, he was a darling person. He was straight. He was absolutely not blown up about his reputation. And you just admired him because he was really a real man, you know. He had all the strength and integrity and, oh, you know, those qualifications that give you the impression of a real male person. Well, though he was strictly modern in his painting and admired, as you remember I may have told you, the work of Velásquez, who he thought was a great master and had a photo over his desk of one of Velásquez' works, still he always loved the church at 52nd, I think it is, and Park Avenue. What's it called, Bill?

MR. McNAUGHT: St. Bartholomew's?

MRS. REIS: St. Bartholomew's is right. Excuse my memory. It slips occasionally. And he had left, either in his will or by request to Betsy, that he'd like - if ever he needed to be buried, he'd like to be buried from St. Bartholomew's.

MR. McNAUGHT: Fascinating.

MRS. REIS: And that's the way it was. It's really a basilica. It's a great -

MR. McNAUGHT: It's a marvelous church.

MRS. REIS: It's a marvelous church. And it was a very beautiful ceremony. So that's the story of Franz Kline.

[Tape stops, restarts]

MR. McNAUGHT: I thought we might talk about Gottlieb. How well did you know him? Did you collect any paintings by him?

MRS. REIS: Yes. We knew Gottlieb very well. Gottlieb was again a very interesting character in another way. We knew Gottlieb and his wife Esther. And Gottlieb was at the stage, when we knew him, a very successful artist. Whether he had family money or not, I don't know. But I always thought so. He had a beautiful home - had a good studio in New York and a beautiful home East Hampton, which he built.

MR. McNAUGHT: Right.

MRS. REIS: Do you remember that? No. And when you came to call on him, let us say, on a weekend, there was Gottlieb wearing a yachting jacket in blue cloth with all the gold buttons and all the paraphernalia that makes a man look as if he owned a yacht. Well, he didn't own a yacht, but he did own a very fine sailboat. And Gottlieb could maneuver it himself and took great pleasure in it. When, far later - far later; I don't know how many years later - when he got sick, he had - what was his condition? Oh, yes, he had a stroke. And at that time, Marlborough was handling his paintings very successfully. And years later, when he had his stroke, it was of course a great misfortune because he couldn't use his right arm for painting. But I remember he had a very good studio in New York down in SoHo.

MR. McNAUGHT: On West Broadway, I think.

MRS. REIS: Was it there? I think that he bought the whole building. And then he had a studio, a beautiful studio, in that building. And I don't remember who the other occupants of the other studios were, but then there were other studios rented out to other people, or maybe they brought them.

MR. McNAUGHT: He gave that building - the Gottlieb Foundation is still in it.

MRS. REIS: That is right.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. I think it is. Did Bernard Reis have anything to do with the setting up of the Gottlieb Foundation, the Adolph and Esther -

MRS. REIS: Entirely. Entirely.

MR. McNAUGHT: Entirely?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: How was that?

MRS. REIS: I'll tell you how that was. When he got very sick and we'd go down to see him, he was sitting in a wheelchair and painting a large canvas with a long brush, a long-handled brush. And first, by the way, before he went back to his apartment and had his stroke, he was in the hospital. I don't remember which. But I remember when Bernard used to go over to see him, he would say to Gottlieb, "Adolph, even though you have had a stroke doesn't mean, sir, you cannot paint even in bed. Try to paint to distract you from your trouble." And you know, he did it.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: He painted in bed, and it did distract him from his trouble. It made him much happier than he was ordinarily. Then when he got back to his apartment and we would go back to see him, we found him still ill in a wheelchair, and he was painting. At that time, Bernard told him that Mark Rothko had designated that he wants his estate to be divided between his family and a foundation, the foundation to provide financial help to artists, past serious artists, who had not made it, you know, financially, but men who were professional, were really artists, not Sunday artists at all, and might be in financial need either due to health -

MR. McNAUGHT: Of which there are many still.

MRS. REIS: Yes - either due to health or due to a fire or due to some catastrophe. And Mark said, "There are plenty of foundations for the young artist to help him along his way. But no one thinks about the artist who didn't make it. And," he said, "I want them to be benefited by half of my estate. My estate is large enough to divide between family and foundation." And when Gottlieb heard that, he was so impressed with it - you know, he had no children, so that he was concerned about what he would do with his estate - he was so impressed with the thought, he said to Bernard - I remember so well - "Bernard, that's a marvelous idea. I'm going to do exactly the same thing." And that's the way it happened.

MR. McNAUGHT: And then did Bernard help actually set it up?

MRS. REIS: At the very beginning, he helped. And then he said to Esther, "Esther, I would rather not be on the board of the foundation. You choose other people as you like," which she did. And I don't know the board. I'm not

sure who the board is. I've never inquired.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, you do not [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: No. But whereas later on the Rothko Foundation made 200 grants in one year -

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: Yes, of very - for very good people.

MR. McNAUGHT: How did it - how was it decided who got the grants?

MRS. REIS: There was always a board of six and sometimes seven people who sat - met and sat right here at this table.

MR. McNAUGHT: At this table?

MRS. REIS: And the recommendations came from knowledgeable people such as Stan Kunitz, who knew the poetry people. Because -

MR. McNAUGHT: So it wasn't just painters?

MRS. REIS: No.

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: He wanted to designate musical composers, good poets, and what was the third category? And painters.

MR. McNAUGHT: Painters.

MRS. REIS: Yes. And so there would be the board always meeting at stated times. And whoever made a suggestion of a given person explained the person's situation.

MR. McNAUGHT: Might this person have applied to the foundation for grants?

MRS. REIS: There were plenty -

MR. McNAUGHT: Was it known that this was a grant-giving foundation?

MRS. REIS: That is right.

MR. McNAUGHT: And you could get money? So did sometimes poor older artists make applications?

MRS. REIS: Many, many, many.

MR. McNAUGHT: Who did they write to? Did they write to you?

MRS. REIS: They would write to the Rothko Foundation.

MR. McNAUGHT: Was this its office?

MRS. REIS: We used this address, yes. And in other words, the foundation was run by a board of distinguished people who never took a penny for their services, nor even charged the taxi fare, they were that kind.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: And they made a decision as to who -

MRS. REIS: And they were always unanimous decisions. There was never anyone who said, oh, I don't think he's worthy of anything like that. But what was told about the given person was authentic because they were suggested by reliable people, and was - they were well-recommended in that sense. Some of them had distinguished names. I remember when Stanley Kunitz made suggestions about people like Alan Tate, who was [inaudible] for the man who had a literary reputation for many years, was in financial difficulty. And the poets Kunitz suggested - because, as you know, he's a Pulitzer Prize poet himself - the poets he suggested were people of enormous consequence and achievement.

MR. McNAUGHT: But who simply couldn't make money -

MRS. REIS: But had no money.

MR. McNAUGHT: - writing poetry.

MRS. REIS: Well, you can understand that poets don't necessarily make money. Now, whenever a request came in from somebody, from anybody one did not know personally, then either by telephone or by written documentation, the whole reason for the man's career was outlined on the application, and his particular circumstance stated so that they could tell whether he's just horning in on money or whether it was a real situation. And they were always real situations.

MR. McNAUGHT: I'm sure.

MRS. REIS: And do you know, Bill, that any number of letters came blessing Mark Rothko for having thought of the artist who had aged from 50 and on. As for the musicians, there were people like Stefan - what is his last name? Oh, a lovely composer. Oh, dear. I'll have to supply it to you because he was a good friend of ours, too, while he was alive. And he had had a fire in his apartment. And he used to love paintings as well. And manuscripts were burned, and the paintings that he had were burned. He was in dire need indeed.

MR. McNAUGHT: Well, could they get substantial grants in cases like that? Did it vary from case to case?

MRS. REIS: The grants were -

MR. McNAUGHT: Or was there a standard grant?

MRS. REIS: The grants were always in the area of about a thousand dollars. In one or two cases where there were extreme circumstances - for instance, one man had a daughter who was mentally ill, and he had had a fairly good career, not a rich career but a fairly good career. And his name will have to come back to me, too, because we knew him. Still, due to his family difficulties, he suddenly lost his market entirely, and he was really in desperate need. So the wonderful thing was that once he received a grant, it's incredible. But it gave him such a shot in the arm that he began to paint again -

MR. McNAUGHT: Began his work again.

MRS. REIS: - and worked very successfully. Even had a dealer who took him. And the same thing happened with a second man. And André Emmerich is still his dealer. He was tubercular. But they gave him a grant, and they mended him somewhat. I think he still has a touch of tuberculosis. But he got a dealer no less than André Emmerich.

MR. McNAUGHT: Who was that? You don't remember?

MRS. REIS: His name is - I know him so well.

MR. McNAUGHT: You'll think of it.

MRS. REIS: I'll have to think about the names. They suddenly escape me when most I need them. But he still shows with André Emmerich. As soon as he - what a blessing it was. And any number of letters would come from people known and unknown to Mark Rothko blessing him for making a foundation of that kind.

MR. McNAUGHT: Does the foundation still exist or not?

MRS. REIS: No. The foundation, alas, was destroyed by the obnoxious suit which a member of the district attorney's office - I think the man's name is Haller, H-a-l-l-e-r; I don't remember that wretched person - who by very clever conniving and I think threats got every member individually to resign from the board because of the Rothko suit, threatened them that they could be responsible financially for the negative judgment about executors of the estate, namely, my husband and Mark Rothko - not Mark Rothko, excuse me, Theodore Stamos, and a man by the name of Levine, who was not an artist and nothing particularly distinguished. Yet he teaches, I think now, at Queens College. His subject is, what -

MR. McNAUGHT: Anthropology.

MRS. REIS: Anthropology, something like that. Yes. You knew that, I think.

MR. McNAUGHT: I remember reading that.

MRS. REIS: Yes. Well, in any case, with the threats which the district attorney's office made, he got every

member of the board to resign for self-protection, as you understand. And the president of the board, namely Clinton Wilder, is a very rich man. And when Clinton resigned, it was because he was protecting his fortune. He liked his fortune. So all the others -

MR. McNAUGHT: So did that just make the foundation [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: Now, what happened was that this district attorney's office man had another board appointed and had them declare that Mark Rothko did not intend to have the foundation benefit people in need after 50. But his real intention, without they had no way of knowing, but that his real intention was to establish a Mark Rothko museum to - you know, to continue his prominence in the art world, and to have the new board make gifts of Rothko paintings to various museums. Now, that was never in Mark's head. He despised the idea of adulating himself in that way. He felt good about having made a success, a financial success, in life, and I believe he wanted to benefit people - I'm sure who unfortunately didn't quite -

MR. McNAUGHT: Succeed in the same way?

