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**Oral history interview with Sue M.
Thurman, 1993 April 23-1998 March 11**

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Sue Thurman from April 23, 1993 to March 11, 1998. The interview took place in Brookline, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Thurman at her home in Brookline, Massachusetts, April 23, 1993. Robert Brown, the interviewer. And, uh, I thought we might begin just talking about your childhood, your family background, some of your early memories and then we can get on into your—what became your principal career.

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, fine. In fact, once we start, it may be hard for us to stop, and you'll have—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well then—

SUE M. THURMAN: —to tell me—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —oh, feel welcome—we welcome that.

SUE M. THURMAN: —if I share more than you wish—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

SUE M. THURMAN: —to know. My childhood was in a wonderful—I remember it as wonderful—little town in Southwestern Kentucky called Hopkinsville, which way back, as far as I can remember, had banners across the downtown streets saying, "Dark-Fired Capital of the World," which meant dark-fired tobacco.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: It was a very prosperous little community in agricultural terms. There were perhaps five loose floors—that's where the tobacco is brought in and handled—and other industries, light industries. Mostly, it was a town of people who had grown up in even smaller towns and were beginning to come into the city way of thinking.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because Hopkinsville—it was sort of market center or—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right. And this—it was the county seat of Christian County with a lovely, old courthouse. The building period of the town had been, I would say, those—the rather old town, the early buildings, but the time when it had grown had been between in the middle of the 19th century [00:02:00] and the arrival of the 20th century. So, there were lots—the courthouse and the important buildings tended to be of that period. Bethel Women's College was there, and it was a magnificent building, which for lack of your kind of organization in the town, preservationists, the architectural groups, the town was a little too small to save itself from things like having somebody come along and say, "Bethel Women's College is too expensive to pay insurance on now. It's a firetrap. Let's take it down and use the brick to build something else." So, it was that size city. It had the substance with which to do wonderful, beautiful things. It didn't have the scale with which to guarantee that they would be maintained well as long as they might have been.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Well, was it—was it, in fact, quite a prosperous area when you were—as you recall?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, prosperous by what terms? Remember that my childhood was the Depression, the Great Depression, but I didn't know that it was happening. We lived, I thought, very comfortably. Now looking back, I remember our favorite meals and so on, and I can see that they were all things, which were, you know, quite a good value for the dollar. I remember that everyone, regardless of what their status in life was, shared certain ways of buying and planning, which had to be economical. I'm just saying that back then we weren't paying for advertising. We weren't paying for lots of things that we pay for now and everything. [0:04:00] No hidden cost. When Mr. Simms [ph] came up High Street, in his wagon, pulled by his dear, old horse—I've forgotten the name of the horse. Mr. Simms, himself, was maybe 85 in tattered, country clothes, and he would get there usually by eight in the morning, and he would begin to shout when he was a couple of blocks away. What it meant was he was shouting all the time, but I didn't know that. I thought, How does he know—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

SUE M. THURMAN: —you know, when it's time to start shouting? But he would yell out whether it's beans or apples or chickens, or just what that is the best buy— berries, lots of berries. Everyone's mother—and you see life was so stable. There was nobody, or if there was, you didn't know that person, who wasn't blessed with a mother and a father, and a house, a roof over their head, flowers in the yard. That's why I say it was prosperous. I don't mean in terms of lots of dollars at the bank. I mean we were simply having a very nice life. Our mothers went out early in the morning and made the best buys, and by afternoon, we may have walked downtown. One car in every family, and the man drove it away, and the women and the children did the rest. We would go do other things sometimes, but for the most part we—I believe, as I look back—we worked. I believe that I was taught to work—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Even as quite a—

SUE M. THURMAN: —that I slowly—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —young child?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you have brothers and sisters?

SUE M. THURMAN: I had one brother, an older brother. There was never any question—there was no making somebody do something. [00:06:02] There was no arguing about it, and I think that had been so in the generation my mother was the one at home, and my father hadn't—was out of town, quite often a week at a time, in his business. So, we were really taught primarily during the week by our mother, and every project, she would relate it to what it had been like when she was a girl, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: She would tell you this?

SUE M. THURMAN: —when she and her mother did whatever, whatever—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But was this invoked as therefore you're going to do that?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, no, no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No? Just demonstrational—

SUE M. THURMAN: It was joyful revelation. You had this picture in your mind because you had, of course, been there many times. You didn't know your grandparents, they died before you were born, but they had been made to live in front of you. And you knew where the garden was that those pole beans were in as you're now canning Mr. Simms's pole beans, you see?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: So, life was connected, and before it was all over, you knew how to can pole beans and every other thing like that. Do I now can pole beans? No. I do have a garden, and you couldn't take it from me. I love the whole thing of seeds and everything that follows, and I simply never stopped working. Whatever the projects were, they were followed by another project. Now, I can't tell you that was good or bad, or maybe it should have had long leisurely periods in between. I don't think I became a workaholic. Maybe I did. I don't think so because I love it. [00:08:00] Work is a game for me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. A game in the sense of?

SUE M. THURMAN: I have a great appetite for it. I enjoy it. I'm not worried about efficiency. I love to let the project find its own way. I mean, as life has progressed, I have worked in different ways, and I adore it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was your family name?

SUE M. THURMAN: McWhirter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: McWhirter.

SUE M. THURMAN: It's a Scot's name.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Sure. What did your father do? What was his—

SUE M. THURMAN: My father was in the retail business. Um, he had—I think it was three jobs, all of them with

companies in Nashville, which was the city that became our vortex. My mother's sister and my cousins were there. That was one family that didn't have—they lost their father early, so they were kind of our family too. We felt that we were all in one family, and we went there regularly both because of my dad's having business to attend to and the relatives there, so back and forth the 65 miles to Nashville.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, that would have been the big city?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes. That's where the Parthenon was. The Parthenon was my first exposure to art, and I had the feeling—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was pointed out to you as a work of art?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or?

SUE M. THURMAN: —it's simply that we always went to everything in Nashville, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. But the Parthenon—

SUE M. THURMAN: The Grand Ole Opry was then a very different place, and we never attended it because that was not looked on with great favor at that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was considered—what—rather lower?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, not so much lower. It's just not much fun to listen to is what people thought who influenced me. But I knew where it was, and I always looked at it as we went down that street. It was the Parthenon that really grabbed me. [00:10:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really?

SUE M. THURMAN: And Vanderbilt and Peabody and, of course, we didn't call it Peabody as I've learned in Boston—

ROBERT F. BROWN: As they say in New England, yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: It was Pea-body [ph]—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] What was it—

SUE M. THURMAN: —and Scarritt. You know, there were good black colleges in Nashville. Nashville is a very interesting city, really. But back to the Parthenon, I think as a young, young child, I thought that art means very, very old because, you know, the Parthenon is my example of a museum. It's really a replica, and obviously, everything there says "BC," "AD," whatever. It's way long ago. So, I had this idea that, you know, art was classical.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did that intrigue you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I don't know about intrigue. I just sort of drank up everything. I went around the world, my world, which grew larger later, and now, it's growing smaller. The way I feel about whatever piece of the world I was then in—and this has always been the case—is that I may not be there again, so I partake to the fullest.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you did even as a small child now, too—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes, of course,

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, you said your mother had the raising of you often when you're father was away?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, yes. Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was there, much—did you do reading? Was there a way of getting beyond your room, so to speak?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes, yes. We had—now, now, what was her name—one—I wish I could remember the librarian's name.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But there was a library—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh yes—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in this small town?

SUE M. THURMAN: —the Carnegie Library, and it seems to me I spent as much time in the basement of it wrapping bandages. You see, this was the period in which we were helping with the war. [00:12:01] Ezell, Kate [D.] Ezell was the librarian?

ROBERT F. BROWN: How do you spell that?

SUE M. THURMAN: E-Z-E-L-L. Her doctor had removed my tonsils—[they laugh]—her father had removed them. Kate always had books that she had thought you might like. It was in the day when you were guided quite a bit. I'm not sure that guidance is so bad. I would no more have not taken whatever books Kate Ezell had set aside for me nor would Frances McGallen [ph], my good friend with whom I always went. We had these routines. As little children, we were being little adults, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you parceled out your day?

SUE M. THURMAN: —Frances and I had a certain—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —fairly conscientiously?

SUE M. THURMAN: —afternoon in a week. Not that we had been told we must, but certainly once summer vacation came, we got organized. We knew that most likely a certain day, we would go to the library, another day, we would go to the picture show—that was the movie that they would call picture shows—and so on. Very little shopping by the way. To pass the time by spending money was—had not arrived as a modus operandi. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you were probably kept on fairly short rations, weren't you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, of course. I can't remember whether—in fact, I don't think I had an allowance. I heard someone the other day talking about their own allowances. I think it may not be good policy in terms of economics, but I think I was expected to say why I needed whatever I needed, and whether I had found the place to get it at the best value. [00:14:02] I think this caused me to get it if they could provide it. I don't think I ever went and collected my money for doing nothing, nor did I ever get paid for canning those beans or anything, even for killing a chicken, which I had to learn to do. I forgot to tell you that work could be very emphatic in the South back when girls were still girls, and you were told, you know, "You'll someday be running a house, and you'll have to do this." That's the one part of it I remember as absolutely horrible, so I did it very rarely.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, your brother would have had a different role, wouldn't he?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, of course, he was never asked to do anything in the kitchen.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did his life go beyond the house earlier than yours, would you say?

SUE M. THURMAN: Ah—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Not only because he was older but that—

SUE M. THURMAN: I'm embarrassed to tell you that I didn't observe that because I thought I was quite observant of things. I must have been more interested in myself [laughs] than I was in anyone—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Most children are. [They laugh.]

SUE M. THURMAN: But there was a coming together, particularly when we were all very young. You see at the end of this vigorous summer day—I think of my days as summertime. I'm sure we had wintertime, too, but I think it must have been summer I loved, though I adored school, which would be another story. But as very young children—do you know what a pallet is?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: See, you're from the South in a way. Well, and you, of course, know quilts. Well, in those days, everybody had more quilts than they knew what to do with if all the women in the family had always made quilts. [00:16:00] We had what was known as a quilt box, and little did I know I would later run a quilt museum. But the quilt box had towards the top of it—it was no way to store quilts. I mean curatorially, it was a disaster.

But in the top of the quilt box, which was a pine, and that's bad for quilts. But anyway, in the top of this box was the one. It was a little ragged. It was nice-looking, and it was clean, but it was, sort of, given way, and this was for stargazing. On very hot summer nights, this very large quilt would be taken to the yard, shaken sharply several times. There seem to be a little bit of ritual I think, and then it was understood that we were going to lie on our backs and count the stars, and talk about them—otherwise, notice nature. Finally, of course, you fell asleep, and you someone [laughs] took you inside.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Lift you up? Yeah. [They laugh.]

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it was simple but fun.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, of course. Now, you say that school was something that you liked?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, I adored it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you—would you have begun—would they have had a kindergarten in those days?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, no, no, no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you started—

SUE M. THURMAN: No. By the time you started school, you were supposed—you thought you were supposed to know how to do things, you know. I mean, we don't want to hear that you didn't was the general [laughs] idea. So, for the first grade, you were watched to the end of the block, but this was a safe town, what was going to happen to you? And it was drilled into you like, you do remember how to go, you know? So, no one, unless it was during a heavy rainstorm or a huge snow or something—you weren't taken to school because you were little. [00:18:04] You went with Frances or whoever was your close friend. You met her at her corner, and you simply did what was needed, which was to take care of yourself. You were supposed to be at Tardy Alley five minutes before the bell rang, and it was called Tardy Alley for the reason that if you played along, you would be tardy. If you were tardy three times, you were in disgrace all over town. I mean it's—Ms. Lottie McDaniel ran. Oh, she was a willowy, bony, lovely, old, old lady with her hair in a big puff, white hair, and little nose-pinching glasses. She visited every classroom every morning and smiled broadly, and said, "Good morning boys and girls." So that you realize that life is really pretty good, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: And this was a castle she ran, the Virginia Street School. It had four corners with fire escape slides inside them. Your brother told you, you see, for three years previously that when you go to the school, they will shove you in at the top corner up there [laughs], and you will slide down whether you want to or not, you know? So you were—

ROBERT F. BROWN: He forewarned you then?