MRS. REIS: - succeed financially. And he must have thought in his - in [inaudible] guts that there but for the grace of God go I. I'm sure that was his motivation. Now, you know, Bill, his daughter Kate, who was always very mean to Mark about his paintings and told him repeatedly that she hated his paintings; why doesn't he go to an office - that he can't paint; why doesn't he go to an office the way all of her friends' fathers do to earn his livelihood and not paint what he can't paint?

MR. McNAUGHT: She said that?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. And she hated his paintings. Told him that time after time -

MR. McNAUGHT: Was this when she was a little girl or when she was growing up?

MRS. REIS: She was about 15 or 16 or now.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: Yes. And she would say something further, which she should have her mouth slapped for. She said that she doesn't believe that her father wanted to do good for anybody, and does not believe that he wanted his foundation to perform as the board knew that he meant to. He had not written down how he wanted his foundation to operate so that there could always be a question, a doubt. But -

MR. McNAUGHT: Nothing was written down?

MRS. REIS: It was not written down. But the members of the board, most of whom were his friends - there were no strangers at all; Clinton Wilder used to buy paintings from him, a very good friend of ours and very well known in the theater, and also a man of an inherited fortune. And so all the members of the board were - Stamos was a member, a 30-year-old friend. Bernard was a member, a friend of at least 20 years. Goldwater was a member, Robert Goldwater, who Mark had designated to be the ideal biographer of his career. Stanley Kunitz, who was a Pulitzer Prize poet. Tom - editor of the - at one time editor of the arts -

MR. McNAUGHT: Hess?

MRS. REIS: Tom Hess. You're right. My God, your memory's better than mine. Tom Hess was on the board. I was not on the board. All that I did was receive the letters and give my services freely because the idea -

MR. McNAUGHT: As a sort of secretary or -

MRS. REIS: Yes. To receive letters, to do any telephoning that had to be done, or that -

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you sit in on the meetings?

MRS. REIS: I did. I was here. I sat in on meetings, but I had no vote. I was not a member.

MR. McNAUGHT: How many years did it go on? I mean, how many years did it exist as a grant-giving [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: I believe about a year and a half at most, I think.

MR. McNAUGHT: Just a year and a half?

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: And then it was stopped because of the case?

MRS. REIS: It was stopped because of the suit, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: And it was her - and it ended up being children's thought that their father never intentioned - had the intention.

MRS. REIS: I believe that Kate was induced to sue the executors of the estate by certain people who disliked the Marlborough, who had operated for Mark, and had some grudges against Bernard, I believe. Anyway, they were determined to do -

MR. McNAUGHT: What kind of people would have had that kind of influence over her?

MRS. REIS: In the main, rival dealers. I mean, that's understandable to you, isn't it? And that included swine like Ben Heller. Mr. Byerly [phonetic] of Basel had something to do with it. Mr. Gimshaw [phonetic] of Pace. Another man who had his gallery on 79th Street and Madison. Oh, you'd know his name if it would come to me. They were all rival dealers and determined, determined, to induce - and the sculptor, dentist sculptor -

MR. McNAUGHT: Herbert Ferber?

MRS. REIS: - Herbert Ferber, who was an enemy for a totally different reason, because Mark and my husband and I stopped him from confining his first wife to an insane asylum because he wished to marry his secretary. And we stopped him from doing that in a very interesting, remarkable story which might interest you if you think it pertains.

MR. McNAUGHT: What is that? Sure.

MRS. REIS: I'll tell you what the story was. Ferber was married to Ilsa. They were very good friends of Mark Rothko, very, both of them, of Rothko and his wife. They were constant guests there - not that the Rothkos entertained very much, but they were very close friends. Herbert Ferber wanted to marry his secretary in his dental office, a little girl of no great moment.

MR. McNAUGHT: When was this? Do you remember?

MRS. REIS: The year was - it was somewhere about two years before the Rothko case began, let us say.

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: And one morning - now, the Ferbers, we were acquainted with them, but they were not household guests at all.

MR. McNAUGHT: They were not great friends?

MRS. REIS: Well, they were not great friends. We knew them and - an amicable friendship, but not that close. But one morning, Bernard gets a telephone call at 8:00 in the morning from Mrs. - then Mrs. Ferber, namely, Elsa, or Ilsa, I think, I-I. And she said to Bernard, "Bernard, do you know where I am?" And he said, "No. What do you mean, where you are?" She said, "Well, I am in a ward at a public hospital for mental deficiency or incompetence, and last night at midnight two psychiatrists came and put me in a straitjacket and took me there." And Bernard said, "Did Herbert know about it?" She said, "I imagine that he got them to do it because he was - being a dentist, he was in the medical profession" -

MR. McNAUGHT: Right.

MRS. REIS: - "and probably knew two such psychiatrists." Anyway, Bernard was astonished. She said to him, "Get me out, Bernard. Get me out. I don't want to be here." And so Bernard said, "Well, I'll do everything I can, Ilsa, absolutely." The first thing he did, of course, was to call Mark Rothko, who was Herbert's -

MR. McNAUGHT: Who was a good friend?

MRS. REIS: Who was such a close friend that Mark was the person to know what happened.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: And he tells this story to Mark. Mark was absolutely flabbergasted. He couldn't imagine Herbert doing anything like that and in that way. He and Ilsa were not living together at the time. I don't know where Herbert was living. But anyway, she was occupying the apartment they had had together on Riverside Drive, I think. In any case, Mark and Bernard tried endless times to get hold of Ferber and get this thing straightened out. Never could they get him on the phone. Always he must have had the phone off the hook. Always there was a busy signal. And they tried for days. One day I said to myself, I think, "I'm going to try it." And early in the morning,

when I assumed he was shaving or something of that kind, I called Herbert Ferber and said, "Herbert, would you take me up to the city hospital where Ilsa is confined? Because she phones every single day in desperation and I would like to see whether it is as bad as she describes it." There was a moment of silence on the phone, and believe it or not, he said, "All right, Becky. I will. I'll call for you this afternoon at 4:00 and we'll go up to that hospital," which was way in the Bronx. He almost didn't know the road himself. But we got there. And while we were motoring up there, I said to Herbert, "Herbert, I am not saying to Ilsa that I asked you to take me. I am saying, on the contrary, that you asked me to go up to see Ilsa to find out how she is." In other words, giving him a pretty good face.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes.

MRS. REIS: Well, when we got there, before we got there, he said, "You know, Becky, I don't think I'll go up with you." I said, "No, it's better not. Let me go up. And if when I come down I tell you what it's like or if I know that Ilsa would like to see you, then you can come up." And he did at the end of our talk. Well, all Ilsa said constantly was, "Get me out of here. Get me out of here." You have to remember that since Ferber was in the medical profession, being a dentist, that he had not to pay anything for her keep at that hospital. So I had a quick thought. I said to Herbert, "Herbert, if Ilsa does need psychiatric care, why not give her the best that can be had? Why don't we take her to the Einstein Hospital where their reputation is so great that if she can be cured, they would be the right people to do so." And Bill, I don't know how I prevailed, but we got her out and took her over to the Einstein -

MR. McNAUGHT: Then and there?

MRS. REIS: - that very day.

MR. McNAUGHT: That very day?

MRS. REIS: Yes. It was the one and only time I had gone to see her. Now, how I influenced him, I don't know. But at the Einstein Hospital, you had to pay a hell of a lot of money every day. And he was not - he's one of the tightest people I've ever known, I think. He was not anxious to have her stay long. He would be just as willing to have her out. And I figured that. So she was taken up to the Einstein Hospital. There she stayed a few days or a week or something like that. And then I induced him to take me up there, and we - I think I must have done it with him by my side - influenced them against their will to let her come out. And we took her out that very day.

MR. McNAUGHT: Well, did the Einstein people think that she should stay because she did have serious mental problems?

MRS. REIS: Well, I'll tell you something. You go to any psychiatric institution and they think you're crazy.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Laughing.]

MRS. REIS: I'm not kidding you, Bill. They really - of course, everybody -

MR. McNAUGHT: Did she? I mean -

MRS. REIS: She did nothing -

MR. McNAUGHT: - had she had mental problems?

MRS. REIS: No.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: She did nothing exceptional. She may have gone out and bought herself an expenditure purse or bought a few things for herself. But I can very well understand that one would. She never expressed a hatred toward Herbert. As a matter of fact, when she was out, she used to come to his opening shows so that she never showed a resentment. I think she must have really liked him. Why I would never know. But in any case [laughing], in any case she was not an enemy of his. But we got her out, Herbert and I, though unwilling. But we got her out. And Herbert's motivation was that he just didn't want to pay that kind of fee. My motivation was quite different, but it worked, you see. It worked. But I'll tell you something. There were such complications about this because I'll never forget Herbert getting Bob Motherwell and Helen Frankenthaler to come to see us to declare that Ilsa was insane, that she had the - as Bob said, "She has the syndrome of a mentally irresponsible person." And so Bernard said to him, "What do you know about the syndromes of a mentally irresponsible person?" And they had a good fight right here in our living room because all that Bob Motherwell knew about a mentally irresponsible person is the word "syndrome." And Bernard reminded him, he said, "You know, Bob, I am on the international board of a mental health organization, and the head of it is Dr. Nate - Nathan Kline," who is known for establishing institutions practically everywhere in the world for the mentally - for mental curing. And

Dr. Kline was an advocate of medical uses for - in mental cases, and so - and a very distinguished man. He was awarded a grant - not a grant, but a citation with grant, by the Lasker Foundation, so that he was not an inconsequential man, as you can see. Well, anyway, as you see, Ilsa got out. And I'll remember as of today that Bernard said to Nate Kline, "Nate, tell me, how would one know that someone is mentally irresponsible, or whatever you would call it, because she bought herself a few expensive purses or an expensive pair of shoes or something like that?" Because that was the only indication they could seem to find about her. She did nothing untoward, but she spent more money than Herbert seemed to like. And Dr. Kline said to Bernard, "Listen, Bernard. You have to look at it in a sensible way. If any person buys a bag of jelly beans, you can't call him mentally disabled, can you? If he orders a whole car load of jelly beans, you have a right to suspect that he's a little off-balance." And that was about the size of it.

MR. McNAUGHT: Hmm.

MRS. REIS: But as I tell you, the good thing was that Ilsa did get out. And it was - I'll take it to my credit.

MR. McNAUGHT: It sounds like you were responsible.

MRS. REIS: Yes. Luckily, he took it from me. And when he -

MR. McNAUGHT: Where he might not have from someone else.

MRS. REIS: You know it. He refused to answer the phone, but for days he did not answer the phone to Mark or to Bernard. And by some happy chance, I did get him on the phone and moved him along with gentleness until the right thing happened. And I'll tell you, we all agreed that if it hadn't - if the Einstein Hospital had not charged a big, heavy fee per day, that Herbert would have never got her out, never allowed her to get out. But Mark then made a very charming remark to me. He said, "Becky, I hope Herbert will one day thank you for making him a decent human being."