SUE M. THURMAN: —you were held back a bit by the possible torment of the fire escape, but for the rest of it, it was lovely. There was a semicircular walk, and in the middle there, Miss Lottie and all her friends—certainly with not a nickel, I'm sure, from the state of Kentucky or certainly not from the federal government—had planted a wildflower garden, which got bigger as time went on. [00:20:13] And by the time I was out of Virginia Street School, it was the most magnificent bluebells, columbine, everything. We simply went in sort of—what shall I say—there were ways to do everything right, and it was expected of you. And I frequently got in trouble over my vivacious or voracity, whatever you want to say it was. I found it hard to be quiet enough. And—otherwise, besides that problem, which humiliated the family all the way through grade school, I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It didn't quite bother you though?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, I got good grades on everything except conduct. I think now it was something of an abuse of the word for me to get Cs on conduct all the way through because I was never in a bad mood or hurting anybody or anything. I just didn't quiet down and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: These were times when often they wanted everyone to be quietly reading or writing or—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well or—or to let someone else talk.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Talk? I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. I wasn't even necessarily at the wrong place in the wrong time. It was just they were trying to impress on me that I was an unusually verbal person.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Now were—in these early years, were there things you particularly liked by way of schoolwork?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, everything I really—and it's true to this day. I have graduate students. I have an extra bedroom. I have a graduate student always living at my house now, and we were talking the other day, the very nice person you've met who's a law student. [00:22:06] He's so convinced that he's glad he's a law student. We were wondering besides the career that I had, you know, what other careers would I have liked. Because he's always trying his law cases on me and seeing if I get to the right answer, so. [Laughs.] It's great fun, and it's the price we all pay that you live once. But I would have loved any—I would have—I really liked math very much and everything having to do with science at the natural—and botany, plants, all of this.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would you have begun getting that even in the elementary school?

SUE M. THURMAN: Because the people who were teaching were making—I didn't know if there was such a thing as curriculum, but they [laughs] were sharing with us all these wonderful things. It was more like some kind of private English school, the little public school, and all those—everyone who was a woman was a teacher.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were.

SUE M. THURMAN: And they were making—I seem to remember, although I could be totally wrong about this, I believe they made about \$90 a month in those days, and they were all from there, but they had been away and gotten fully trained in every degree, and so on. And then some of them had extra things, and I particularly remember the ones with the extra things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Such as what? You mean extra things for the children?

SUE M. THURMAN: To offer, yes. One was Annie Paine [ph] who was really an outstanding classical scholar. I now realize that she had quite a background. [00:24:00] But I first met her in fourth grade and then I met her again in high school after she had moved up. In the fourth grade, I didn't know she knew anything about Latin, and in high school, I took four years Latin from her. This woman was just fantastic.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really?

SUE M. THURMAN: My love of words, where they come from, the metering—I'll just never forget—it was music. There was no one in that class, regardless of what their interest was or what problems they may have had learning—there was no one in there who wasn't getting it. There were several of those people who were just superb teachers. There was a family named Bartley [ph] who happened to be our neighbors too. This was, I think, seven sisters and a brother. Their entire contribution, the parents Bartley, was to turn out all those teachers. Every one of them was a teacher. They all had this thing of they'll teach first in grade school and then they'll move—so, I had Miss Juanita for my seventh grade teacher and then I had her, again, for math in high school, a fantastic person.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And these were—

SUE M. THURMAN: She told us you can't trisect an angle that there is no theorem for trisecting an angle. I remember it to this day because several of us went home that night, by ourselves without saying to each other, and figured out a theorem for trisecting an angle. Whether she knew we would, whether she tried to cause it to happen, I don't know. She acted very surprised the next day. And then there was Mrs. Abernathy who was my sixth grade teacher, and it was Mrs. Abernathy who really sent me on my way, I suppose, because she was from Louisville, and she had spent several years in Paris. [00:26:12] Now, she was approximately in my present age. She was in her early 60s or maybe more. No one ever told anybody when to quit, I guess, in those days. Anyway, she said, Mrs. Abernathy said that "If we had a good week all week"—and she told us this Labor Day when we met her—"that it would work this way. That if everything went well all week that when noon on Friday comes, we will put our books in our desks." They were those wonderful desks with the wrought iron sides and the ink hole, and the hooks for things. She described that you will please arrange to have either make it or have your mother make it. In any case, bring a cloth bag that is about 12-inches long and has a drawstring at the top. We need this to hang at the side of our desk. And on Friday noon, if it's been a good week, we will get the bag, and it has in it your watercolors, and we will then spend until time to go home making pictures. Now, it turned out that Mrs. Abernathy had studied art in Paris. I thought she could do no wrong. It was beautiful that my family let me believe those things. You know, family sometimes get jealous or whatever. [00:28:01] They never invaded that territory that existed between me and my teacher. Everything to support it. So, I don't think we had a bad week all year. I don't think there was a time when anyone in that class did anything bad enough to cancel the art class.

ROBERT F. BROWN: About what grade was this?

SUE M. THURMAN: Sixth.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sixth grade?

SUE M. THURMAN: Now, you talk about discipline, to be that good all week to have that art class on Friday, you come up loving art, you come up behaving. And we had—the only thing she did wrong, but of course, that's all right, too, as far as I'm concerned—she didn't tell us the best thing was to express yourself.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Instead, what did she tell you then?

SUE M. THURMAN: The best thing is to get so you can make it look like it looks. Well, you know, there's always been a school like that. She also had some outstanding views of Paris where we were literally going to duplicate what she had seen.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, you mean she had photographs or reproductions?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, they were like transfer patterns. I'm telling you, it doesn't ruin you for the arts if you copy a church steeple. But the most important thing about her—and I will never see the day end. Can you believe that I never see a day end without thinking of Mrs. Abernathy? Now, that's a lot to say. How could anyone be remembered so well? It's that she taught me to look at the sky, all of us. We couldn't possibly fail. She wanted it so much that we did it. We took blue. We wet the paper.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, this is when you're actually looking at the sky. [00:30:01]

SUE M. THURMAN: This is the watercolor—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You're no longer looking at reproductions?

SUE M. THURMAN: No. No. She said, "In your life, you go around looking." Now that was what was wonderful. So, in my life, I never did quit going around looking. I'm not saying I hadn't looked before I met her, but I'm saying she greatly emphasized it. Now, in class she said, "You don't need to look out the window at the sky." Right now, it's not very outstanding. It's two o'clock, you know, it's just kind of pale. But what did it look like the last time you saw the sunset? So—and she wasn't really an art teacher. I later found out she had studied some art. She was really a lot of other things. But what an art teacher she turned out to be because she said, "Wet the paper. Now, you've got an accident about to happen." I've had some awfully good art teachers say that in more recent years. So, before it goes bad, make it go good. You've got to drop a little blue in up high, and then you're going to pull it down, you're going to have less and less blue, but we don't want to see it come in bands. We want to see it gradual. We don't want to know where your strokes were.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And how are you going to do that?

SUE M. THURMAN: And well, we did it. I wish I still had one of them. Anyway then you are going to drop in a little orange after you get it totally white but not enough orange to really see. You know, you put it in the orange, it's the only way we know it's there. All right, so you keep doing it, and of course, you get to the bottom, and it's going to be a fiery orange sunset. This was in the sixth grade, and this was all different kinds of little kids. Even the ones who hadn't been to the Parthenon or the ones who had been a few in town who were very well-traveled and—you know. But this was a common denominator and she knew it. [00:32:03] The sky would always be with us. And after she had gotten the sky across to us then it was some other thing like that that was always going to be with you. It was a beautiful experience.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, she gave you method?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And discipline?

SUE M. THURMAN: And she gave you observation.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then what about her critique of what you had done?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, that was not to the point. Well that, I think, would have been the last thing in the world she ever would done.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they looked at? Were they pinned up on the wall?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, they were pinned up, but there was none of this business of, "Oh, you're marvelous, this is—you're going to be an artist." It was like writing. You're going to write, you're going to add, you're going

to subtract, you're going to look at things. Art was looking at things. And this had a major impact on me because I never later thought anything else. I thought what we're talking about is the way things are, and it's looking at them and then doing what you want to with the materials.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: I just couldn't imagine a happier grade school.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you suppose that most of the class—your classmates were—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, we talk about it to this day.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —turned on?

SUE M. THURMAN: When I was down in Hopkinsville last year, not for the Derby, but it happened to be the week of the Derby, and lucky enough to see a group of my friends who always get together to watch the Derby, and we were talking about these things. They tend to still have some copies of theirs because they've moved around this. I had a list recently. Someone made a list in connection with the reunion, and I noticed that two-thirds of us in that class I was in stayed there—they never went anywhere else but they're living there now. [00:34:01] And so, you have to be kind of careful of what you [laughs] say about—they understand there are wonderful places elsewhere. They just kind of wonder why anybody lives there, you know. They had traveled to those other places and come back.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The travel in those days, by and large, was minimal, wasn't it, certainly by our standards today.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. I didn't fly until after I married. Isn't that amazing? We married in 1950 and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: By then you were—

SUE M. THURMAN: —I did graduate work after that, but I didn't fly to New York for that. We drove up in the car. And then my first job was at the Junior Art Gallery in Louisville in 1952. That really wasn't my first job. It was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: No.

SUE M. THURMAN: —my first postgraduate job. I then started just as a matter of routine—it was the easiest way to get to New York, and I needed to go there to make exhibition, so I just went. I guess I flew eastern [ph]—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But it small—

SUE M. THURMAN: —in 1952 and spent then the next two or three decades traveling a great deal.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But a small in your childhood that—no?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, that's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there a break for after that class of elementary? What was Mrs.—did become of Mrs. Abernathy, do you know?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I used to see her sitting on the porch at Mrs. McKnight's [ph]. Mrs. McKnight ran what would now be called bed-and-breakfast or a lodging, but it was called a boarding house. Mrs. Abernathy had a daughter in Louisville and various people, various places, but she didn't keep a house there in Hopkinsville. She lived in high style at Mrs. McKnight's beautiful, old home, and was joined at dinner by a group of people who came for the most magnificent meals you can imagine. [00:36:02] It was like Old Stone Inn or any of these places that have everything good that the community takes pride in. There were always two or three people who managed and hosts—and were hosts for large houses with people boarding in them. And I used to see her sitting in the rocker after she was older and I was older, and we would wave and talk from the porch, and so on. I'm sure she stayed there the rest of her life.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. So, she was—of elementary school—a very happy, she was the high point or her—for some way—

SUE M. THURMAN: Hard to say—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because you liked everything.

SUE M. THURMAN: —it will either be Mrs. Paine or Ms. Juanita, or Mrs. Abernathy. But I'm just saying in terms of

my career. I probably would have run into it one way or the other anyway.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, I think—

SUE M. THURMAN: Because always—well even before Mrs. Paine, but particularly in the fourth grade before I had to stay home one semester for having scarlet fever, which I didn't like to miss that much, but Mrs. Paine started us on workbooks that was a fairly routine part of education in those days.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Workbook of what?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, a topic. You would choose a topic, and you would find out everything you could about it then you would write it in your best handwriting, and then you would make a cover, which was the part I loved. Finally, I remember a teapot cover. This must have been a book about China. But we were always one booklet followed another. It was like in college, you always had one research paper after another. And they would always be hung out to dry, you know, there would be at the back of the room, a clothesline, and all the booklets would be there. [00:37:59] And I would be proud of mine, but there would be others that were very good, too, but I began to be told that I had—you know, I was good at art from the booklet covers [laughs]—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now what about—

SUE M. THURMAN: —and posters at church. You see, the institutions in those towns in those times were schools and churches. Then the larger town Nashville would have some extra things like museums and music, and so on, and universities.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, now, was the—so the church was a regular and prominent then?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Almost equally prominent to—as the school?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, First Methodist Church, that very beautiful building, which I cannot remember, but I know that it was an exceptional gift, a private gift and I had—can't put it together in my head, but it is a beautiful church. I still think that to this day.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did going to church—

SUE M. THURMAN: Many of the people were the same. Miss Lottie [ph] was at church [laughs] as well as running the grade school.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did church—what role did it play for you as a small—as a young child, say, through elementary school?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I was very serious now that I think. I know that I was always taking on—when I was a little older—maybe it was like getting into high school—I was always the one—you know, people had their preferences, and we were always having these topical things to choose. And I liked to study what later I kept running into when I started tribal arts. I realized I had first known of the Bushongo or whatever from something I had ran in connection with the church. I don't even remember what that category was called.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well—

SUE M. THURMAN: Social betterment or something.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Missionary thing? Was that just something that—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I don't think it was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —was more—

SUE M. THURMAN: —it wasn't done from the standpoint of getting them to belong to our church. [00:40:02] That would have been missionary. I think it was done from a standpoint of people and how they live around the world. I wish I could remember the category because I was always doing it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the church service itself, was that a major—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it wasn't as—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —thing in the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Methodist, high Methodist is what it was, and it wasn't anything like as high as Episcopal, but it was a very beautiful service with a very good choir and lots of events. It was the center of our away-from-home activities. Lots of dinners, lots of picnics, and you traded with other people's churches. They came to your things, and you went to theirs. This little town probably had 10 sizeable churches with good staff and buildings, and so on. I know that's a big change from what we see today I think. I mean the buildings maybe there and a lot of people still go to church, but somehow we, I suppose, will never be quite as fed through that channel. We're not as dependent on it to the exclusion of other things now that we have television and everything else.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, sure.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure. Did it—the questions of religion and all, intellectually were they of considerable interest to you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right. Oh, I took it all very seriously. In fact, I think that I probably—since I loved people and this was all about helping people as I saw it, I think I probably considered or got told by several people who cared about my future that this would be one thing to consider to working. But in those days, a woman didn't go into the ministry very often, but I was very active at church. [00:42:06]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Actually, were there many times or any times you can recall as a child when being a girl was a limitation, or on the other hand, being a girl was something better than being a boy?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were these things—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, there were certainly those, that one I just pointed out, you know ministers were men, not that I was that close to that, um—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But things back then weren't discussed particularly then, were they?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, no, no. When they came to be discussed, I know that we were all into it for some years before we identified it. But I would say that it was when I was at Cranbrook, which was early in the '70s—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure, much later.