MR. McNAUGHT: Mark Rothko said that?

MRS. REIS: Mark said that to me.

MR. McNAUGHT: Has that ever happened?

MRS. REIS: No. No. No, he never thanked me for anything. He was always sort of friendly toward me. But he resented that from Bernard to such a degree that I am very sure that he was one of the major instigators of the Rothko suit.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: I am very sure. Whether he would admit it or not, I don't know because there are a lot of things I think that people do quite unconsciously. And I would swear - he was very good friends with Kate, you see. Kate once said that she doesn't like what he did to their friend Ilsa, namely his wife. Still, Ferber and his new wife, you know - I don't know what her name is -

MR. McNAUGHT: He did marry her?

MRS. REIS: He did marry the girl. And they always were very friendly to Kate after Mark's death and after her mother's death, you see. Her mother had died six months after Mark. So that -

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: Yes. And they never knew what she died of, but it could be that since she was heavily alcoholic, she may have taken pills, sleeping pills and drinks, which did her in, as has happened often, you see.

MR. McNAUGHT: I see.

MRS. REIS: But Ferber kept close friendship with Kate. And the coterie around Ferber was venomous and resentful, particularly to Bernard. That I am -

MR. McNAUGHT: Particularly to Bernard?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes, because Bernard had so much to do with the whole situation with Ilsa.

MR. McNAUGHT: I see.

MRS. REIS: And then, as I was telling you, that the dealers were resentful because they didn't have a show on

getting works out of Mark's remaining paintings.

MR. McNAUGHT: So they were against Marlborough?

MRS. REIS: They were against Marlborough, in what a vicious way. Now, you -

MR. McNAUGHT: And Bernard Reis, too?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. The whole pot was boiling, as you can understand. Now, their resentment against Marlborough was purely commercial because not one of them ever gave Mark Rothko a million dollars for a hundred pictures, which Marlborough did. Not one of them dealt for Mark in so spectacular a way as Marlborough did. And they only came in on the till.

MR. McNAUGHT: After he was dead?

MRS. REIS: After he was dead and after they could make the suit against the very executors who Mark designated. Now, when, after Mark's death, the executors gave to Marlborough the handling of Mark's estate, in which there were at least 800 unsold paintings, the price to be determined was, the executors said, that since Mark and Marlborough had had very good relationships, Marlborough paid more than well for anything that they bought. And they had a marvelous capacity for publicizing and building a market for his estate, both here and abroad. And that was very important. And Mark had no resentment against the Marlborough, not the slightest. The relationship had always been good. And it was the most natural thing for the executors to appoint Marlborough as the dealers for the estate, to represent the estate. Now, and Marlborough proceeded to publicize Mark, in this case to publicize him not only for America, but for the world, really, by giving a superb show of the best paintings they had.

MR. McNAUGHT: Were these paintings from the estate or paintings that they had previously [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: I think it was a - I think there was a combination. But it was at the time when the Biennale was going on in Venice. Mark had not been invited to that Biennale. He had previous years, without any good effect whatsoever. This time he was not designated as one of the men to be shown in the American building of the Biennale in Venice, so Marlborough set up a show in the palazzo - the name was just in my head - in the - well, if you'll forgive me, it'll have to come back to me. But it was - it is the palazzo on the Grand Canal.

MR. McNAUGHT: Where they show the modern art?

MRS. REIS: Where they show the modern art.

MR. McNAUGHT: I know where you mean.

MRS. REIS: Do you know the name, perhaps?

MR. McNAUGHT: I can't remember it.

MRS. REIS: No. It was my head a minute ago and then it escaped me. And I want you to know, that was the most brilliant opening on a superb afternoon in these glorious rooms. They removed all other paintings and it was only Mark Rothko shown in one of these glorious what they call, you know, the piano - the Italians call their main living room. There's a name they use. Piano means floor.

MR. McNAUGHT: Piano nobile.

MRS. REIS: That's right. Good for you. The piano nobile. And it was an enormous room, and nothing but Mark's paintings were shown. And you saw the Grand Canal at this end and lovely buildings out of the window at the other end. And it was crowded with people. And it was a thriller because you saw Mark's paintings all together, which he'd wanted always in life. He hated to have one of his paintings mixed up with everybody else. Didn't want that. Never did want it, and almost never allowed it or succeeded in not allowing it. For example, the Duncan Phillips in Washington had one special room for their Mark Rothkos, never mixing him with other artists of their collection.

MR. McNAUGHT: But he would sell to people on an individual basis, would he not?

MRS. REIS: Marlborough made a contract with Mark before he died, much before he died when they were doing business, that Marlborough was to establish the price of sale of every picture. But they gave Mark the privilege of selling four paintings a year out of his studio provided he kept to the gallery price, so that he was not underselling himself, you see.

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: And Marlborough knew that nearly every artist loves to sell out of his studio. So they were wise enough to designate, yes, you sell some out of your studio. But remember that it asked you not to give them away at bargain prices. You're to keep your standard gallery price so that you're not underselling yourself just for a few more dollars.

MR. McNAUGHT: I see.

MRS. REIS: And he got the idea and abided by it. Now, I can give you a darling little story apropos of that which I think I should because Mark -

[Tape stops, restarts]

MRS. REIS: Well -

MR. McNAUGHT: You were going to tell a story about Rothko.

MRS. REIS: Yes. You know, after he had made the clear understanding with Marlborough that he is privileged to sell four canvases but not under the market, the gallery price, which was a wise provision, Bernard - Mark said to Bernard, "Bernard, you know, you got Mary Lasker to buy some of my paintings and she gave me \$30,000 for a painting. Do you think that I could call her and tell her that Marlborough's market rate is \$35,000 and not 30?" And Bernard, I must say, smiled and said to Mark, "Mark, I think that I would be too shy to do it for you, but you call her and tell her the circumstances. She might agree." And he did, and by God, if she didn't give him \$35,000 for each. [Laughing.] That's the story.

MR. McNAUGHT: Marvelous.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

[END TAPE 3, SIDE A]

MR. McNAUGHT: It's July 14, 1980. William McNaught talking to Rebecca Reis. This is tape 3, side 2. Mrs. Reis, what do you think was the actual point that made Kate Rothko start the case, instigate the suit?

MRS. REIS: I think that Kate may never have thought of it herself. After all, she's a young girl. But I think she was induced to start a suit. And to my mind, there's no question that Ferber was one person who encouraged it. And another person, I'm sorry to say, was undoubtedly Bill Rubin of the Museum of Modern Art. And I'll tell you why Bernard and I thought so. Bill Rubin had met with Bernard and with Mark one afternoon to discuss what would be the function of a foundation. And Bill Rubin said decidedly he thought that there should be a museum put up somewhere with Rothko's work, his whole - you know, his whole -

MR. McNAUGHT: A Rothko museum, in other words?

MRS. REIS: A Rothko museum. And then paintings - yes. A Rothko museum. And I don't remember whether he said anything about paintings to be given to any museum or institution. But after that meeting, Mark said, "That SOB" - oh, excuse me. He asked Bill Rubin, "Well, who would conduct that museum?" And Bill Rubin said, "Well, I would." And Mark asked him, "At what sort of fee?" He said, "Well, I would charge you a regular fee for that." Well, needless to say, that was not Mark's idea. And after the meeting broke up, Mark said to Bernard, "That SOB. That's not my intention at all, especially since he would be getting a fee for running the museum." Mark -

MR. McNAUGHT: Did he mean leaving the Modern to run this?

MRS. REIS: No. No.

MR. McNAUGHT: Or having it on the side?

MRS. REIS: It would be a side job.

MR. McNAUGHT: I see.

MRS. REIS: Mark didn't want to glorify himself. I don't think he really had any such thought.

MR. McNAUGHT: What do you think was his real thought?

MRS. REIS: Mark's real thought was to benefit needy artists past the age of 50 because, as he and everybody else knows, not everybody makes the grade. To make the grade, though you may be very good as a painter, you naturally need a crackup dealer who can really publicize you and put you on the map, and establish prices in due time which, as you know has been done, which became astronomical. Castelli has done that. Many dealers

have done that. Well, that's very fine, but not every artist gets that opportunity. Mark's thought was that at least he could do something noble in his life. Now, when Kate heard about this, Mark's intention, she said, "My father never wanted to do anything for anybody," which is of course not at all the truth because I know two specific instances where he got people jobs because he could be effective in getting these two people jobs with an institution in their own field.

MR. McNAUGHT: Was he - art jobs?

MRS. REIS: Well, in one case it was getting a job for a man who was an ethnographer, and he got him a job with one of the colleges. And what was the other case I remember? I don't know what the other case was. But in any case, for Kate to say that her father never wanted to do anything for anybody was not at all true. She did not know her father nor his activities, anyway.

MR. McNAUGHT: Nor his intentions?

MRS. REIS: Nor his intentions. Now, when Mark said to Bernard that Bill Rubin was an SOB, he didn't like Bill Rubin's whole concept of what the foundation should be. He was clear that he wanted to do something for artists who needed just that pickup at the right moment. And it worked that way. The record of grants made by the board then is now in possession of the new board, but everything is clearly annotated in the checkbook, with the stubs clearly noting who they were and what they got.

MR. McNAUGHT: Is there a board now? Because there's still a Rothko Foundation.

MRS. REIS: There is still a Rothko Foundation.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. Who are the members of it now?

MRS. REIS: And the members of that board are some very distinguished art people, but not very wise ones, not very realistic ones. Donald Blinken is chairman of that board, and though he is a good collector of modern paintings, including some very good Rothko, still whatever his motivation is for joining the board and taking the chairmanship, I don't know. But he should not have done it, really, because you could accuse him of having an interest in raising Rothko prices to the sky. He possessed them, didn't he? So I don't know. The board somehow took the job thinking that it was a noble gesture to serve on a board for Mark Rothko's foundation. But they were never very realistic. They were coerced into joining the board by the man whose name - from - whose name is Harrow, an assistant in the district attorney's office, who thought that he could make a great name for himself as a protector of an artist's estate. Now, I don't know who - what other people were distinct enemies, but all the testimony that prevailed in the trial turned out to be dealers. They were jealous, I'm sure, that Marlborough had the estate to handle and to deal with.

MR. McNAUGHT: How did Marlborough happen to have the estate? Because they were Rothko's dealer?