SUE M. THURMAN: —that you got to subscribing to women's movement publications, and— well, publication doesn't exist until the movement has been there for some time or there might be those who put it the other way around. But it was definitely—over and over it was said to me, "How does it happen that you're in this job?" when I went to New Orleans in, um, '57—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Fifty-seven, wasn't it?

SUE M. THURMAN: —mm-hmm [affirmative]—to disentangle the New Orleans Art Museum, which is now quite a place, wonderfully, developed. But when I went there, I don't know how many people said to me, "What is it like to be a woman?" Some said, "What is it like to be young?" but people pictured men and older as the two words that connected with responsibility for the institution. [00:44:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And presumably, even when you were a child, this held in terms of even the small town, right?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, well, definitely—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Longevity in any job—

SUE M. THURMAN: —one would say. You know, I was my mother's right-hand helper on all of her projects.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then you also say your brother—

SUE M. THURMAN: And she—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you're not so quite certain what—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, you know my father's helper quite often. He would go for the week sometimes with him. That's one of the things that I do remember he did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But was there any—much of a break when you left from grade school into the next stage?

Was there a—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well no, because those teachers [laughs] were moving on too—

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were moving on? So, it was almost seamless then—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —right through high school—

SUE M. THURMAN: And kind of—would you say? We were very connected. The high school was a bigger version of what I've already said. There were several of us who, all the way through, were friendly competitors, and did we compete. We certainly did compete and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What form did that take sometimes?

SUE M. THURMAN: When we—well, we all liked each other very much. But we weren't about to make a mistake if we could help it because this would let so-and-so win whatever. And we were prize-oriented. I don't know whether that was good or bad. But I know the *Hamlet* very well. When we got to the end of the course, meaning graduation, those of us, three or four of us who had been competing with each other from the beginning, all got big chunks of it, or we all tied for everything, or something like that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, in your adolescent years in high school, were there certain areas becoming of greater interest to you by then?

SUE M. THURMAN: Studies you mean or activities?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, studies and activities.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, writing. I loved to write, and so I liked English teachers and that whole thing, reading.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You liked what? [00:46:00] The writing as a means of expression—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, just the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —or organizing thought? The whole thing.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. Because it was related to words. [Laughs].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Which you thought?

SUE M. THURMAN: Words are my fuel. In high school, I began to be a specialist in the arts, so was Anne Murchison, and so was someone whose name I can't remember, maybe it'll come to me, she's a very nice gal. She had come there from a different grade school, so I didn't know her as long. It made a difference how deep your roots were, you see. These things having to do with tradition and belonging, how could any of us—whatever happened to us later, how could we ever complain having been given such a sense of stability?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: You belong to the world—

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SUE M. THURMAN: —in my nook and cranny that I was known for in high school because it was activities you were known for. It wasn't your classwork. You're just supposed to do that, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: But I was the illustrator of the weekly newspaper, which means that I sat with a little stylist over one of those hot, little machines with a light in it and a blue stencil. Remember those things?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: And drew kicky little pictures of teenagers bebopping around and doing other silly things. When you made mistakes, you had to take that blue paint-on stuff and make a new surface and cut some more—I don't know how anyone ever drew anything with one of those knives. But I certainly stayed late in the afternoons. You did all of that after school. School time was for something serious and then after school, there was no problem of getting into trouble because almost everybody was still at school doing whatever his special

things were. And I made who knows how many posters? That was for everything in town.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the school often produced them?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, people would call there and say, "Can you all make some posters?" and I loved making posters. I feel a little bad about the fact that quite often—maybe not quite often, but several times, the family had been about to do something, and it was a question of priorities. Someone that we all thought was fine needed a poster. [Laughs.] I hate to tell you this. The table would be cleared, and I would make the poster and then if we still had time to do whatever we were all about to do together, we would do it. [00:02:05] Now, that was some kind of training.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure was, sure it was.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. It also meant you learned to work for Esther because you might do both if you—and then if you keep doing that year after year, you will build up quite an accelerated life. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You remember some of them? Were they very vivid and graphic?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes, *Ramona*. Oh, well they were quite often—the ones I did for schoolwork were quite often in connection with book reports because we weren't just expected to read the book and know about it. We were expected to visualize it. There's a lot of that going on then, when we don't even think they knew anything in those days. Educators think that visualization didn't begin at that point, but somehow, it was always being done. And I remember the Indian girl in the book *Ramona* quite well and lots of other posters. But, of course, this was the meeting ground with the church activity thing because for the church, you would hear that there are going to be 500 people, and they all need something as a favor at their plate, and this, and that, and the other. Well, you were kind of ready to work for a small little art firm by the time you got through [laughs] four years of high school filling in for everything anybody needs.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there continued formal instruction in art through high school?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, there was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What shape or form did that take?

SUE M. THURMAN: It was not as inspired as what we had had in grade school, but that's sort of par for the course. In other words, it's magic to work with children, younger in the arts, and you run into a more—you're not as sure of what works with that slightly older group, and they have to find out for themselves. [00:04:04] But we had an art teacher on the faculty in high school, but it was a kind of—everybody gets an hour and just—I think it was that I was already more into art than at the art class. It was not as far along as—there are several of us who were doing all this [laughs] production work and Murchison and I, and the other girl whose name escapes me. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You sort of self-taught and learned about poster paint and how the thing—different things can be handled?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, sure. Oh, yeah, yeah. And we had Cornett's, and it happens my mother later when I had gone away to college, and she didn't have as much to do at home, and she's feeling lonely. Several of us talked her into going up to Cornett's, and she became a part of a staff at the bookstore, which carried the art supplies. So, there is another kind of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What? What was Cornett's, was that?

SUE M. THURMAN: —service—Cornett's was a wonderful store that carried a very—books and gifts, and art supplies, and wallpaper in those days. Mr. Cornett often commission me to do—I think I used to make like five dollars an item for signs that went with crystal, and I was [laughs] into commercial art, but I never really called it that. No one ever told you how it should look. He just said, "Will you make me a sign? Will you make me some favors?" Or, "there's going to be a wedding, and could you do this for them?"

ROBERT F. BROWN: They had seen your work too, hadn't they? Perhaps—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, yes, but I mean think of it. With the whole town for a sort of workshop, it was nice.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you work on things, which you might now call abstract to some degree? [00:06:04] Or were they mostly—

SUE M. THURMAN: No, I think I really—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —work for—

SUE M. THURMAN: —ran into things like that when I got to the University of Kentucky.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see. But you—not in your teenage phase as far as you—

SUE M. THURMAN: No, an important spot for me, and I don't even know whether it's on my resume because you start trying to make fewer pages after a while, things fall off. But Bethel Women's College, that wonderful building that I told you—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I wanted to ask about that.

SUE M. THURMAN: All right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was still going then, wasn't it?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, and that was an outstanding—it had been a very good school, and I didn't know, you know, these days everybody knows where they're going to go to college a long time ahead or we feel that they do. But we—our little group were in high school during the war, World War II. And I don't think many of us knew whether we were going to college or where we were going to college until we were pretty nearly ready to go there. Life was not that predictable. The war affected everything and so on. Then we heard that Bethel Women's College, which had suspended its educational services for various reasons like money and so on—but it had for a time served as a residential place. It was very much needed because Camp Campbell, which has become Fort Campbell, was just outside of Hopkinsville and this gave a very nice place for people to live. It was almost like a large, old hotel. So, then came the announcement that it's going to be re-opened as a college in that fall in which I would just have gotten out of high school. Some of my friends went on as they had planned to, to the University of Kentucky. [00:08:00] But when we heard that Bethel was going to reopen, and I was offered a scholarship there, and it was just so many of us decided to go there. The boys weren't back yet anyway [laughs], and so I did my freshman year at Bethel Women's College for which I just went down High Street and went through the barbwire fence, and the hedge, and went in the backdoor of Bethel.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And it was essentially one big Victorian building?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, it was a magnificent central building with ionic columns—it wasn't Victorian. It was earlier—and a wing on both sides. It had been a place that hide the slaves as they came through to the North down in its lower reaches. It had an avenue of trees as distant, as long away as from Arlington Street to Berkley Street.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And so, it was really almost—

SUE M. THURMAN: It was a spectacular—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —quarter-mile long or something.

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, a beautiful, beautiful building with swings, that push-pull swings out on the lawn. You know the kind—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I see yes.

SUE M. THURMAN: —you sat and faced someone?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Platforms, sort of particularly.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Anyway—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You went there and did you—was that greatly different from high school?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, it was in a way and as unpredictably as anything in the world could have been. It was a fantastic year. And I—when I look on it, I some—I think that some of the things—you know, you're so concerned that everything gets planned down to a tight point. And here was the school that may or may not have been ideal as it reopened, but it happened to get some of those wonderful teachers again. [00:10:00] Annie Catherine Parrish had just come out of Radcliffe, and she landed down in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. She said that if you didn't read the *New York Times*, all seven days cover to cover that you were really not informed, and that if you didn't read a book—I've forgotten. I think a book a week of one sort and a book a week of another sort—and if you didn't write an essay—I mean she taught freshman English like I don't imagine it has ever been better taught. Creative writing, research, it was really something. Various ones of us agree that when we went on and did further study, we would hate not to have had that course. Now, I know we all feel that way about our freshman

English or we might, but I really wouldn't trade that for anything. There was also—you were asking about the art at that point, an art teacher from Mississippi who's very ladylike and—but a very good teacher, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. How would she teach?

SUE M. THURMAN: This was—we were always working, nearly always, with what I liked anyway, which was plants. She was filling everything in. She was having us look up Dürer and see the plants, and all of this, and not just think we're just sketching and nobody ever sketched before, so it was a mixture of history and studio. This campus was—Hopkinsville has a lot of plants and flowers as you can tell from all that I'm saying. And it had beautiful things like wisteria all over the building and irises, and every kind of bed of flowers that you can think of. [00:12:00] So, we went through the year learning to draw. I think—you know, if I have an art I can't claim to because most of my career or most of my time has been at a desk making, putting together other people's art, but drawing is my art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And how did she teach? Did she sort of rather gently hover around or come around occasionally?