MRS. REIS: Because the three original executives [sic] appointed by Mark - namely Bernard, Theodore Stamos, and a man whose name is Levine; I've forgotten his first name - decided that Marlborough, with whom Rothko had had splendid dealings, had received, as I noted earlier, a million dollars for a hundred paintings at one time, to be paid by the Rothschild firm in Paris over a period - over a very long period. I don't know how many years, but to protect him with a large annual income and not pay it all out in one year to the government by way of taxes. So Marlborough not only had that qualification, but in addition, Marlborough knew how to build an artist. Marlborough always had the reputation of taking an artist of good quality and succeeded nearly always in selling out the whole show, succeeded in selling both abroad and in this country because it was an international firm, and because they had the know-how. And when the estate was given to Marlborough, the conditions were pretty severe. By that, I mean they would get 50 percent of all sales, but all sales were to be at the same level as Marlborough's own purchases of Rothko's work. Secondly, they were to restore all the paintings in the estate, and those paintings were in abominable condition. They were to publicize Mark. They were to do - they had to insure the paintings, pay for shipments wherever they were to go, keep the prices high, and generally keep the Rothko estate and the foundation in a constant flow of income.

MR. McNAUGHT: Now, when you say that it was Rothko's idea, his main intention was to have the foundation to give money to less fortunate artists, the way to finance the foundation was by the sale of his paintings. Do you think that he always intended that his whole estate should be sold off?

MRS. REIS: No. Half the estate.

MR. McNAUGHT: Half the estate?

MRS. REIS: Half was to go to his family, and the other half was designated as foundation.

MR. McNAUGHT: Okay.

MRS. REIS: A foundation saves taxes, doesn't it?

MR. McNAUGHT: Certainly.

MRS. REIS: So that it was both a practical and a noble thought. Now, Mark frequently in his lifetime gave paintings to museums under certain very important considerations, namely, that they would not just take a painting and include it in their collection, but they would have a definite area, definite room of suitable size, in which he would have only his paintings. And the most notable instant in stance of that was that he gave 13 paintings to the Tate Gallery in London, which is their modern gallery, and -

MR. McNAUGHT: Those were the Seagram pictures?

MRS. REIS: Yes. They were originally the Seagram. You're right about that.

MR. McNAUGHT: The Four Season ones.

MRS. REIS: And so Bernard negotiated that whole arrangement.

MR. McNAUGHT: With the Tate?

MRS. REIS: With the Tate. And when they were accepted in an official opening at the Tate - to which we went, we all went, including Mark's wife Mell; not Kate, but Mell - when we went to that opening, it was accepted officially by a government representative, a woman whose name doesn't occur to me but who was of importance. And then Norman Reid of the Tate said, in accepting it also, that it was due to the efforts of Bernard Reis that this occurred. And thereby hangs quite a story because while the negotiations with the Tate were going on, many times Mark would say to Bernard, "I don't think they want my paintings." And Bernard said, "Well, we'll assure ourselves that they will and that they - we will assure ourselves that they will want your paintings, including their board, not only Norman Reid, the director, and that they will build a separate room to house only your paintings. And that's exactly what was done and exactly what Mark wanted. And I have one other amusing illustration of that. One night at dinner here at home, Peggy Guggenheim was at dinner and Mark was. I don't remember who the other guests were. But Peggy said, "Mark, why don't you give me one of your paintings for my collection in Venice?" And Mark said, "I won't give you one. If you would designate a given space, I'll give you several, provided you would not mix it with other paintings." And Peggy, not too smart at the moment, said, "Well, I can't do that. I haven't the space." Had she known the prices it would have achieved, those paintings would have achieved, I suppose she wouldn't have said that, you see.

MR. McNAUGHT: She wouldn't have - yes.

MRS. REIS: But it was a little too early in the day, evidently. But you get Mark's intention. He absolutely did not want his paintings hung with other artists because they would lose their impact.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yet he didn't mind them being sold one by one from the gallery.

MRS. REIS: No, not at all. But always he wanted a condition when he gave anything. If a museum bought a painting, you can't tell them that they can't hang it, can you?

MR. McNAUGHT: Exactly. But if he gave it, he could [inaudible].

MRS. REIS: But if he gave paintings to anybody, he did not give just a painting to have it hung anywhere with anybody. He wanted his whole feeling, which was rather an emotional and religious feeling, a very deep feeling about what he wished to convey - he wanted that to prevail and not just another painting. Now, that's understandable. And Bernard helped in every way to achieve that. He did the same negotiation with Harvard University, and Mark's painting is not mixed with others. It remains as Mark's room. Well, that was the general understanding. The people who began the suit undoubtedly were jealous, as I've said, of Marlborough, and -

MR. McNAUGHT: Can I ask one question? What was Bernard Reis's relationship with Marlborough? Did he have one outside the Rothko Foundation?

MRS. REIS: I'm going to explain. I must explain that. Very simply, Bernard had a very thriving accounting business. And at about the age of 75, I think, he decided he would retire and give his business, under certain conditions, to other firms, which he did. And Mark was still living then, and realized that it's not good for Bernard, who is so in love with the arts and so active-minded - it's not good for a man not to have somewhere to go and something to do that he loved rather than being simply a retired man who didn't even golf. So Mark said to Frank Lloyd of Marlborough, "Why don't you have Bernard - in addition to taking care of your finances, why don't you have Bernard join the firm in some capacity such as he can perform, just so he would have something

to interest him and to do. The salary doesn't have to be large," and it wasn't. It was really sort of minimal. They paid for a secretary, really. Only really paid for a secretary. And so Frank Lloyd saw no reason why not, and so Bernard became associated with Marlborough in the capacity which I don't know how they designated it, maybe vice president. But it really didn't mean a hell of a lot because he was [laughing] - he was not sharing any of the profits, you see.

MR. McNAUGHT: But it was really Mark Rothko's suggestion?

MRS. REIS: Mark's suggestion.

MR. McNAUGHT: To Frank Lloyd?

MRS. REIS: Right.

MR. McNAUGHT: How fascinating. But Frank Lloyd was getting the better end of the deal there because he was getting all the brilliance and the expertise of Bernard Reis in his business -

MRS. REIS: Well, that's right.

MR. McNAUGHT: - for a modest price.

MRS. REIS: But Bernard always suggested clever things to Frank Lloyd because Bernard knew the field anyway. And he always suggested painters that Marlborough might try to acquire. And he never charged for those suggestions, I assure you.

MR. McNAUGHT: Had you been good friends with Frank Lloyd over the years?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes. We knew Frank Lloyd very well in a social way. We used to go out for dinner with him and his wife, and he used to come here. And we'd sometimes go to museums together. It's the general opinion that he knew nothing about art, but that's not the truth. He did know. He had a very good instinct about good art.

MR. McNAUGHT: Hmm.

MRS. REIS: And he proved it to me one day when we were up at Yale. And we went around the gallery looking at paintings, and I knew from what he admired that he knew. He had an instinct for good art. Besides, his whole business was done entirely in good art. So that's a false impression that has always prevailed. Now, I don't know whether Lloyd should not have said, "Let's ask a lawyer whether it is safe legally for Bernard to be a member of the firm even though not - you know, not a sharing member and still be an executor of the Rothko estate." Mark's idea was that if Bernard was in some capacity at Marlborough, at least he could oversee. He'd be a watchdog to see that things were going right for his own, you see.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: For his own paintings. So that the intention was -

MR. McNAUGHT: And Mark rather liked the idea?

MRS. REIS: Oh, he liked the idea. He adored Bernard, and he really once said, "I don't know a sweeter man in the world." And I'll give you a little story about that in a minute. He wanted, in other words, to do something for his good friend Bernard, not to have him completely aimless in his retired years. Now, he also got Marlborough to take on Theodore Stamos, now, Stamos also to do something for a long friend of 30 or 40 years because Stamos had been with the Emerick Gallery and they were not doing very much for him. They must have had a fight. I don't know the nature of it. So that he wanted a good gallery who - which could push him somewhat. The conditions were absolutely regular. By that, he was to pay 50 percent of sales, as all artists did, and the gallery was to do its utmost to show him to advantage and, naturally, to sell his paintings. Now, a great many people think that was a form of bribe.

[Tape stops, restarts]

MR. McNAUGHT: A form of bribe?

MRS. REIS: Yes. But I assure you, Bill, that that was not anybody's intention. Mark wanted to do something for Stamos, and that was the best thing he could do. But the conditions were absolutely normal. Stamos was to pay 50 percent of receipts. It was to be on a perfectly good business basis. And Marlborough was to do the best it knew how for Stamos. So that it was Mark's intention to do something for Stamos that would mean something to him, hopefully. If it didn't go, if Marlborough did not succeed in selling, naturally Stamos would not continue with them. But the hope was that Marlborough, being so good at launching an artist, it would work. But it never got a

chance to work. It was misinterpreted. But can you understand what I mean by Mark suggesting that a friend go to a gallery which might do him the best good?

MR. McNAUGHT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: No bribery in that at all. But that's the way it was interpreted, as a bribe, in the law court. The law court was terrible in every sense of the word because they implied dishonesty in every - from every angle of the case. And there was not one smidge of dishonesty. Bernard's intention in the handling as executor and his two executors, the two other executors, had the clear intention of doing the best in the world for the Rothko estate: one, to have a foundation, which would save tax money and do the good that Mark would like to leave behind him; two, they wanted to provide Mark and his family with a constant large income over many years, the extent of his lifetime and after his lifetime. And everything was done with that purpose in mind, not with the purpose of underselling Mark at all because if the market rose, Rothko's estate would have - Rothko, if he were not dead, and his estate would have the advantage of that. If the market didn't rise, there would still be a good income.

MR. McNAUGHT: Wasn't there - wasn't the problem that Marlborough bought a lot of paintings at a set price?

MRS. REIS: Marlborough bought those personally from Rothko before his death.

MR. McNAUGHT: Ah-hah [affirmative]. And that was Rothko's decision?

MRS. REIS: Well, yes. Rothko was delighted because at the time, did he have a dealer or not? I don't remember. But it was a great boon to receive a million dollars, to be paid and guaranteed over the years because if you receive a lump sum and you have to pay taxes on it, well, three-quarters of it would be gone, wouldn't it? So it was Bernard's financial notion, and correct it was, to give him a long-lasting, handsome income forever. Why didn't the court interpret it that way I'll never know. Had the court not been - had the case not been in the Surrogate's Court, which always is there to protect widows and orphans and to assume that anyone who did anything at all was trying to cheat them - but it was no cheating. It was that more - it was the wiser, more seemingly conservative but the safer policy.

MR. McNAUGHT: Well, what was Kate's real aim, then? Why did she instigate the case?

MRS. REIS: I think that they induced her to do it because they thought that she would gain a great deal of money by - a great deal more money, I suppose. Well, why figuring that, if the estate were evaluated at the monies these witnesses declared, that the estate tax would have been enormous. And it probably is. The question is how it will come out in the final run. If she has to pay taxes on the evaluation they now put on the paintings, only heaven knows what those taxes are likely to be. Now, doesn't that appeal to you as being sensible, wise business judgment? That's all there was to it. It was for the protection of the family and Mark's desired - his great desire to do good by virtue of his intention with the foundation.