SUE M. THURMAN: She just got you started and sent you out in the building or wherever you wanted to go. I'm not sure she did the same with every student. But what happened to me was I was just told, "We're in this category now, and which do you want to use, pastel or ink or what, and we're going to meet here again at four o'clock," you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, this was an intensive year and a very, very good one?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, if there had been nothing—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was—

SUE M. THURMAN: —but the freshman English course, it would have been intensive. But they're—I guess I had five courses. I think that's the first time people began to say to me, "You must spend some time resting." And it had never occurred to me before, [laughs] and of course, I didn't take the advice then, but that was some year. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there much social life at this time?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes. We were always having—see, those were the days of planned events. And this—even though you were a town girl, and you had a locker in the basement room, and you weren't really quite like the girls that lived in a dorm, though nobody was—and there really wasn't any intended—I don't mean to imply discrimination, but just that they were more fully at the college than you were.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. Yeah, they were college women and you were—

SUE M. THURMAN: You were just coming and going. But I got into the yearbook with all the rest of that going on and was editor of the yearbook. [00:14:05] That's because Annie Catherine Parish was the advisor of it. She told me if I was willing to do it, she would teach me how, and that it would mean that I was willing to take the bus to Nashville anytime it was necessary because the printer was in Nashville. So, she laid out this idea, this sort of prospect, which I couldn't possibly say no to. [They laugh.] I don't know what happened to that annual, but it won the national first prize, and we were all very thrilled. But then—that freshman English and learning to put a book together even if it's just a college annual, and that kind of art teacher who just wanted you to get with your art materials and meet with her later, it was such a liberal kind of traditional education.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the church then still somewhat of a religious or denominational school or—the college that is?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, it was run by the Southern Baptist. But we didn't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You did not have to—

SUE M. THURMAN: —affect us at all. No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —no, participate in any of that?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-mm [Negative.]. Powhatan [Wright] James was the president.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Powhatan James? Powhatan—

SUE M. THURMAN: He had been a Baptist minister, but he was actually, I think, not very interested in that part

of it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But he was interested in—

SUE M. THURMAN: He was very good and his wife—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that—good education—

SUE M. THURMAN: —was the daughter of a writer, and it was—we were just lucky. There just people came together there that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: That particular time?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because otherwise, the war—had the war affected you or impinged on your consciousness much?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, my brother was in the army. He didn't see any active battles, but this was, kind of, always in the offing and—[00:16:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Must create certain stresses—

SUE M. THURMAN: Stresses at home.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at home.

SUE M. THURMAN: Worry on the part of your parents every time there was something getting worse. I'm sure that it made those of us—by the time we got to Bethel, the boys were being drafted, our friends in our classes there. You see, they were going in and volunteering or being drafted. This couldn't have helped but emphasized all the ramifications of being female. In other words, we no longer sorted out and say, "The men do this; the women do that." I mean, the men are at war, and the women aren't. It was the way it was basically lined up. By the time I got to the University of Kentucky, there were people coming in on the G.I. Bill. So, I remember taking—I guess it was a trig class or some kind of math class actually, in one of those huge lecture halls, which hold 500 students. One friend of mine from Western Kentucky and I were the two women in that entire class. So, never did I see the 50-50 relationship. I saw the all-girls because they're gone, and now, a few girls compared with a great number of men that are there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But the war itself, in general, apart from your education when victory came and all, were these things that were—did you recall or was there any—much of made of it in your town?

SUE M. THURMAN: It was—as I look back, it was quieter than you would have thought. It's certainly quieter than we would be today about anything. There was no revving it up, [00:18:00] and people I know—I remember hearing so many people say, "Well, it is good, but we must remember that a lot of people have sad experiences, and so it's not a—it's not just all wonderful." There was more talk about no more war than there was about everything is great right this minute.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: I do remember when Japan surrendered. I was out doing my flowerbeds [laughs] in that same backyard where we used to put the quilt, and I was now older, and I was transplanting portulaca, the little rose moss?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did the impact—was there an impact on the town as you recall of Camp Campbell?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I'm sure to a businessman, it was—

SUE M. THURMAN: —in the manner of—yes. But my part of it was that every family who possibly could genuinely felt that their part of doing something to help was to make life better for those people who were stationed out at the camp. And that must have seen—if there were people from places with the—which had already gotten into doing this in order to get that out of it, opportunism and so on, we must have seemed naïve. But I think the community, as a whole, had nothing in mind but to make—to be nice, to form a hospitable circle around any of these people who wanted to be received. And so, this happened from church. I'm sure it happened

from other places, but the church is where the center of it. On Sunday, you left home knowing that you had made dinner for three more people or four more people, or whatever, and you went to church. [00:20:07] There would be all sorts of people you've never seen before, people in uniform, sometimes couples. The wife would be there, too, but whatever. Then the local people stood at the doors as church broke up, and instead of talking to each other as they always had before, they were saying, "My name is, and we would like so much to have you join us for dinner if you would like to come." It was literally hundreds of people who went from each church, strangers in town, home to dinner with the people who lived there. Well, that was a very broadening experience for us.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, it is because you had scarcely met people from other—

SUE M. THURMAN: From all the way—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —parts of the country at all.

SUE M. THURMAN: That's right, right. And here was this fellow, I remember, Cliff Edwards. He later became the superintendent of schools in North Carolina, and I haven't heard from him for years. But he was a particularly good substitute for my brother. That's what these people also were doing—they were filling the gaps for lonely parents who were worried, and they figured maybe somebody will have our son to dinner today and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

SUE M. THURMAN: So, if I really went through my memory, there may be as many as a dozen people I would know by name who, after we got to know them, of course, it was they who had a standing invitation rather than—that you were looking for someone else.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Of course, they were there and then they were gone too, weren't they?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, and that was always—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —weren't there for long all—

SUE M. THURMAN: —sad when they would leave. But I think the war or the proximity of Camp Campbell was a big factor in lots of things. It certainly has been a factor in the landscape. That was—when I did my painting of—it got so I painted in the summer at home. Somewhere along the line, I made paintings. [00:22:03]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Back when you were a still teenager?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I don't know, just whenever I got some oil painting, I think. We had wheat fields, which were—you know, it's beautiful the way the grain rolls with the wind?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: And there's flatland out where the camp is. Well, for several years before even started being changed into a fort or a camp, I had been old enough to somehow get a ride out there or something, and I would go out in the countryside and draw and then come back and paint. So, I had my paintings of the wheat fields, and so on—wheat and cattle, and corn. The Pennyrile is what that area is called.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Pennyrile?

SUE M. THURMAN: Pennyrile. It's also spelled Pennyroyal, and there's a big debate as to where the two words came from but—um, that area then got built up into a big camp. It was a shame in the way that such a beautiful, beautiful area was sacrificed to the camp because I think the camp might have somewhere else, but perhaps there were reasons it had to be there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But the camp didn't have the effect of producing a big honky-tonk area to speak of?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, right around it there was some of that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Something of that?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. I have the feeling that the town on the other side, which was over in the edge of Tennessee, all of this is just right on the border between Kentucky and Tennessee—the camp is half in one and half in the other. I think they went to Clarksville for their just sort of, you know, silliness. Although, they may also have gone there for these other purposes. But at that time, I had the feeling that we weren't getting too many of those things happening in our town. [00:24:00] Maybe I just didn't know about it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were—you must have had a fairly size—or did you have a fairly sizeable black community in Hopkinsville?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Their life was essentially apart, wasn't it, at that time?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And I'm—you know, I'm just going to say what it was called. You know what it was called. But it's called "nigger town," and in one lifetime, too, we've had things—think of all the steps things had gone through, and yet, I don't know that the basic feeling had all those steps in it. In other words, we had people who were very close to our family, Cora and her sisters who were people who—we didn't often have someone in to do the work, but when we did there were the ones. And then we were always taking things there, you know, a kind of friendship, and they tended to build their own houses. It was the sort of shantytown where they didn't even go to the building companies to get the materials. They made them from whatever they could find, and I, sort of, always knew that wasn't right. I mean, this was what was eating on me when I was into that finding out about other people and helping them, and so on, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But your church, as far as you know, wasn't actively helping those that—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it was having these courses and classes and things where we were doing our part, and I'm sure that they were—they thought they were doing something. But it was mighty hard, as we now see, for people to change in the direction that diminishes what they have and give it to somebody else. So, black people—and that expression as I say has adopted, [00:26:02] for me, it's not what we use. Black people have been a big part of my life. Those sisters that we knew. Dovey was another one. Cora, and Dovey and then I can't remember the third one, and a number of others around town. And many people along the way that I have known in school and professionally, but in close, personal ways. When we lived in New Orleans, which is where our son was born, we had one of the best experiences, human experiences, a person could ever hope for, and he did. Because Augustine who was in every best sense of the word a Southern mammy, and that word has gone out of style. But Augustine, I worked—this was decades before we have the Zoë Baird case. I was in charge of the museum. I had a very hard job. It had to be done right. Augustine knew that, and she knew that this baby here is as important as anybody's job. Together, Augustine and I took care of my job at the museum and the baby at home. I don't think she ever—she didn't live there. She came there every morning. I don't think she ever failed to come. I don't think she ever failed to have a wonderful, New Orleans dinner ready when we got home at night. I mean it was some more of that close home living. And then when the time came to come to Boston, which we did from New Orleans when our son was a year old, she said, "Well, I can't move there." [00:28:07] Her husband wouldn't let her move there. But she said, "He says I can come and stay a little while." Well, if it had only been one day, we would have been lucky because here we were shuffling up our nice, little nest and coming off to Boston in the middle of the winter, a new job and all of that. And this little fellow who was just pulling up to the table standing up and so tied to her that we couldn't think how he would react. She had never even been to the airport in New Orleans, much less on an airplane. We went there. We sat all night. They said, "There's a fog. The plane will go the next hour, next hour, next hour," all—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is when you were leaving New Orleans, yeah?

SUE M. THURMAN: The baby and I and Augustine were coming here. My husband was in Tulane, and was staying a few more weeks, and was packing, and all of that. So, her common-law husband and my husband, and Blair and I are at the airport, and never did she lose her dignity in all those hours. A person who's never been on a plane keeps hearing, "It's not safe to go," so she would just say, "Well, let's wait till it's safe," you know. After a while, we had used up all of the food that had—what—I had forgotten what you called it. Anyway, the bottles of milk and everything were—had been consumed, and all of the baby clothes had been consumed, and everything. So, we had to all go back home and come back to the airport again, and I thought, Well, if she's ever going to walk out on the plan, it's now. We went by, picked her up. I think this woman who would've come whatever had happened. [00:30:02] She was reliable. When we got on the plane, Augustine was twice as big as any seat on any airplane. There was a very gracious stewardess who explained to her that these arms come out, and if it would be okay, the plan is going to be—because Augustine can't fasten the belt around her you see, and we can't take off. Here's this whole plane full of people and the woman who's never been on one before but has the dignity, and she knows she didn't do anything wrong, and she's pleasant. So, she just helps to get the extra arm out, and finally, we take off for Boston with Augustine on two seats with two seatbelts. [They laugh.] She loved it, the little blue lights when we landed in Washington. By then it was snowing. She had never seen the snow. I mean if I thought this was an adventure for me, leaving New Orleans with this baby, headed for—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Think what it was.

SUE M. THURMAN: —the hinterlands but really New England? Yes. And when we finally got here, it was not even

the right day, and at that time, no stores were opening on Sunday. We wound up going to the Wursthaus in Harvard Square and getting some milk for the baby and potato salad. I mean this was it, so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So—

SUE M. THURMAN: —that was my—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you're—

SUE M. THURMAN: —arrival in—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the blacks and—

SUE M. THURMAN: —Boston.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the reliability of it—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, and like—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —intimate relation to you then.

SUE M. THURMAN: —family members yes, yes. And, uh, you know people now—I've known—I—one of the most interesting living experiences I've ever had was in a co-op situation here, which had a marvelous girl who was then in Harvard dental school, had been a—gone through Wellesley in three years. [00:32:08] She was from Jamaica, a beautiful girl who then went on and on, and she's now—I'm sorry, I can't say the word—but the kind of dentist who rebuilds the bones of the face. I see her quite regularly, and so I just—I don't know what it is about skin color. I don't understand it, you know, why it makes any difference. I just wish there were some way that people—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you say that even though you grew up in—

SUE M. THURMAN: Some people could catch up faster in terms of equity because not catching up fast enough makes all the fighting and back and forth, and that tends to have the effect of slowing down catching-up.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: We're continuing the interviews with Sue Thurman. This is September 17, 1997.

[END OF TRACK AAA_thurma93_7359_r.]

SUE M. THURMAN: Hello.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —continuing our interviews, Sue Thurman.

SUE M. THURMAN: And I'll say a word or two.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Good, and this is September 30, 1997. Bob Brown, the interviewer.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Our last interview was in 1993, I think, and we talked about your time during World War II, and your first college experience at a women's college. I thought maybe we could start today talking about you're going to the University of Kentucky. You were from—what—the other end of the state?