MR. McNAUGHT: Were you all terribly startled when you found out that Kate was suing [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: We were so startled. Bill, we were so startled when that case started that Bernard had a major stroke.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. He fell down - I think it was on Easter day. He fell down right here in the dining room. And I said to him, "Oh, Bernard, do get up." And he tried and couldn't get up. So I realized there was something wrong. I brought in the chaise from the garden and made him a bed so that he would not have to go upstairs to bed. I slept on a blanket on the floor. And I thought that we'd have to see what happens overnight because it was - well, it was not in the course of the day. It was in the evening, and a Sunday evening, you see, when I didn't really know which doctor I could contact. So we waited until Monday. And I said to Bernard, "Bernard, you know so many doctors, so many famous doctors because of your position on the Lasker Foundation board," where he had been for 32 years. And I have a letter of - a letter from the Lasker board, which I must read to you, somewhere in this tale. So the next morning, I said, "Of all the doctors you know, who shall I call?" And - whom shall I call, I should say. And he said, "Dr. Rusk." Now, Dr. Howard Rusk is head of the therapeutic hospital down at the New York University Hospital, and he's world-famous for having instituted the whole idea of therapy for injured people - for stroke, for great accidents, for birth without arms or legs. He has been the founding father and force for the whole idea of restoring to people whatever activity they can achieve - the paraplegics of the war. First they started with the Air Force. Then, through General Bradley, he got President Roosevelt to establish it for the foot soldiers. And it has gone on that way since the war that Dr. Rusk has been a - well, the equivalent of a modern God to people who have lost limbs and have had to learn to live with attached limbs.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did he help Bernard after the stroke?

MRS. REIS: The first thing I did was, at 8:00 in the morning, call Dr. Rusk. And Dr. Rusk came out of his shower and said, "What's going on?" And I said, "Bernard has a stroke, I'm pretty sure. He fell down last night, on Sunday. I didn't know who I could reach. And he would like you to know and to take care of him." And he said, "Becky, I'll have an ambulance up there at 11:00 and we'll see that he has a fine room down here. And I'll see to it that the best in the world will be done for him." And that's exactly what happened. They cured him of his stroke down there. Taught him walk again. His brain was always absolutely crystal clear, which was fortunate, because his neurologist was the top neurologist down at the New York University, whom Dr. Rusk had designated for him, so that he came home able to walk - not to walk as he used to walk, for miles, but to walk, always with somebody. And he had therapy at the house. He had a therapist who would come.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did this happen at the beginning of the Rothko case or during it?

MRS. REIS: As soon as he knew about it.

MR. McNAUGHT: As soon as he knew about it?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Then after that, you know, you have a major stroke, and then always the doctors tell me, smaller strokes occur. And you are really not yourself. But one thing led to another, so that Bernard was - became sick. That thing, that case, made him sick.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did he ever actually testify at the [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: He had - there was some preliminary testimony before trial. But though he begged his lawyer to allow him to testify, his lawyer - his name was Richenthal - who understood nothing about art whatsoever nor the whole idea of the art field -

MR. McNAUGHT: Why did Bernard ask him to be his lawyer?

MRS. REIS: Because we didn't know other lawyers, and it was suggested by the estate lawyer, Mr. Karelson [phonetic]. He knew Richenthal, and Richenthal has a good reputation. He wins some cases. But this was the kind of case that, had we been more fortunate in a lawyer, I think could have been won. But there were no Clarence Darrows around, I assure you, and we didn't know any other lawyer.

MR. McNAUGHT: I would have thought that you would know [inaudible] any lawyers.

MRS. REIS: Lawyers? How would one know lawyers? I've always avoided them like the plague.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: We didn't know anybody who was superior as a lawyer. And generally speaking, lawyers don't understand or know the peculiarities of the art world. They are peculiar.

MR. McNAUGHT: They are indeed.

MRS. REIS: Indeed they are. And I could go into a long tirade as to why they are peculiar and who has made them peculiar. However, that was our tragedy. Now, when I tell you that Mark would have - if there is such a thing as turning in your grave, Mark would have turned in his grave had he known that such a thing could happen to Bernard and to Stamos and to Levine, the third man as executor. Because they were forced to resign, of course, and then they were sued. Well, in the Surrogate's Court, you had no earthly chance, I don't think. And Judge Midonick wanted, I am sure, to make himself a hero in handling one of the biggest art cases that ever occurred, certainly in this country, I think. And he was going to be the St. George of the art world, you know. And so it was publicized when the case was over, I might tell you. But there's nothing you can do about that. He was, I think, convinced before even starting that they were guilty, before even hearing testimony that they were guilty. Now, Bernard wanted very much to testify himself in court because, he said, "I am sure that anyone hearing me could be convinced that my intentions were not evil; were for the preservation of Mark's life and the life of his family and the life of the foundation; that I could have convinced anybody that that was the intention, and nothing invidious," you see.

MR. McNAUGHT: But he was not allowed to testify?

MRS. REIS: His lawyer would not allow him to testify.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you testify once [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: I once testified. And I testified - do you want to hear that one, too? Because it's awfully funny. I testified on one particular question. The lawyer wanted me to testify as to whether Mr. Levine - who separated himself from the case, saying that he did not approve of many things, and I don't know what they were - but

Levine had appeared [sic] in court that he had a terrible fight with Stamos in this house in which he called Stamos a son of a bitch. Well, I knew that that had never occurred at all, and for two very good reasons: one, that I was always here when any company was here; two, that they were never alone in the house together. It was always at board meetings. We were not particular friends of Mr. Levine. He isn't really our dish, really. But Bernard did say this for him also because he was Mark's friend, but he was not anyone that we would cultivate as a friend temperamentally. So Levine had declared that this fight occurred with Rothko [sic] in this house. What the lawyer wanted me to say is whether that was likely or true. So I was called, and the lawyer, I'm sure - Mr. Richenthal, I'm sure, had misgivings as to what kind of a witness I'll make. He didn't brief me in any way at all. But I was to tell the truth as I knew it.

MR. McNAUGHT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MRS. REIS: So I got on the stand, and his question to me was: Did that occur in this house? And I said, "Never. They were never here together alone. And since I am a social person, I was always here when anybody came because not employed a live-in Medicaid, just having someone come in to clean, who else would open the door and who else would serve drinks? So I was here always. And nothing of the sort ever occurred. And I'll tell you something else. I believe that if Levine had called Stamos an SOB, Stamos would have landed him one sock in the jaw."

MR. McNAUGHT: You said that?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Now, I was questioned as to having gone abroad. And I said yes, we had gone - I think it was after Mark's death - we had gone to Italy and I had arranged a marvelous holiday for Bernard. It's true he had had a stroke, didn't walk very well. But I knew what would give him a nice holiday. And I found an ad of a villa in the hills outside of Florence, Italy, made reservations there, and what I knew Bernard would enjoy would be to go down to Florence for part of the day and live in a nice villa for the rest of the day and the evening. And it worked out just that way. We would go down to Florence, which took 20 minutes by bus, a small bus that went from the villa down to Florence. and we would do only one great art thing a day in that morning, whether it would be the Santa Maria or whether it would be the Uffizi or whether it - because Florence is filled with individual distinct places of great, great art. And so I confined it to one a day, I was telling the summer court, and then the bus would call for us right there. We would be taken back for lunch, and we lunched on the out-of-doors overlooking the river. And then we would take a siesta in the afternoon. Then we'd dress for dinner, and came down and had a lovely dinner by twilight, again out-of-doors. It was just a grand occasion. "And I'm going to tell the rest of you," I said, "if ever you want to go Florence and live happily and learn the art of Italy, just ask me where and I'll tell you." They roared with laughter.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Laughing.]

MRS. REIS: And I kept this going because I found these grim, grim people in a courtroom that was, I thought, quite ugly, just sitting there and agonizing. And I was determined to cheer them up.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Laughing.]

MRS. REIS: Well, after I finished my testimony and came down from the witness chair, witness whatever, they applauded. The whole gang of them applauded.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: My lawyer rushed up to me, hugged and kissed me and said, "I've never had a witness like you."

MR. McNAUGHT: [Laughing.]

MRS. REIS: And Mr. Ross of the opposition came over to me and knelt by my side and said, "I had met you once before. We were - I was behind you and your husband at an event at the Guggenheim Museum." I had not remembered that. That was very nice. Then Ben Heller, who had testified that the Rothko paintings were worth, you know, these many thousands and thousands of dollars, the dealer himself, Ben rushed over to me and said to me, "Becky, I fell in love with you years ago and I still adore you." So it was a very successful afternoon, as you can imagine.

MR. McNAUGHT: How charming.

MRS. REIS: But we all had the impression when it was over that the judge thought I was rather flippant, which I wasn't. I wasn't flippant at all. I was telling them a nice way to live or, if they don't know how, just ask me and I gladly would tell them. [Laughing.] It was really a very funny session. But we all had a damn good time.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Laughing.] How well did you and Bernard know Stamos?

MRS. REIS: Oh, we knew Stamos for many years.

MR. McNAUGHT: Was he a good friend?

MRS. REIS: Stamos was a good friend. I think - I don't remember how we ever knew him in the first place, but he painted a large portrait of me in a very strange way. He had seen our house when we had renovated it into what it is pictured in an art magazine, and he said he knew the name without knowing us. And he told me much later that he admired the house, the pictures he saw. He admired it very much. And then he said that he saw a photograph, a full-sized photograph, in Esquire magazine of me and Jacques Lipchitz, the sculptor, talking at an opening at, I think, the Museum of Modern Art. And the photographer of Esquire took the photo, and it appeared full page in Esquire. Stamos saw that photo, and from the photo he painted my portrait exactly as we stood - as I stood talking to Jacques Lipchitz.

MR. McNAUGHT: Hmm.

MRS. REIS: And it hangs on the third floor. It's a large portrait, and exactly me as I was that night.

MR. McNAUGHT: How marvelous.

MRS. REIS: Lorgnettes and all, by the way. [Laughing.]

[Tape stops, restarts]

MR. McNAUGHT: This is William McNaught talking to Mrs. Reis. Today is September 8, 1980. Continuation of side 2. Mrs. Reis, in view of your husband's reputation and the art world that you had known, I imagine that all of this sudden publicity and the fact that he and other executors were brought to trial came as a great shock to both of you. What was his personal reaction at that time? What was your personal reaction at that time?

MRS. REIS: Well, he was so unbelievably shocked because of his relationship to Rothko and his sincere preference to serve Rothko and his estate well, conscientiously, I mean, it came as a terrible shock to him, as it did to Stamos and to Levine, the other two executors. But in Bernard's case, it was something that really, really knocked him out. Very shortly thereafter, he had a major stroke and had -

MR. McNAUGHT: It was shortly after the time the suit had been brought against him?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Yes. He had a major stroke, and you can understand -

MR. McNAUGHT: Do you think it was directly related?