SUE M. THURMAN: I'm from the Pennyrile section where Bethel Women's College was one of the most marvelous of cultural institutions. It was shortly thereafter demolished because, as people said, it would cost a fortune to get it in good shape. [Laughs.] It was an absolutely magnificent building and should've been on the protected list forever. It had been a stop on the slave escape train. It was four pillars, three stories, everything handmade brick by slaves. It was down on an avenue of trees, which were superb, and it was the kind of place that at the end of the year—it was a girls' school. At the end of the year, we all brought daisies from all the farms around, and made a daisy chain, and danced our way in. I went from there where I stayed one year rather than take miscellaneous kinds of courses that wouldn't transfer. I had very good, wonderful training there in, I thought, in English and creative writing and things that counted forever. And then by the next year, the war was getting back in order, and people were coming back to college. [00:02:04] It was a coed situation again and several of us transferred on to the University of Kentucky in Lexington.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You wanted—you wanted to be in a coeducational school?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, and also, I guess, we probably didn't realize how wonderful the college we were in was, although we loved it. I don't suppose I'll ever have a better class anywhere than some of the classes I had there. However, the University of Kentucky was very good, too, and had a sizable art department for those days.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you went there—what year were you when you went there?

SUE M. THURMAN: I was a sophomore. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you know what you wanted to study?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it was interesting. You know, people have a lot to do with your life without even intending to. In Hopkinsville, there were not very many people who made the posters and did the decorations for the dances, and did all of these auxiliary art activities. There were three or four of us, and I became the one who was sort of the most active of all, and several people joined in showing me how to do things, and helping me do them. There were several art teachers who spend extra time with me, and I appreciated it so much, and I came to think of myself as in the arts forever, which is I'm not regretting it. I'm just saying that that would be a funny way these days to decide what do. Not one thought of, Could you make a living at it or any of those peripheral things. I did, in fact, love math and all those other things that might be considered smarter to emphasize, but I was labeled as the art person in Hopkinsville. And when I went to the University of Kentucky, I naturally put down art as my major. [00:04:10] And then I was in for a little bit of a shock—I could say little bit of a blow—because there were three very strong professors in the art department at Kentucky: One was Ray Barnhart who was from Black Mountain. One was Clifford—

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was in design or in graphic?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, design. One was Cliff Amyx who was a superb art critic and art historian, and also a painter. I took painting from him. One was—the head of the department was Ted Rannells who had been all over and was good at just about everything. These three fellows were in their prime and get—had considerable recognition all around. So, they were always getting in little art students like me, I'm sure. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well now, was Rannells trained mostly as an artist or as a historian?

SUE M. THURMAN: Rannells was a historian primarily, and he was married to an art historian, and his daughters later worked for me in museums, but anyway, it was all very familial. When I first got there, I thought my heart would break because we would be sent on assignments. This would be studio, of course, and I was not sophisticated enough to understand that this wasn't going to be eye for eye, you know, today is not going to be graded. I was not quite primed on how all that was going to be. I, who had been winning all those little tokens and prizes and things, had to go through a long period, which I'm sure they spotted me for someone who thinks she knows what to do. [00:06:00] I had to go through a long period of taking it down and starting it over. They weren't at all interested in realism. Well, they weren't against realism, but they just—they could see that I could make something look exactly like it was, and that wasn't, therefore, going to be any kind of education if I kept that up.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you just kept doing what you already did?

SUE M. THURMAN: Same thing, right. After a while, I realized that they were really just broadening my scope, and I wouldn't be hurt, and it didn't mean I couldn't go on doing realism forever if I wanted to, but now, I would do whatever they laid out. After that, I loved it. It was a magnificent place, but I have to tell you that I was, on one occasion by Cliff Amyx, told to take down the paper and throw it away. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, my. You mean with what you had put out—

SUE M. THURMAN: What I had started.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: I just knew that he couldn't mean that, but he did. He turned out to be very good friend. He recently died. Last month, he died, anyway.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, did they—did they teach by example or were they just, sort of, centered to drawing a setup or from a model or kind of what was—

SUE M. THURMAN: Various things. Barnhart—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Maybe you could go over it—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, Barnhart who was really the—I would say the most artistic of the three. I mean he was art to the bone. An interesting-appearing, little man with a very long face and scruffy hair, and I must say he did sort of look like a horse. That's what people said then and didn't mean any harm. But Barnhart worked at this. I'm sure that he spent most of his waking hours thinking how students could gain more knowledge of the world about them through their eyes. [00:08:13] That's what it was all about for him. So, he would arrange things that took a bit of doing. I mean you would go into his class, and you were to go to the bulletin board, which was made of cork because he explained that's the right kind of material, not scratchy fiber that won't close itself. Cork will close itself. So, you'll get all the reasons for everything and then you get tedious. Later in life, people think, "Why do you tell me all that? I don't want to know." But you go to the cork bulletin board where he has torn, not cut, a piece of note paper, torn it so precisely that it's just fuzzy on the edge but exact and then he has taken a pencil, which he has razor-bladed to a chisel position. He has hand-lettered with his soft pencil with the chisel pattern what you should do today. You know, several little things are on the piece of paper.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he very specific?

SUE M. THURMAN: Not terribly, but it was so fascinating that you didn't talk or mess around or whatever. You went to your little worktable, which he had designed also.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sort of like a drafting table?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, and you went there and got these things out. And no ifs, ands, or buts, he then explained a little bit about the reasons for it all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Can you give an example of some of the problems?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, one day, there would be a huge table laid out with every kind of dried trash, we might say. [00:10:03] I would not say that anymore, but up until those days, I thought it was dried trash. It was such things as dried orange peel, any kind of natural pod or a member of the vegetable kingdom, any kind of fabric, any kind of metal. I mean it was things—things like you have around you all the time, but you don't have them around you unless you pay attention to them. So, what it was all about, we finally discovered, was paying attention visually, not just visually, but tactilely. So, such things. We kept the trash table or the wealth of sensations table for a number of classes. We once—maybe the first time, we went up, and whatever the guideline was, maybe you're picking your 10 favorite things with your eyes, you're looking. Well, maybe the next time you're wearing a mask, and you're not seeing anything, and you're selecting tactilely your 10 favorite things, whatever. You then go back to your little station and do something like create a scale. The scale may be from the friendliest to the most threatening or maybe something objective from the hottest to the coldest—not that they're not the same temperature, they are—but they all have different characteristics, very different characteristics. [00:12:01] He put these experiences on us constantly for two years because we went from basic to intermediate, and if possible, if you were lucky, you got to go to advanced design with him. And by then, you were doing some very useful things, things I use all the time. People say, "But you're not in the arts anymore." Well, I'm never not in the arts. In restoring these buildings that I've been working on lately, I'm always using these things. I know that the color of this spot depends on the color of its surroundings, and so I don't have to put the paint on three times getting it to take the wall. He would have us line up bits of glass, sort of panes of glass that were all different colors. I don't know where they had been gotten, maybe from a window-making company. But we would start that all of these are two inches apart. Well, of course, you're looking through the whole batch of them. So, that's some very sophisticated ranging there of color, and all you have to do is to duplicate it [laughs] with your brush and pigment, right?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well and then after that, he sets them all twice as far apart, which changes the whole game. Again, you must do it—now, we're back to what I thought I was so good at, it's realism. It's exactness rather than just duplication. It was a wonderful, wonderful place to go to school.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You would translate that into paint, say?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, but by then Mr. Amyx did most of the work with paint and—but between the three of them—and there were others in the department, but it's just that I don't know how it could've happened that simultaneously those three superb teachers were there in that state university. [00:14:17] It was really a miracle. Because in those days, I don't know that we—I know we didn't think of all the schools in the country before we decided where I would go to college. I was going to go there to the state university, and I was pleased to do so. But they were—just happen to be excellent people in that unusual field that I somehow wound up in.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was, at that time, the arts or arts, say, at a state university probably not that very—not that extensive, generally speaking?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, there were certain state universities that had rather rich offerings. But I think that as an educational experience, a creative education, we couldn't have had a better one. I think there may well have been places that would have had larger art libraries, larger—um, and larger number of art history courses. There could have been quantity.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How was art history woven into these exercises that you're talking about?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it was a separate courses, actually. I mean it was also talked about together, but we took, as in those days, slide courses and then in the upper years, we had seminars, very good seminars as I remember, for which you did a lot of reading and you did a kind of verbal thesis every once in a while.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But did most students or all art majors do as you had, extensive laboratory or studio?

SUE M. THURMAN: Most did, and I think, actually, I took every course they had before it was over. And then some of us—because we did by then realize that we would need to get a job someday—were also taking on the side in the education college, their activity work, which didn't compare, and it didn't even—it was so undemanding that we were able to do it as a second project. [00:16:20] I guess most of us came out getting—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see—

SUE M. THURMAN: —that was so near the Depression that people would've advised us to get something.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You got a certificate in art education?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. But I—all the things I did afterwards, I think very few of them did I ever use the certificate for.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, so that was an insurance at that time?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was—at Kentucky, would you say the arts, were they looked on pretty favorably at the university?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was it largely women in that or not particularly?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, no, it really wasn't. As a matter of fact during our time there—um, and I say our, that's where I met Hal. He was also a student in the art department—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Harold Thurman?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, and he was from Louisville, and so. I mean there were a number of students from the cities as well from around the state. They began to build a new arts building while we were there. And new buildings weren't that commonplace in those days. But we did projects in connection with the building. I designed the—some part of it, and finished it up in terms of these things that I had learned from Barnhart, from Ray Barnhart.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In his case, it was—he really was challenging, wasn't he?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You had to—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, very.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —each time, each session was a—

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You were—you brought nothing in but yourself. What you did the last time is nice for you, but now, you're making another step.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And yet somehow, you accumulated, in fact, a greater and much greater skill and ability because you were with him—what—three years? [00:18:06]

SUE M. THURMAN: It was a vocabulary just as important in my life as speaking. I really feel that way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And it was—

SUE M. THURMAN: And I never thought that I was going to teach it, but every time I've ever taught, which hasn't been years on end, but I've taught a number of times in my life. In fact, right after the University of Kentucky, at Wilmington College, I taught studio and history, which is a pathetic thing for a student to do right out of school, you know, right out of a bachelor's. But that was such basic information and such a basic approach that I could do it to some success, and some of the students were getting it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you must have felt by the time you left the university, you had a real vocation, didn't you, for art?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I did. I mean I did feel that way. I'm sure that, well, when I got to—as I said, I then taught at Wilmington College, but just going through the catalogs and finding the ones that had no art department was how I chose that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, did you feel you wanted to go on and be an artist as you left the university someday or?

SUE M. THURMAN: I don't—I never really thought that way. I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you all really know what an artist was? Was this discussed? Was it?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. We knew. We met artists. We went to Cincinnati. The Cincinnati Art Museum was our main museum. The speed was rather quiet in those days in Louisville, but we knew artists around. I think it may have been something I just avoided thinking about because I'm not sure, I knew there were women artists, but I don't think I knew any of them. [00:20:00] I think the artists I had met were men. And already I had a sort of pattern, which has lasted to my—good or bad, I don't know—of sort of inventing things to do and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What is—

SUE M. THURMAN: —which would be combinations of concept deskwork, raising the money to do it and then do it—doing it. In the arts, there are lots of things of that sort. You won't get rich doing it, but you can have a very lively career that way. Most of the time, you'll be called director of some small museum, sort of on your own terms, you know, as to what it shall be. Well, it's like being a minister of a small church. [Laughs.] As long as you don't do anything terribly out of line, it's okay.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What—did you go immediately from university from your BA there, which—

SUE M. THURMAN: To Wilmington.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —where you've done—to Wilmington?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Well I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You've done—at the university, you've done very well, I guess. You've gotten high academic honors.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I did. I got—I was very surprised to get several of those things. But I, uh—towards the end of the year, I began to—I did go there also in the summers, I should say that because—for certain research projects that I wanted to do—contemporary architecture, one on film, a range, I suppose I was never trying to specialize. I was sort of acquiring whatever general understanding in the field I could. So, in two summers, I did some of those projects and then in the late spring of the year I was to graduate, [laughs] I got to realizing that, really, you must find a job because there was no talk of my going to graduate school particularly. [00:22:11] Those were graduate credits I was getting in the summer, but as a general thing, I was just going to get a job. I did go to the library, and looked at all the catalogs of other schools, and just simply pulled out the ones that had no art departments [laughs]. There were 12 of those that I could find, and I wrote a letter to them and said, in my way, you know, truthfully saying, "You don't have an art department, and I don't have any experience, and would you welcome my efforts?" Well, I finally heard from nearly all of them, but I went to the first one. The first one to answer was a Quaker school up in Ohio near Cincinnati where we've been going to the museum a lot. I went up for the weekend, and they hired me. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this was Wilmington College?

SUE M. THURMAN: Wilmington College. So then I realized, you know, I'm going to run an art department, and I'm also going to start it. They had had a wonderful elderly man Mr. Holly [ph] who had come there once a week as a sort of private art teacher so that people could take painting, but having any courses in the catalog, they didn't have any courses.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did the school strike you as pretty innovative or wanting to be if it hired you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it was very easy to impress me, [laughs] and actually, it had some very creative people, they were not, I believe, primarily in the arts. Their creativity was not—but they had done such things as build themselves a new dormitory on the weekends. [00:24:03] Now, of course, if you're—if you work the way I do, and you know you need a dorm, and here's the president and everybody else builds it on the weekend that gets my attention. It's not the kind of thing that should cause you to select your first job, but I think it had something to do with it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Wow. Everybody pitched in?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes. Oh, I had—I signed up too. We all worked on the dorm. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, thereby, you got—in fact, that's probably some practical—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, but those three fellows back there in Lexington had their eye on the situation, and they were nominating me for something after Wilmington.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, they thought you—

SUE M. THURMAN: I expected to go back to Wilmington and made arrangements to do so by—this was a case of they urged me, in fact, sort of, made me apply for the American Council of Learned Societies' grant in each field in those days, I don't know whether they still do it the same way. They would choose one national champion or whatever, select one person in each field. No further back than that was, I was the only woman in the group of 12 fields and did get the art award, which was extremely—it was a small amount of money, but it was a great honor. And to have this and their backing, you certainly wouldn't say, "I don't think I want it," so, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you had to realize that you perhaps shouldn't stay at Wilmington College?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, not that I shouldn't stay there, but they said, "If you'll get somebody, we'd like to have you come back," so I took it seriously [laughs] and invited someone I knew. [00:26:06] Hodge was his name. He had been at the University of Kentucky. Acquaintances were, at that time, in that circle. He liked it. Phil Hodge came with his wife and baby. They thought it was a wonderful spot for them to be for a year, and they explained that they understood that I would be back, and they would leave. In those days, you shook hands, and that was it. But as it turned out, I think they retired just last year.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs] Oh, that's [inaudible].

SUE M. THURMAN: I've never gotten back there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why had you—do you feel you accomplished in your—that one year, your one year in 1950, [19]51 or so at Wilmington College?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, um—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did you create? What did you—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I mimicked—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —start the library—

SUE M. THURMAN: —a great many things. I mimicked those little worktables that Barnhart had done. I tried to talk less and suggest more as had been the method of all of my people in Kentucky. I think we had—heavens, I hadn't even thought of it for years. We had exhibitions at all times out in the great hall next to the art department, which was two rooms. Now, the exhibitions, [laughs] you understand, were made the hard way. You borrowed someone's car, and this had to be local material or from the area because there's nothing in the budget for that. I guess they were my first exhibitions. So, it could be coverlets from a certain kind of a loom in a certain part of Ohio. It could be something you wanted people to see. [00:28:02] It did involve a lot of furnishings, antiques, and a great many fabrics. Decorative arts, I believe, was the main thrust of the exhibition program [laughs], but of course, we never knew when one exhibition went up what the next one would be. The exhibitions were done in your time off because you were teaching during the week. Actually, a building was built several years later with a real art department in it—Hodge got a lot done—and with a gallery and so on. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, a great deal was accomplished on—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a shoe string?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, well, I was allowed to learn a great deal too.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see. You mean you could make—you could try one thing?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Well, where could you—I mean, how could you go into a school that thinks it knows everything, and do those things?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: You couldn't. There would always be someone to stop you and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this was the method, you mean the teaching approach of your teachers at Kentucky to suggest, not to direct.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right. I had—I didn't know there was such a thing as collegiate arrogance until I went to New York [laughs], which is where I went on my—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, you then went to—

SUE M. THURMAN: ACLS funds.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to Columbia University to do graduate.

SUE M. THURMAN: We married that summer before we went, and after spending a summer on a farm near—in Wilmington taking care of the sheep and goats, and things, and teaching summer school.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Huh. And was your husband teaching as well?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. We then went—and mind you, neither of us had been before to New York. This was just before everybody started flying wherever they wanted to fly. And so, though we had traveled quite a bit around in the Midwest and South, we just had never gone all the way to New York. [00:30:10] So, if you can imagine, we put our wedding presents in the car and drove off to New York, almost unable to contain ourselves because we weren't just going there like people do who haven't been. We were going there to live. It was our next part of our life. Of course, I don't need to tell you [laughs] the shock effect, the whole thing. The horn and hard arts, the everything from famous art galleries that we—now we're standing in to all the things New York—that was a very good period for New York, and I kept going back there a lot while it was in good periods. I think this is—New York will always be a wonderful place, but I think it's a good deal harder now and tougher. My son lives there now, and I gather that it's a good deal grittier than it was then.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: But when I got to Columbia, there were people who said, "Oh, you're so lucky. You're so lucky because you've already worked." See, I had worked at Wilmington College.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, and you were—they had—

SUE M. THURMAN: They had come so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you were lucky because?

SUE M. THURMAN: —straight from every fancy school in the east undergraduate—they had finished the undergraduate program and had come, most of them, straight into graduate work, and they said they were terrified. I don't know why they would have been terrified. [00:32:01] I had to take them at their word, and they could see, I guess, that I wasn't terrified, although, I found it very different. You know I remember. The things I remember are not things that are very profound. They—I mean some things might be, but the things I noticed earliest when we were there—school started maybe a week after we got there. Coming home, finding my way on the bus to go down Amsterdam Avenue, I wondered what the little children were doing, who were crouched on the sidewalk out in front of a brownstone. And then I saw they were about to shoot these arrows they had dipped into kerosene and lighted into the building, [laughs] and the firetruck was about to come. I mean, it was life at a different level from what I had been [they laugh] shown to date. We moved three times that first semester until we finally reached our level. We still had our wedding presents, but we were having to push them under the furniture, and so on. We were getting to realize that maybe we didn't need them in New York.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] So your life was a bit different then—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, it was very different.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —day-to-day?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, did you go there knowing of some of the teachers there or some of the programs?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, and I chose the program. This was wonderful, and there weren't many things in those days where you could simply be trusted with some stipend, and say what you were going to do with it, and where you were going to do it. You could do it anywhere. I think, in all truth, we wanted to see New York and get acquainted with it. [00:34:02] If you're going to be in the arts, you're going to need to do that. So, it wasn't entirely pure that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your choice.

SUE M. THURMAN: —we went to New York. But then when you say New York, there, again, you have an enormous range to deal with. It did seem that, you know, as long as I had the special chance, I should get a degree from some very good place. Art history and archaeology at Columbia sounded fun.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did they have people then who would talk to you to see what you might want to work on?

SUE M. THURMAN: I know we had Mrs. Day who was the secretary in the department [laughs], and Mrs. Day rarely looked up. I don't think she was glad when new people came. It was—it was hard-to-get-welcomed-into department. After you had been there a while, and I think lots of things that way if you can survive for a while, you will be okay. Certainly, people like Paul Wingert were wonderful.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You—

SUE M. THURMAN: I went there partly, but I knew of him. I knew his books, and you see, I had decided to study tribal arts.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, you had even before you got there?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, in a vague way, tribal arts. I mean, whatever that going to mean. But then I took a course with Meyer Schapiro, and I thought, "I can't miss this." So, I was, again, into that thing of take everything they'll let you take, and then I realized that here it's not those parties to decorate for, it's the museums to go down and be—what I'm trying to say—trainee in—what's the word for what I mean? What a doctor is—intern.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Intern.

SUE M. THURMAN: Intern?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

SUE M. THURMAN: So, I interned before that was the word—I don't think they called it that—at the Museum of Natural History. [00:36:04] I went all one summer up to the—up under the roof in those nicks and nooks, and crannies where the light bulbs were bare, and they just about put your eyes out. They locked me in because that's a collection that hadn't been catalogued, and I had been vouched for by the professors as an honest person. So, Bella Weitzner was up there. Margaret Mead came and went. It was that group—now, of course, that's anthropology we're talking about, but that's where the tribal arts were.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

SUE M. THURMAN: So, then I would sit there with my tablet and my cards. Of course, you know, I still live with three-by-five cards. I would make descriptions. I would number the objects, and I was opening trunks that had been sent back from the Congo in times too far back to know some of the dates. They had not been opened before. They were dusty. It was an uncanny experience. If you had been inclined to be spooked out by things, you would've been. The idea was to gently open it, save everything, note everything, you know, and give it a temporary name if you can't tell what it is, and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were there many guidelines as to which tribal origins you were looking at that time?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, this room had been—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[cross talk]—

SUE M. THURMAN: —filled with things from—I think it was mostly the anthropologists who had—this was their digs. They had moved things together that they thought went together and that they thought came together. [00:38:02] So, I would be dealing—musical instruments—I remember lots of gourds and things, and really an awful lot of stained fabrics as if stained with someone's blood.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Well, in fact, you did a thesis on the transformation of wood-carving motif to textiles.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was—

SUE M. THURMAN: —it was interesting how much is in New York in the public buildings. Now, I know it's true here too. The library is fantastic, the public library. But they had an enormous arts division, and of courses, so did all the museums, and so did Columbia. But the place I could find the most about Congo weaving and tufted materials, which were any kind of embroidered where you add another piece of fiber to decorate the thing. The most of those materials I finally found, and they hadn't been checked out for years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You found them in the public library?

SUE M. THURMAN: In the public library, right. So, I sat next to my little, green lampshade in the same chair [laughs] day after day after day, and thought how funny it was to be in New York to be spending my New York time in such a conservative way. You know, that you're sitting in this little oak chair next to the green lamp weeks on end.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As opposed to what? Being—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, things that you would think would have to happen in New York couldn't happen anywhere else. After all, this was a book, another book. I mean books can move.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure. That's right.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. But they also have a room called—what is that—a family name. [00:40:01] It's one of the tobacco families.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Lorillard maybe?

SUE M. THURMAN: I don't think, it's the Lor—anyway, they have a room that's a cage. It's a gorgeous room—I don't know why that is. I'm sure there's some explanation for it—which is the whole history of tobacco. I have often wondered what has happened to that room now. [They laugh].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: The New York public may be getting a large contribution in order to agree to do away with this room. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. Were you doing this—

SUE M. THURMAN: I found that because I was from Kentucky, and it interested me, of course.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you were doing this under some—presumably some academic direction?

SUE M. THURMAN: Paul Wingert.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was he like?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, Paul was such a fastidious fellow. I never knew when I first met him how little I would see of him, not that he wasn't generous with his time, but he traveled. He traveled a great deal, and when he was—because he was writing books and collecting art, and he was traveling in places like the South Pacific, and he would come back with stories. I didn't know whether to believe or not, but I think they were true. He was a rather colorful person, enjoyed a good story and embellished many. But I think it's true that he often did things like hire a small plane to go wherever he had to go into the backend of nowhere to find some tribe or whatever, and then the pilot would tell him that the plane is going to go down or they're in danger. They start throwing everything overboard, you see, until they get down to his [laughs] favorite notebook, which has to do with the whole trip, you see. It's everything to date. So, I don't know. He always had stories like that, and naturally, he was anxious before he would leave knowing what life was like on the collector, scholar trail. [00:42:04] And then when he would get back, he would be writing. So, you were very fortunate, and it would usually turn out that he

would—after he finally did have time to go over everything that you had done, and you reminded him what it was all about, you know, and then he would take you to dinner. It would be like a wonderful kind of visit, and Hal would come and we would—and Margaret would be summoned. Margaret ran the Junior League New York office. His wife—

ROBERT F. BROWN: His wife.

SUE M. THURMAN: —did. And so, yes, they spent time with me of an entirely different type. And had I not had some—something that developed my independence, my ability not to panic if left alone—I don't think I would've ever gotten my degree from there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you had had that at Kentucky?