MRS. REIS: No question in my mind about that. And he went to - Dr. Rusk of the New York University Hospital took charge of him down there, and in due time he recovered from that stroke. But he was ill off and on during those years that followed.

MR. McNAUGHT: He never actually did testify during the trial itself, in person.

MRS. REIS: No. No, he never did because his lawyer, Mr. Richenthal, for some reason would not let him testify before the judge. And he was begging to do it because he said -

MR. McNAUGHT: Do you think that things might have turned out differently if he had been allowed to tell his own story?

MRS. REIS: Bernard said to me repeatedly that he could convince any fair-minded judge that he was not deceiving or mutilating the estate. And he said he could convince a judge or any other reasonable person. But he never had a chance to testify before that judge. He never saw Judge Midonick. And that, I think, was a mistake the lawyer made. Even though when he was ill, he would have come down in a wheelchair and told his story and why he did what he did for the estate. His intention was that the estate would receive - the estate being the family and the foundation - would receive a large annual income guaranteed by the Rothschild firm, and that that would secure -

MR. McNAUGHT: Guaranteed by the what firm?

MRS. REIS: The Rothschild firm, Switzerland and Paris firm, which he -

MR. McNAUGHT: Why would they have guaranteed it? I don't think we've mentioned them.

MRS. REIS: Well, because Bernard felt that though Marlborough was a rich and successful gallery, that he didn't want only their assurance that that income would come, but he wanted Frank Lloyd to give a further guarantee

of a large and important financial firm that that money would come to the estate, you know, with their guarantee.

MR. McNAUGHT: I see. I see.

MRS. REIS: Which was a further precaution, as you can understand. And that is exactly what happened. I'm sure that Lloyd had to put up some guarantee of money with the Rothschilds; otherwise, they wouldn't have done that, so that it was really - what shall I call it? It was really the safest guarantee that you could procure. And that was his intention. Had he gone before the judge, a proper judge - and when I say a proper judge, I mean a judge in a usual court, not in the Surrogate's Court, because the Surrogate's Court is there to protect orphans and widows and they don't listen. They are pre-prejudiced, as you can understand, in favor of orphans and widows.

MR. McNAUGHT: Do you think that really happened in this decision?

MRS. REIS: Oh, I think there's no question. No question about it at all. It was a -

MR. McNAUGHT: Do you think that Frank Lloyd and Marlborough tried to withhold things from Bernard Reis? Do you feel as though they were not absolutely as up-front with him as they could have been, and that this contributed to all the misunderstandings and situations?

MRS. REIS: I think that Marlborough did not do anything wrong, did not shortchange the estate by a cent. The understanding was that they would take the remaining paintings in the estate and sell them as time goes on, not more than 35 a year, at the same price they would get for the ones they already had bought, and would protect that estate to the utmost. They were to receive - Marlborough were to receive 50 percent of the sales price. And they were obligated to restore those 800 paintings, to frame them, to insure them, to sell them, to publicize them, to promote the rest of the estate. And 50 percent is absolutely normal. It is - ask any art dealer in the United States whether they - whether 50 percent is excessive. It is certainly not. That's not only normal, but many art galleries even charge more. I've known them to charge 60 and 70 percent. But 50 percent was quite correct. And everything they were supposed to do for the paintings was to preserve that estate, to expend money to further - to put everything in fine condition and to further the increase of value as time went on. Now, the evaluation of the paintings was made in order not to so increase the tax on them, not to give them an inflated value, but to give them the value of exactly what Mark Rothko had received for every one of his paintings at the time. And that normal value was \$30,000 for a painting. Mark received that, and Marlborough heightened it a little by charging \$35,000 and telling Rothko that he's to ask \$35,000, and that very well do for every painting.

MR. McNAUGHT: But it was inevitable that after his death, the prices would go up.

MRS. REIS: Would increase. That was the expectation. But that doesn't mean to say that they would keep to the prices, to those prices. They would keep to the prices that would increase as time went on. Quite normal. Now, what the witnesses on the Rothko side were testifying to was an inflated, extraordinarily inflated value of Rothko's pictures, as if they were projecting the value into the far future or some future. But it was not the value that they knew at the time. And a business court would have recognized that you cannot give a value of paintings in the future. You can only give a value of paintings as they were at the time. That sounds reasonable, doesn't it? Well, Judge Midonick, being ignorant, really, of an art market and how it operates, assumed that the minute a painter died, that his values jump sky high. Well, there's no assurance of that. I think that the reason why the Rothko paintings took a jump in value at the time of the trial and following was because of the great publicity that the trial created. And Judge Midonick simply took that as an established fact, that an artist who died had to have his paintings trebled or quadrupled in value. Well, there is no sense in that.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you have any idea that it was going to be - this trial would bring such an amount of publicity as it did? It must have been extraordinary.

MRS. REIS: Well, I think that it was inevitable because, in the first place, Rothko was known as a major painting - painter. Secondly, he had committed suicide. Thirdly, the suit was brought by his daughter, his heirs, daughter and son. It was a combined suit. And so that it was inevitable that it would display what seemed a great scandal of three executors who were friends of the artist had so betrayed their friend. And that was the nature of the publicity all the time. Well, it just wasn't the truth. And Bernard suffered, I think, because his devotion to Mark had been such that for him to have even had any such inclination was horrific to him. It was not in his nature. And he would - he just couldn't believe that he was accused of something that was so mean, dishonest, and - what shall I say - a betrayal to one of -

MR. McNAUGHT: A betrayal because he had been such a friend?

MRS. REIS: Such a great friend. He was such a great friend to Mark such as you can't imagine. I'll give you an instance.

MR. McNAUGHT: We really haven't discussed in detail the friendship of you and your husband and Mark Rothko, so perhaps we should talk a bit about that now.

MRS. REIS: Yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: What was the one instance you were going to say?

MRS. REIS: Well, I was going to tell you that Mark had left home -

[END TAPE 3, SIDE B]

MR. McNAUGHT: This is William McNaught talking to Rebecca Reis on September 8, 1980, continuation of our conversation. This is tape 4, side 1. You were saying, Mrs. Reis, about a particular incident regarding Rothko.

MRS. REIS: Well, he had left home for very serious personal reasons. He told me that his wife had been an alcoholic for the past twelve years, that when he came back from the hospital - he had been hospitalized on account of some heart condition - when he came back, it was an impossible situation at home. And his daughter and his wife repeatedly said to him that they don't like his paintings, namely the ones for which he was famous. And he told me that one day his daughter had said to him, "Why don't you go to a regular office the way my friends' fathers do and just work that way? Because your paintings are not good anyway." So that gave him very, very unhappy feelings. And his wife didn't like his late paintings. She liked the earlier ones when he was painting in the surrealist manner. And so it was too much for him at the time, and he came down to live in his studio, which was just a block away from our home. Bernard used to stop by to see him every single morning before going down to his office.

MR. McNAUGHT: Every single morning?

MRS. REIS: Every single morning.

MR. McNAUGHT: For how long was this? In the '60s?

MRS. REIS: Well - the '60s - well, I can't tell you the precise date at which he left home, but from the moment he was living in his studio. And Bernard would stop by and see him every morning to find out how he was and how things were going, just to make sure that Mark knew someone cared for him. And then Bernard always had the habit of taking Mark out on Saturday afternoon to see other galleries, to see things that Bernard found interesting and that might interest Mark. And Mark always told me that though he was reluctant to go, he felt so much better when Bernard had taken the trouble to take him, get him out of his studio.

MR. McNAUGHT: He always would go?

MRS. REIS: He always would go. He never said no. And then our house was open to him. He came to dinner repeatedly. I saw to it that a tailor, Bernard's own tailored, tailored him some decent-looking clothes so he didn't look like a sack tied in the middle. And I used to - he was cold that winter, and I took him down to Bloomingdale's and got him a warm sweater because the coat wasn't warm enough. It was a beastly cold winter, and make him have a warmer coat down there. And all of that was a kind of friendship that you would do only if you cared terribly for someone. Now, I know that Mark was a depressed person. We all knew it. And I might tell you that Bernard took him to see Dr. Nate Klein, who is, one, an international president of the mental health association. He took him to Dr. Kline at about 10:00 or 10:30 one night so there'd be nobody else in the office, just to make sure that Dr. Kline would know what his mental state is and what to do for him. And Dr. Kline never charged a penny because Bernard was secretary - was treasurer, rather - of the international mental health foundation. And Dr. Kline would do anything that Bernard asked him to, so he made that appointment when no one would be in the office so that Mark would feel perfectly at ease. Dr. Kline thought it was a garden case of mental depression, and gave him certain medication, which I'm sure Mark did never take because you had to survey - you had to - you know, you had to give Mark a certain amount of surveillance to have him do the things that were good for him, you understand.

MR. McNAUGHT: Was he drinking at this time?

MRS. REIS: He was drinking, but he was never drunk. I've never yet seen him drunk.

MR. McNAUGHT: Really?

MRS. REIS: No. But I think that he liked drinking some Scotch. And Bernard always sent him wines and sent him good foods to each, such as he never got at home. When he was in the hospital, I used to bring him his favorite food because he couldn't eat the hospital food.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you get on with his wife before this period that you're speaking of?

MRS. REIS: Yes. We both did.

MR. McNAUGHT: Mel? Was that her name?

MRS. REIS: Yes. Mel and we were absolutely in harmony. We never knew Kate very well, but we knew that she was an unhappy child. And we knew that she didn't have complete confidence in or knowledge of her father at all because when it was shown in his will that he wanted to divide his estate into family support and the other half to go to artists past the age of 50 who were in need of financial help, she said, "I don't believe it. My father never would do anything good for anybody." Now, that was Kate's opinion. And the household, as you can understand, was really very depressing to Mark. So when he came down to his studio to live, we took a lot of care of him in every possible way. He even went out with us in a friend's car to the - just a few days before he committed suicide - to the airport because we were going to California to visit much daughter. And he even went out with us. And it was while we were away, two or three days later, that the report came that he had cut his wrists. And we immediately came back.

MR. McNAUGHT: It happened while you were in California?

MRS. REIS: It happened while we were in California.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh.

MRS. REIS: And we always have felt that had we been here, it would not have happened for the very simple reason that he could unload his anxieties with Bernard and with me when he had anxiety about the girl he was courting at the time - not seriously, but a girl whom I can mention; I don't know that you want me to. Yes? He was courting Rita Reinhardt, the widow of Ad Reinhardt, a good painter. And he needed company, and he always needed to have a woman by his side. Now, you may be shocked at what I'm going to tell you, but Rita told me that Mark was impotent. Yet she was determined to have him divorce and marry her because, having been the wife of one prominent artist, it was her hope and [inaudible], of course, to marry another prominent artist. Now, that sounds shocking, but that's a fact.

MR. McNAUGHT: Hmm.