SUE M. THURMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I went back there a number of times because after—we could only stay two years. I mean, that was a fact. Hal had his Hite scholarship to go back to at Louisville. And for many reasons, we just couldn't stay in New York forever, you know? And the scholarship lasted only one year.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you were from about '51 through ['5]2 or ['5]3?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, early '50s. I found a job [laughs]—as if I needed a job with all the rest of that going on—I found a job Barnard School for Boys where I was the art teacher. I think I went there one day a week only, but it's the other end of the world. It's way up in the Bronx, and that's where the—who were those smart, little kids, the Quiz Kids, the—is that their name?

ROBERT F. BROWN: It could be. You mean?

SUE M. THURMAN: On the radio?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: Or the—yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Quiz Kids, yeah. [00:44:01]

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Well, several of those were in school there, and it really was a very brainy, little, prep school. I just pretended I wasn't tired or didn't have all of those things to do that I must do for Columbia, and went out there and toured all the classes in one day and taught every single one of them an art lesson.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What would you do, set up something [cross talk]—

SUE M. THURMAN: And it had to be very portable. I remember once I don't know what had gone wrong, but whatever it was, I had to do it instead of prepare for Barnard. So, I went into a grocery and got an armload of brown paper bags and stopped at the newsstand right before I got to Barnard, which is out at 244th Street, and went in with these two things knowing you can make something if you have all of that. Everybody at all ages made something with those brown bags and newspapers. The very youngest children made jointed animals and doll, as it were, by stuffing newspaper into the brown bag, and then joining like little wieners everything. So anyway, I'm sure they came out a little short as to whether they had the best and most planned art lesson. But [laughs] I later found that there were some other people there whose husbands were artists and that they had had a sequence—maybe that's why they accepted me—of people who were in town for art purposes instead of formal art teachers. [00:46:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, you—at Columbia, you presumably—aside from studying tribal art, you would have had to—as an MA candidate, you had to take a spectrum of courses.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I took a core kind of thing. That's—they were glad to do that in those days. I was studying a concept, which was art thought about by more than one person. Well, a tribal—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean this was—

SUE M. THURMAN: —practice.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —your general concept at college?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well no—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I mean—

SUE M. THURMAN: —while I was at Columbia.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Columbia?

SUE M. THURMAN: I mean tribal arts, that's what—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And they agreed with you this was a good thing?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, but they didn't—they wouldn't stop you, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: You might later not ever get a degree [laughs] but—you know? So—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were pretty well on your own in many different ways?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, oh, yes. But mostly, it was the library where they knew who you were and what you were doing. Mary Chamberlain ran a wonderful library there and then we all sat together in a little study room. I was going to say when I went back there, later—

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SUE M. THURMAN: —and if you wanted to at Columbia in those days and presumably now, you could make your own menu. It was a core curriculum sort of thing. Since I was studying tribal art, I said that I needed to know something about anthropology, which I was totally without any information about except in the most cursory fashion. So, I wanted to take some anthropology and particularly, to do a lot of using of the anthropology library. Because that's where—it's in those, those journals, those continuing record kinds of things that you find the overlap material. That's where it was back when people could've collected. See, I could've collected tribal art when we were in New York for almost nothing in the way of money because in those days, it was called something else. It was anthropology, and if you went over to Carl Beck's Gallery on Third Avenue, remember? If you went there, I believe it had anthropological objects or something like that on the windows.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Carl Beck?

SUE M. THURMAN: Carl Beck, Carl Bock [ph], was it? I don't know which—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, no.

SUE M. THURMAN: Anyway, I did spend some time there, but that plan, I wouldn't call a great success because you really can only root yourself in one library [laughs]. You're going to just scatter your time. I took some courses in psychology, which had to do with group efforts, not very deep in anything, but to take any such courses is an odd opportunity, you know? [00:02:09] But soon, I realized that I'm simply going to finish taking the courses that had to do with—and it was divided into Melanesia, everywhere, everywhere, all over the world. I will take the courses. I will take as much as I can take also from Schapiro who was wonderful in contemporary art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was a very—

SUE M. THURMAN: He very much appreciated tribal arts, so it couldn't be better and then when Wingert was away, they would tend to be one or the other would be around, so I would have a wise person [laughs] at all times.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Could you go to see Schapiro fairly easily?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, sometimes, I did. I knew he wasn't my advisor, but several times, he advised me on things because he knew Wingert was away.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he was rather giving person?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, a wonderful person. I loved him. Then, to spend as much time as I could as an intern, I went to the Brooklyn Museum. All of the museums that were strong in anthropology—and then to start writing my research, which was really a study. It surprised me that it hadn't been done a dozen times. Because it was a case of saying, "All right, this is woven, and when you weave by hand or by loom, you tend to make a pattern of some kind." All right, then I discovered that from these plain, relatively plain patterns—they were all the same fiber—this would then become the model. [00:04:01] I discovered that it was—and many others have discovered it I imagine—that it was little blowups from the pattern of the weaving, little ways that things meet each other on the woven surface, which are like flowers or something. They are taken out, and they are made into

embroideries, those patterns. So, you have tufted fibers, as they were called, which are like chenille. They're tied into the background in these angular ways, which come out of weaving. Nothing is other than angular. There is no curve or round thing because there couldn't be in weaving. Then, now I know what the symbols are. I got—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Though they could have been in chenille, of course, but there these people were locked into the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. We're not talking about anything big.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —memory.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. I mean we're talking about the unit itself. And then sort of feeling that I had a new language that I had found, I started looking at the wood carvings, and here it would be right in the middle of someone's stomach, you know, in some little, nude figure. There would be this very same lifted-out pattern, and it was all over, so it was fun. I enjoyed it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was going on [cross talk]—

SUE M. THURMAN: I should—I should have gotten that out and published it maybe because—maybe I should.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because you would speculate as to why this occurred, this transfer?

SUE M. THURMAN: I could say that the relationship existed. I couldn't say why. But I think that weaving is such a simple thing, and it happens because of holding itself together. That basket there is that way not because someone is bent on making it look that way. [00:06:01] They've put it so it'll stay together. So, I think it's about as objective a part of tribal art as you would ever look at. So then when I saw the same—if we stare at the basket a long time, we might—though in this busy day, we probably wouldn't try to make anything that picks up the basket pattern, but they did at that time. And after making it into the textile sort of transformation or maybe simultaneously with it, it also entered the wood carvings.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This kind of very precise observation was encouraged, it was by Wingert for example, he was a disciplined—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, anybody who was going to watch 10 people do their research is going to love [laughs] anything like that. Right? And I did hand work with—I did drawings and all of that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: Those are in the basement, I think. Maybe we'll find those when I get to the base—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But as a teacher, he was known for his precision, wasn't he in his own, precise field observation?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, very, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In fact, as he described things, he would sometimes run through five or six synonyms before he would get exactly the right word.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you worked two years or so in New York and yet in some sense had so little time for it? You were so busy with your studies.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was your husband studying while you were there as well?

SUE M. THURMAN: He was—he was working at North—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he doing—

SUE M. THURMAN: —American Cement Company because he was going to buy his purchasing agent. [00:08:01] Because he was going to do his graduate study, finish it back in Louisville at Hite Institute—

ROBERT F. BROWN: As an artist?

SUE M. THURMAN: —with Justus Bier, right. Well, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Justus Bier was—mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So then when we went back to Louisville for that was the point at which, I guess, my museum impulses really took off because it was all ripe to happen from what I had just been in. And then they said when Hal saw Justus Bier, I think Justus Bier said, "Oh, tell Sue the gallery we tried to start in the library has no director, and she could come and talk about it." So, that was the Junior Art Gallery,

ROBERT F. BROWN: Which—at the Louisville Public Library?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It had been run in a way of bringing in nice traveling shows and things. But Louisville public schools didn't really—I don't mean that nobody responded to that. I just mean it didn't mean that much. You know, it was a bit predigested. It was kind of there, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: So, since it hadn't drawn much of an audience, and it was run by someone who had come from New York—I mean, as a matter of fact, from the New York Public Library, I think, she had come—that didn't seem to be the thing to try again, so, um—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You want to think of something that would captivate and draw in—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right and then I guess—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —see what was—

SUE M. THURMAN: —always—I don't know how it happened, but I was always of the opinion that you should isolate what something should be. [00:10:02] I mean, if necessary, you should invent something and not just if necessary, if possible. [Laughs.] So, it seemed to me that if we're going to have something said, it was—[phone rings] excuse me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

[Audio Break.]

SUE M. THURMAN: The Junior Art Gallery seemed to have just been an empty slate [laughs] on which I was invited to write. The people there were really so easy to work with and lovely, and it all seemed like heaven after the vicissitudes of New York, although I love New York.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were, in some way, sorry to leave but—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, anyone would be sorry to leave New York, but finding yourself in the top of the Louisville Library, a very classic, self-assured building to which you—it seems I'm always at the other end of three flights of stairs, always—that's the story of my life. Marble stairs led up to an area, which had been used for large frames and broken pedestals, you know, that kind of place, and the skylights were up there. Well, they had cleaned it up, painted the skylights unfortunately, hung electric lights, and they had what you would call a picture gallery, which wasn't exactly what I thought we needed. But we got some stands made, which I always was meant [laughs] to later—I'm thinking of ways I should gather up my previous efforts and copyright them—this was a kind of triangular case that you could put works in easily. I wasn't concerned about anything being stolen out of this kind of thing. Anyway, this was a very personal museum—[00:12:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: In the sense of what?

SUE M. THURMAN: People came there with a mission. I mean, they really did. Either schoolteachers bringing their classes of all ages, all the way into the university all the way down to kindergarten. People from the school for the blind, whatever groups of people wanted education. As they would hear about it, they would start making appointments now—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And before you got there, it had been just sort of?

SUE M. THURMAN: It had been—some of that had been happening, but they, I don't think, had ever a pattern of we come to every show kind of thing, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. It didn't develop for a while.

SUE M. THURMAN: And a lot of that may have been in my imagination, but I think some it wasn't because—so, I started saying—trying to define what you see here. You would see originals worth looking at, I mean, this would be real art. It wouldn't be something else, and it will be drawn together by some common factor. And with children, that's often—or people who are learning, it's very convenient because then they would refer to it by topic. They wouldn't usually be by what artist made it. It would be either by the medium or by the subject matter

of the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: There's some sort of theme?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You always—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, themed shows. And then the trouble that it gets you in is that you're going to need to put those together. [Laughs.] You can't order them, or if you do order them, you'll get only what nobody minded lending. It will be a sort of leftovers show, and so you will soon be not worth visiting. Well, it went great guns. [00:14:00] We had about four exhibitions a year. I had to have that many. Most people didn't realize two would have been enough. We could have kept two shows busy, you know, six months each, but they had this feeling we want to keep going, and so. I really should have pressed for the two a year, but I wasn't old enough at that time [laughs] to realize that I could do that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It became rather frantic and?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, rather frantic because where was I to get these things? Mostly by going back to New York. So, repeatedly, or at least twice a year, I would go to New York. I always stayed at the Barbizon. I feel as if that's my long-ago home because it was near everything and a safe place, and not too expensive. And I would borrow for two or three shows at a time. How would you know what to borrow? Well, you would be in trouble with that question if you never had time before you went on the trip to look things up, which would usually be the case. In any way, the library there wasn't that rich and even out at the Hite Institute, they've—no library would have everything you need to dig from it for exhibition sources. That's a very time-consuming thing to do. So, I had to find some other way to do it. I would do enough research that I had some questions to ask that showed that I had gone to some trouble. People don't like to help someone who just says, "Help me, please." So, you would go to New York with your cards, and you would set up your phone call. In those days, you could often speak with the main person. [00:16:02] No voicemail, and you would ask according to that thing you looked up, and you would hear, "Absolutely not." But because you had asked that and you had learned, "Didn't you know we sold that to so-and-so?" whatever, you would get told, "What I could do is this." And amazingly enough, many of the objects I have borrowed, which were worthwhile objects, insured at quite a price, and cared for properly were first consented to on a payphone in New York. After which, we would set up an appointment, and I would go over, and the works that would be gotten out, and I might choose as if I were a buyer. It was a gentle day, and I could choose which of these I knew. I don't say I take them all, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: I would choose two out of three or something like that. Well, of course, you start at the hard places because after you know what's setting up the show, you may not even need these other things. So, it's a kind of inverse buying. You're not buying at all. You're borrowing. After you have learned, "You may have this and this," you will, of course, mention that "So far, the show has in it this and this," and that will help you get the next things. And so, the business of assembling exhibitions almost without funds is something I developed a way with.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And these are dealers you were talking about?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, dealers and sometimes, the dealer will call—and this is a real honor—one of their best collectors and say, "Will you let? [00:18:06] Would you think of letting?" You know, it was wonderful what people would do. We had some really good exhibitions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who were some of the dealers? Can you think that—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, Leo Castelli would always do whatever was needed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this would be contemporary work?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you have in mind showing quite a lot of contemporary work? Was that—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, no, not particularly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No?