MRS. REIS: Now, what else do I want to tell you? I also took Mark to my physical doctor, Dr. Isidore Rosenfeld, someone of big reputation, because I thought, maybe there's something physically the matter with him and we don't know it. And I made the appointment without telling him precisely. And I went over and fetched him to go over to Dr. Rosenfeld at East 72nd, just five minutes away, to have him examined. And I remember that when I came to get him - it was in the afternoon, let's say at about 3:00 - when I came to get him he said, "Oh, I didn't know we had an appointment." I said, "Yes, I've fixed that, Mark. I only wanted Dr. Rosenfeld to see whether you are physically okay because I've known of cases where the physical condition affected one's moods. And I wanted that cleared up." And he said -

MR. McNAUGHT: He was perfectly willing to talk about the fact that he was - had these depressive episodes?

MRS. REIS: Yes. He was not up to snuff by a long shot. And I personally felt, knowing the story as I did about George Gershwin from his family, that he was psychoanalyzed for months in Los Angeles, in Hollywood, because he was very unhappy. Hated the place. Thought he was not appreciated. And it all turned out through a friend that he imported a neurologist from New York, a very well-known man, to be examined, not to rely on the psychiatrist's treatment. And when he examined him, it turned out that he had a tumor on the brain and it was now too late to operate. And knowing that story - and of course, he died, as you know - knowing that story, I thought, maybe there's something physically the matter with him. Let's find out whether that's clear.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did he go through with that examination?

MRS. REIS: Yes. He said to me, "I didn't know we had an appointment. Wait until I change my underwear." And I said, "There's plenty of time. Go in and change your underwear." [Laughing] And then we went over and Dr. Rosenfeld said that he was absolutely physically in good condition. Dr. Rosenfeld's specialty was heart anyway. And Mark had had a heart condition - the aorta had not been right - but had recovered from it, so that there was nothing physically the matter with him. And then, as I told you, Bernard took him to Dr. Kline for a psychological test. So that we knew he was depressed. But -

MR. McNAUGHT: At least you both must feel that you did try and you did as much as you could in every way for him.

MRS. REIS: We tried to - we tried to do everything we knew of, as you would for a husband or a brother or anyone in your own family or a very dear friend, to make sure that there was nothing that is incurable. And so it was. It was a depression, and I think a complication with Rita Reinhardt because one day Mark stormed the

house at 11:00 in the morning and said to me, "Becky, if you knew how much I have lied, you'd have nothing to do with me."

MR. McNAUGHT: What did he mean?

MRS. REIS: Now, what he meant was that he had told his wife - with whom he telephoned every day, to whom he telephoned every day, and had household talk with her for at least three hours a day - he had told his wife he would be coming back, and he had told Rita Reinhardt that he would divorce and marry her. So that he was telling two different people two different things, and he felt that he was lying his way through the whole business.

MR. McNAUGHT: Which he was.

MRS. REIS: Which he was. But he didn't want to be divorced. And I know why he didn't want to be divorced. First, there is a Jewish tradition about having children - and, you know, he was a good old Jew in many ways - that you don't divorce when you have children. You take on that responsibility and you just don't throw it overboard. And his wife had told me and told Bernard, too, that this was not the first time he had had a sort of lapse of fidelity with other women, and that he always came back. So she wasn't very worried about it anyway. Well, that's the human story. And we were not unfriendly with Mel during this whole period at all.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you see her?

MRS. REIS: No. I don't think so. I think -

MR. McNAUGHT: Were her drinking problems very severe at this time?

MRS. REIS: I believe they still were.

MR. McNAUGHT: They were.

MRS. REIS: I have never seen her drunk, if I may use the expression. But it was well-known - Rothko knew it, and Mark had told me later, you know, as I told you - that she had been drinking heavily and was really an alcoholic for the past twelve years. And when it got very bad and very unfriendly and vicious at home, he decided he'd come down and live in his studio - not that he lived sumptuously at all in the studio. Had I been his girlfriend at the time, inamorata at the time, I would have seen to it that there was a decent bed and decent comforts. But Rita Reinhardt seemed not to bother herself with that at all.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: And you had a bed that was in the nature of a cot, and really slumming it - in a very beautiful studio, I must tell you. Well, that is the sad story which I think led to his suicide. Because the day he stormed in at 11:00 in the morning, never removing his hat or his coat, he said to me not only that he's a liar, but he said to me, "Rita said she was going to commit suicide." And I said, "What a ridiculous thing to say. How can she say that? She has a daughter, a grown daughter. How can she do that?" A grown daughter about 16 at the time. "How can she say or think such a thing?" I said, "Now, let me talk to her. Just you wait a minute." I rang her on the phone immediately, and I get the most cheerful, hearty, "Hello, Becky. How are you?" It didn't sound like a suicidal voice to me at all. But she evidently had offered that as a threat, that unless he did something posited, namely, divorce his wife and marry her, she would commit suicide. Well, you can imagine what Mark must have thought.

MR. McNAUGHT: How soon before he committed suicide did this [inaudible]?

MRS. REIS: Not very long before. Maybe two weeks or so.

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, so it was right around the time?

MRS. REIS: Oh, yes.

MR. McNAUGHT: So he was in a very excited state at this time as [inaudible].

MRS. REIS: Yes. He was in an excited and worrisome state. You can't imagine a man who has a public reputation suddenly being faced with the suicide - or what he thought, of course - the suicide of his inamorata, of the current girlfriend, what that would have done to his life. There would have been nothing for him to do but to commit suicide as well. I mean, that stands to reason, I think. So that he took her threat more seriously than most people would, I suppose. And when I called her and found her in a cheerful, non-suicidal voice, I realized what the state of affairs was. I said, "Mark, I don't believe she had any such intention. Put it out of your mind. I think that she was simply threatening you." It calmed him down. But being, as you know, depressed also, not

happy in the new relationship nor the old relationship, and remembering that his own wife Mel had supported him entirely in the early days of his painting career when he didn't earn a cent, and that he had a certain appreciation and debt, I'm sure, to her, he had no such desire to divorce. He would have solved it in the future in some other way, I presume. But he certainly was not going to divorce. And yet he would tell that. He would tell me that he was going to divorce and marry her.

MR. McNAUGHT: So he was obviously very -

MRS. REIS: Well, he once told Bernard that he's afraid Rita is a gold digger. That means to say, sir, that every time she had an opportunity, whatever the circumstance was, she would somehow wangle a painting out of him. And when Bernard once asked her how many paintings of Mark's she had, not out of curiosity but out of - just as a record, she said, "Mark told me never to tell anybody." So you see, she was, to my mind, a great factor toward his suicide.

MR. McNAUGHT: Aside from this - aside from everything that happened and the trial and then the ultimate death of your husband, Bernard Reis, say if that hadn't happened, the trial, what do you think your husband as you knew him would like best to be remembered by in making a contribution to the art world in New York?

MRS. REIS: Oh, I think there was no question in his mind that he would have protected that estate to the end of his ability. And it was Mark's idea that - since it was Mark himself who asked Lloyd to have Bernard do some function or thing in the Marlborough firm, it was Mark's idea that it's a good thing to have Bernard on hand as a special protection for him and his estate.

MR. McNAUGHT: So you think in a sense that it would have been his dealing with Rothko and the estate that would have been his greatest achievement, Bernard Reis's?

MRS. REIS: No question about it.

MR. McNAUGHT: Had things gone the way -

MRS. REIS: There is no question about it. And the estate would have benefited. I'll tell you why. By declaring the paintings the value which they were at the time, there was no enormous tax. If the IRS is getting its tax today, it is on the inflated evaluation of Rothko paintings. And I don't know what the commission is. But I don't doubt that there's an enormous tax if they take what the market had been worked up in its value. Do you understand what I mean?

MR. McNAUGHT: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I see exactly.

MRS. REIS: Well, Bernard didn't want to do that. Then Bernard was very devoted to the idea that Mark wanted to do something for his confrères in the art world because he had many friends. I remember the early contributions of the foundation went to people who were good painters but had not hit the top in the [inaudible].

MR. McNAUGHT: I think there are many.

MRS. REIS: There are always many.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: And I'm sure that if I understand Mark, who could have said to himself many times, "There but for the grace of God go I." It could occur to anybody because success has an element, yes, of excellence, but an element of luck as well.

MR. McNAUGHT: Absolutely.

MRS. REIS: And why do we close our eyes to that? Luck is a great factor in one's success.

MR. McNAUGHT: Absolutely.

[Tape stops, restarts]

MR. McNAUGHT: William McNaught talking to Mrs. Reis. It's September 9, 1980. This is the continuation of tape 4, side 1. Mrs. Reis, do you - in talking about the trial, do you feel that a lot of mistakes were made, that there really were errors on the part of one party or the other or the judge or the lawyers? I mean, what do you see as the most outstanding aspects of the trial that you find fault with?

MRS. REIS: First of all, I do think that it was an unfortunate court, namely, the Surrogate's Court, which is by - not only by its nature prejudiced, but the judge, Midonick, had a very fixed idea even before he began.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. We talked about that yesterday.

MRS. REIS: That we talked about yesterday. Then when he wrote his opinion, the curious thing was that he did not charge Bernard with dishonesty of any kind. Bernard had given him, to prove that he had - there was no money involvement from his standpoint, that is, no fee from Marlborough or anything like that - he had given Judge Midonick his income tax returns for, I think, oh, two or three years to show what his income tax was and where it came from. In his - in the opinion which the judge wrote, he therefore did not accuse Bernard of having any motive, any money motive. But you'll never believe it: He said that Bernard as executor was benefited by - what shall I say - enhancing his position in the art world. Now, the joke is that Midonick, knowing nothing about any art whatsoever and all of the history of anybody's involvement in the arts, never asked nor considered whether Bernard had any art relationships before the Rothko trial. And the truth of the matter was that we have been buying art for 58 years, from the moment we were married.

MR. McNAUGHT: As everything that we've recorded.

MRS. REIS: Yes. As I've already told you.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.] Yes.

MRS. REIS: And it came from our love of art, and a good deal of knowledge about what was very avant-garde in the art world, both here and in Paris. And for the judge to have said that Bernard's motivation was to enhance his position in the art world is nothing short of an ignorant joke. Do you get what I mean, Bill?

MR. McNAUGHT: Oh, yes.

MRS. REIS: Yes. Well, so that was one ridiculous thing. Then when Bernard made the deal for the remaining - for the estate paintings, the 800 paintings remaining in the estate, when he consigned them to Marlborough, his interest was to have the estate benefit as far as possible by an international dealer who knew how to push a man because every time he's taken on anybody, shows have been sold out, prices raised, all sorts of things, of a good promoter, as Marlborough International was. Now, when Bernard made - Bernard and the other two executors - made the arrangement with Marlborough, he asked the lawyers, his lawyers and the estate lawyers and all the lawyers, to get approval from some court because that would be a safety - that would be, you know, a guarantee that a court had approved it or disapproved it, but very likely would have approved it. The lawyers said that they couldn't get such approval because courts do not engage in business arrangements. So that was one dreadful mistake, and so unfortunate as to prejudice -

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes, the way it turned out.

MRS. REIS: - ruin everything. Yes. And then I find that Bernard's lawyers, that is, the Richenthal firm, was very negligent in that they never succeeded or seemed to want to succeed in getting character witnesses for Bernard because his reputation with any number of people was superb.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did they have anyone come as a character witness?

MRS. REIS: No. Not at all.

MR. McNAUGHT: No one?

MRS. REIS: No. Now, whether it was the lawyer's fault or whether the judge said that that was not - how shall I say - a consideration in the case, and it might have been that reason, but there were never character witnesses produced for one or another reason. And unfortunately, Richenthal would never do anything about the press, whereas Mr. Ross unquestionably gave to the New York Times lady reporters all the briefing every day for publication in the Times the next day.

MR. McNAUGHT: So you feel in that sense it was one-sided because it was just the one lawyer?

MRS. REIS: Oh, my dear, you know, if you know Mr. Ross, who was pursuing the case, you'd appreciate what I'm saying because Ross saw to it - I can swear by that - that he lunched and talked and influenced, since he's got a charm of a kind, and influenced all these lady reporters as to what was the substance of that day's proceedings. And they seemed to report it just as he said it, not using their own judgment or inquiry into any of the facts of the case, any of the pertinent facts of the case, which a keen reporter would do, I think. Well, so that the press was entirely on the Rothko side, entirely with the Rothko side. That was too bad. And then I mentioned to Mr. Richenthal, "Have you no influence with the press? Don't you know anyone on the Times to call somebody else in to hear the trial?" And he said, "I don't believe in trying this case in the press." Well, so that was another misfortune, I thought. Now, then I did mention, you see, that there were no character witnesses. Well, there could have been any number of people. And why they thought - who prohibited the use of character witnesses I

recall don't know because when a man has done as much good and public service as Bernard had done, to a great extent without pay - by that, I mean he was so intrigued with the pursuance of art, largely for the benefit of the current American artist.

MR. McNAUGHT: And he was interesting in things other than art.

MRS. REIS: Absolutely.

MR. McNAUGHT: Such as you mentioned he was one of the founders of Consumer Reports. Is that correct?

MRS. REIS: That's right. That's right. Without pay. Just remember these things. These are public services that he believed in, without pay. Then he served the Lasker Foundation -

MR. McNAUGHT: Excuse me.

MRS. REIS: That's all right - he served the Lasker Foundation for I think it was 22 years without pay, which was true of the whole board, of course. But that was his feeling about the importance and the public service that the Lasker Foundation could perform, which was of course basic medical research. Many of their - many of the people they recognized, many, many, were later Nobel Prize winners, you know. So he also pursued a case against the Hearst newspapers, without pay and single-handed, which he brought to the attention of the SEC. That means to say that whenever a corporation wishes to float a loan, a bond, a stock on the market, it has to be approved by the Securities - the SEC, it's called. And at that time, on the bench was William Douglas. And Bernard went to Washington and presented all of the conditions which made the Hearst guarantees for issuing - for selling stock showed that none of their guarantees were worth money, that they would be selling stock to the public without the security of substantial funds, you know, the imaginary reputation of the Hearst newspapers. And on his own, he presented that flotation of stock, without pay. No one paid him to do it. But he thought it was an intrusion and a joke to the public. He wrote a book called False Security [Bernard J. Reis; New York, Equinox Cooperative Press, Inc.: 1937], which was very well reviewed, I might tell you, by financial people, which disclosed so many wrong issues that corporations had at that time floated, and as a warning to the public. They've got to beware of what they're investing in. And it's an important book. I think it is now out of print, but you can read it now. And I think that government restrictions today are much more stringent. But at the time, in the '50s, they were rather lax. He wrote that book.

MR. McNAUGHT: Speaking of books, what about the books written regarding the Rothko case? What is your opinion of those? Lee Seldes wrote a book called, I believe, The Legacy of Mark Rothko [Lee Seldes; Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York: 1978].

MRS. REIS: Yes. Well, that is an atrocious and vindictive and lying document, and should have been sued for defamation of character, if you ask me. But -

MR. McNAUGHT: Did you - did she interview you for that book?

MRS. REIS: Never. Never interviewed Bernard.

MR. McNAUGHT: Did she ask to?

MRS. REIS: Never asked to. Never. Never. And one day appeared in the newspaper - she may have it in the book as well because I can't bear to read a book of that kind - she told this story, that James Brooks, a known American artist, had come to Bernard for financial help, for financial advice. And Bernard straightened that out and even made his tax return, never charging him. And so Seldes says that Brooks offered him a gift, a present for it, a gift for it, and asked him to come to his studio, and that Bernard did go, and refused to receive a small painting and asked for a larger one. That never happened. Bernard had never been to James Brooks' studio. He never asked for anything. And subsequently, when that appeared in the newspaper, Brooks wrote Bernard a letter and said, "I hope you will not blame me for this kind of a lie because, as you know, we never talked about a gift, you never came to my studio, and such a thing never happened. And this means that I'll never talk to reporters again." Well, now, that should have been brought up in court, too. I called the lady one night at 10:30 at night, furious with her, and said to her, "Why do you publish a lie like that?" And she said, "I know that it was a mistake," she said, "but I'm sorry for it." I said, "Yes, but what public redress can you - do you offer to make for it? How can you - why don't you deny it in print as well as having printed the lie?" And she said, "Well, I can't do that." And that was that story.

MR. McNAUGHT: Where was this published?

MRS. REIS: It was published in the New York Times.

MR. McNAUGHT: In the New York Times?

MRS. REIS: It may even be in the book. Who knows. But that kind of ramped-up story is ridiculous. She never thought to ask Bernard what he had done by way of having American artists represented in European collections. You know that Bernard - at that time, an artist was allowed to make presents, to make gifts, to certain known museums, and they could get some tax reduction on it. They are not allowed any more.

MR. McNAUGHT: Only the cost of materials.

MRS. REIS: Yes. Which is ridiculous because the cost could be, what, \$10.

MR. McNAUGHT: [Inaudible.]

MRS. REIS: Yes. But at that time, the estimate on a painting was given as a tax deduction to the artist. The importance of that was that artists, reputable artists, could be represented in European museums and American museums as well. So that Bernard was responsible for the whole gift of, I think, thirteen of Rothko's paintings to the Tate Museum in London.

MR. McNAUGHT: Those were the paintings that had been done for the Seagram Building?

MRS. REIS: That's right.

MR. McNAUGHT: For Seagram.

MRS. REIS: And Mark Rothko's condition was that he would give them to the Tate provided that a room was specially built or assigned -

MR. McNAUGHT: Designated. Yes.

MRS. REIS: - to his paintings only and not have them mixed up with the general collection. All of that Bernard achieved with then-director, the then-curator - what was his name?

MR. McNAUGHT: Norman Reid?

MRS. REIS: Norman Reid. Thank you. And it was accepted by the City of London at a ceremony once they were received and installed there. And Norman Reid made public acknowledgment to Bernard Reis for having negotiated and arranged not only that gift to the Tate but gifts from Robert Motherwell, gifts from Philip Guston, gifts from various of the prominent artists here to European museums. Then they never brought out the fact that Bernard had made marvelous gifts personally to museums in this way. Before Jackson Pollock was known anywhere except on the East Coast, Bernard, feeling that that was absolutely wrong for a living artist not to be known throughout the country, a living artist of that reputation - because, as you know, Jackson Pollock was a landmark - and Bernard gave personally one of the most beautiful paintings Jackson Pollock ever made called The Cathedral. He gave it to the Dallas Museum before the tragic events that followed later, I assure you. And every time they loan that painting called The Cathedral, they always acknowledge that this was a gift of Bernard Reis. He did a thing like this. I remember that Helen Frankenthaler had her first public show at the Jewish Museum in New York, and she was not at any museum whatsoever. At that time, John Myers was her dealer, and John did everything he could for his artists. He really turned himself inside out to further them. Bernard bought one of Helen Frankenthaler's large paintings and presented it to the Carnegie Foundation Museum in Pittsburgh, so that she was - that was a foot in the door. And it means a great deal to an artist -

MR. McNAUGHT: To be represented.

MRS. REIS: - to be represented in important collections. I'm trying to think now - oh, yes. He made a money gift of half the cost of a large Lipchitz sculpture to be given to the Cleveland Museum, and was made an honorary life member for that. But that - I can't think of the numbers of gifts that he made to museums of important artists. You know, there are people who give paintings of one sort and another to museums because they get some sort of tax deduction. But they give rather rubbish things, you see.

MR. McNAUGHT: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yes.

MRS. REIS: But that was not Bernard's style. He gave only important people to the museums because he wanted to benefit the artist. His consideration was not how to reduce his taxation, which was really very minimal because the evaluations of these things were not large anyway at the time.

MR. McNAUGHT: Not like they are today.

MRS. REIS: And not at all like they are today. So that what he did by giving important works to important museums, never to any kind of unknown anything, so that you can see by what I tell you that those facts should have been bought out in court as character evidence and as - and his devotion to the fine arts, for the reason

that he loved them, just being a man who liked to - well, we both were. We liked to have important works of art, and always advanced work, you know, nothing that was just a kernel. So that it became a very prominent collection, with the result that many museums, many worthy institutions, came to this house to see the collection year after year. That would be people from the Cleveland Museum, from the Museum of Modern Art in New York, from the Guggenheim, from - [inaudible] - from Smith College, from - what's the other women's college up north?

MR. McNAUGHT: Vassar.

MRS. REIS: Vassar. I can't tell you how many. And hundreds of people came because of [inaudible].

MR. McNAUGHT: It must have been marvelous.

MRS. REIS: It was marvelous. It wore out a wonderful Samarkand 300-year-old rug, which I gave to the Metropolitan because it was so rare. But all of these things were never brought out, neither in the newspaper - you know, wonderful material - neither in the newspapers nor in the trial. And nobody but intimate friends knew these facts.

MR. McNAUGHT: So I'm glad now that we've had an opportunity to put it on tape so these facts are down.

MRS. REIS: Yes. And there are probably dozens of more, which I'll discover among our papers, that I'll remember to tell you about one day.

MR. McNAUGHT: We can continue again if you [inaudible].

MRS. REIS: Whenever I discover among all the papers that we have in this house anything of pertinence like that, I shall certain tell you about it.

MR. McNAUGHT: Yes. Well, it's been -

MRS. REIS: But you can - wait a minute. You can understand how painful this whole trial has been and how devastating it was to Bernard's whole life, his whole presence, his whole interest, everything that he stood for in a public way.

MR. McNAUGHT: I can. Thank you very much. End of interview.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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