SUE M. THURMAN: No. But I mean I just cite him as the level of gallery. But sometimes, I throw away—you wouldn't want me to do that would you—batches of things like cards, which were nothing but cards of where I

would go in New York.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you went to many of the prominent dealers? They were generous.

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes. And sometimes—I remember going once to the Met—oh, what was his name—Priest in the Oriental, who ran the Oriental department. What was his first name?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Alan?

SUE M. THURMAN: J. Alan Priest, I think so. His glasses for years had had a safety pin on one side. [They laugh.] I saw him maybe three years apart, and they were still that way. I was wanting to borrow some beautiful Japanese robes, which he had more than he could need. After a due session in which we admired them, it was love—it's love that most curators are motivated by for their works. And if they can believe that you're going to hurt them and that, in fact, you have an interesting idea for using them, and that you're going to take a picture and send it, and all those other little things that show—you try to be polite—you have, at least, half a chance of a getting it. So that when the time came there—you always have a key person in an institution. Louise Condit was my key person at the Met through many years, and I saw Louise again about a year ago, and she and her husband are both quite elderly, but we all recognized each other, and I was somewhat elderly myself I guess. But Louise would be very open and forthright—

ROBERT F. BROWN: She was—what is her position there?

SUE M. THURMAN: She was the head of the children's wing, and so because we both ran a children's thing, I got so I saw her everywhere I went to meetings, which I never missed one of. She, therefore, kind of became a special New York helper. Now, I think it was Louise who said—I believe I had to go that route to get to see Alan Priest. But, of course, he's not going to tell Louise that he can't see me, you know, because they've been working together for years. So, it's like anything else, it's how does it fit together, and what will make it happen?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you feel that you were in on a—if not the ground floor, fairly close to him, and there weren't that many people doing what you were trying to do there.

SUE M. THURMAN: Actually, I didn't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or am I wrong?

SUE M. THURMAN: —I didn't know it, but I think that's true.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As you look back.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. I think there were important, big shows, we know that. I wasn't doing a show. Well, for example, at the Cincinnati Art Museum, to which we went so often there, there would be a magnificent, permanent installation of musical instruments, permanent. People were in a time after the war, of putting in beautiful, permanent installations and of creating a traveling or a—I think they were often called traveling galleries. [00:22:02] But as to making shows, it's very—I don't want to say a wasteful process because I think it wasn't wasteful of me or the people who looked at it. But to make an exhibition for one place only is a highly—well, it's just a very special thing. I didn't want to ask for, "May I have this and send it 10 places?" That's why we were getting very good material, but it went all the way from—for example in a show called *Birds*, which is just as simple a show as you can have, but we would describe it as being the image of birds throughout art history, which nothing new about that. But it's more likely to be a book than an exhibition. We got enough good cases for that show that we could put gorgeous, little, wonderful Egyptian birds, which had to have—

ROBERT F. BROWN: A magnifying—

SUE M. THURMAN: —a magnifying glass, and the children loved it, you know? And then, of course, we had from Cooper Union, one of those gorgeous cages to show what birds lived in in those days. I mean, it was—people were coming who were not in school at all. It was very interesting—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And much older than school children?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yeah, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you know in the end what the teachers told me over and over—and I believe it, too, without their saying it—that the classes, which came constantly, never missed a show and listened to whatever interpretation, which was never the same twice—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Unfortunately—yes?

ROBERT F. BROWN: —interpreter?

SUE M. THURMAN: See, that was the problem. I either needed an interpreter, or I needed a person to go get the shows. [00:24:02] It was very hard-pressed this way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you had to do both?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, that—I did do both. Nobody made me do it. Anyway, without the interpretation, people come in, walk around, leave. It was the interpretation that caused them to realize what they were looking at. And I did a lot of questions to get answers from people. If I didn't, like Wingert, if I didn't get the noun and I was looking for, I kept after the noun I was looking for. So, it turned out to be a verbal training. More teachers have told me that people who had never made a coherent statement would sometimes going home from there, having contrasted this, you know really pulled words out of themselves, and they would be so pleased that they could talk better, as they called it. And I loved it. Of course, I do, myself spend a lot of pleasure on articulation. So, I'd think that these are very close together, vision and words.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yes. And many of these are people who, of course, where they were children had no conception of art history.

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, of course.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And yet, they could express their—

SUE M. THURMAN: And then we did the—we're just playing fun, but they fit in. Like we had a black magic show. Well, by the name, that's a little bit corny, black magic. It could have been just magic, but it was a Halloween show. It had all kinds of things that you could classify that way. And then on Saturday morning, we would—all week we always say that—see, nothing was ever stopped. All week, we'd be saying, "Come back Saturday," for those who are really keen about it all, and there was a little workshop and everything.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, really? The kind of a place—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —where kids could—

SUE M. THURMAN: And we had—I had for a long time a collection of things they did then that I could tell each show—which show had made the work. [00:26:06] But I remember particularly the Saturday morning that a large circle of children were sitting on the floor, and I was sitting with them, and they had looked at a numbers of spherical shapes. This was in the magic show, and we had talked a little bit about gruesome things connected with Halloween. And I said that every—eyes would stay closed and then I would send something around the circle. I sent nothing any more elegant than a cabbage, an uncooked—a raw cabbage, a green cabbage. You have never heard such shouting, shrieking, carrying on this cold cabbage, after all of this talk about stuff. Well, that's—I don't claim that that's education, but I claim that it's kind of responsiveness and alerting people. It's a little bit of that thing of is the orange peel warmer than the whatever, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: And finally, I had said, "The first person to realize what it is—it's nothing that will hurt you or nothing that could hurt itself. The first person who knows what it is can just shout it out." Finally, somebody shouted, "It's just a cabbage." [They laugh.] So, I mean it was a funny place. It wasn't in any way stiff or formal.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you were given a good deal of leeway.

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, all the leeway.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, your teaching was very much a growing experience for you? [00:28:01]

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I have taught several times in my life in little spurts, like at Wilmington and then when we were selling our farm, which was after the Junior Art Gallery, and we lived over in the hills of Indiana. I taught the fifth grade because their teacher was sick. Actually, you can improvise. If you understand how to learn something, you can teach something.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You had that from early days. It was something you expressed today the way you—this was revived at the University of Kentucky. They were teaching method—

SUE M. THURMAN: Sure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You also dealt—work with, I guess, the local museum people at the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at the J.B. Speed Museum in Louisville.

SUE M. THURMAN: But not as much as we would have liked to because they just were very separate in those days. They were—the people from the University of Louisville, we worked with, they all came out, and from the art center, and so on. But the Speed, itself, was at that time very quiet. It has—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who was the director—

SUE M. THURMAN: —recently—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at that time was?

SUE M. THURMAN: Paul Harris.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Did you know—did you get to know him a bit or?

SUE M. THURMAN: A bit, but I was just not—he's fine. I mean we're just running a formal institution. They recently got a very large grant, a huge grant.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, you were there then until '57?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes and that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were living in Indiana in a farm nearby?

SUE M. THURMAN: And it went on—you know where to get things, I don't want to leave you with the idea that everything had to come from New York. One time, we had a show called the *Old-Time Toys*, which was of course for Christmas. We started in the early summer by writing—I went somewhere and got access to every newspaper smaller than—I was still using that technique from Wilmington—how do you find who doesn't have an art department, remember?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: So, I'm looking up little newspapers because they're going to have editors, and they're not going to throw things away. [00:30:06] They never get letters from people saying, "We're making an exhibition, will you help us?" But they're at where the old-time toys are, very likely. So, we just wrote to all of them and said, "If you have the room, will you publish this letter, and if you like the idea, will you say so?" Well, we had that entire space so full of incoming shoeboxes [laughs] and every other kind of box with a paper carefully written. You know it said in there, "Don't just send us something, please identify it, insure it, do all of these things." That show was really—because everybody made it—a knockout. We had every kind of old-time toy, mechanical things. We even had a dollhouse built of tiers at one end with superb furniture and dolls, and so on. There, again, I went back to Louise Condit at the Met and got *The Butcher Shop*, which has every little sausage and everything carved, a German butcher shop, which was put into a certain section of the show and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you—I suppose you had an audience larger than usual because you borrowed from—what—all these small towns in the region?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. We had to send out another letter that said "Stop." [They laugh.] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, that you were by that time beginning to think, you might want to go on in museum work?

SUE M. THURMAN: Sure. But I mean at that age, you don't even know where you're going to live. You're still feeling kind of like you're just starting, and Hal was finishing up his degree. [00:32:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: His degree was in what?

SUE M. THURMAN: In art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In art, in painting?

SUE M. THURMAN: Painting. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: At the Hite—

SUE M. THURMAN: At the Hite.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —school?

SUE M. THURMAN: —and with Ulfert Wilke and people like that. There was a good group of people there. I guess it was about that time—how did it happen—that we both stayed in Indiana. He—I believe, he was superintendent of art, supervisor of art or something in Corydon, Indiana, the next town.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was the name of that town?

SUE M. THURMAN: Corydon. And I was a fifth grade teacher temporarily, and the all—all this had settled down. It was going so well then, of course, we got a letter [laughs] from somebody. It was from George Rickey saying to me that he was in New Orleans living there and that the museum needs someone to come in and take it over and clean it up, and stop the war that's going on in the town, and so on. Well, of course, that museum has stopped its wars. It's quite a museum now.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And how did George Rickey know to get in touch with you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, he was head of the art department at Tulane.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That he had known you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Sophie Newcomb. Well, he had come to wind art show, which I guess, I didn't mention before. He came once one Saturday to do a program on his movable works along with kites and all the things that would go in a wind art show, so, you know, you just kept adding people as you added loans. So, after that, we sold our farm maybe for a dollar more than we had put into it. [Laughs.] We weren't so sharp when it came to property. We had a wonderful, wonderful 39-acre farm, which we and our friends had restored, complete with a pear orchard and everything up over the Ohio River. [00:34:10] And a letter beckoned and then we looked into it, and we went to New Orleans.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Continuing the interviews, this is December 3, 1997.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Resuming the interviews with, uh—we want to talk first about—we've talked about your time in Louisville, Kentucky, and we want to pick up now with you're going to New Orleans, which—the New Orleans Museum of Art. I'm not sure that was the name of it just then.

SUE M. THURMAN: It was called at that time, the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, named for the person who provided the amount of money that would now seem very small to start an art museum.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, why did you think of going there in '57? Of course, you were—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, you remember the pattern is somewhat of a jigsaw of our travels. We were back in Louisville, as you've said, and I was at the Junior Art Gallery for a number of years. [Phone rings.]

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, in '57 then.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And I went there as a result of a letter from George Rickey who, in each of his communities as a teacher and sculptor, has entered into institutional life in a very constructive way. And George had become involved at the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, which was in a state of some unrest and needed all kinds of things, but more than anything else, it needed someone who wasn't afraid to take the job. [Laughs.] It was a time when groups of people were divided with each other, and there were people quite upset over the way the museum was being handled, but they were only making it worse by getting the newspapers into the fray. [00:36:16] And it was really a rather distressing state of affairs.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you knew this? You went down—

SUE M. THURMAN: I knew it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and just took it over?

SUE M. THURMAN: I knew it to some extent. One never gets the whole story. But I received a letter from George saying, "Why don't you come down and visit us this weekend and meet with some of the people from the museum?" Now that I look back on it, they probably were quite leery themselves, because this is young woman from Louisville, and she's been dealing with activities, and children, and loans of works of art. And though she seems to do this in New York and other places, this probably isn't what they think they are at that point. I think that they had the center building in City Park, a very handsome, classic building. They had whatever people gave them, some of which was rather fun, and some of which wasn't. They had not reached the point of saying, "This is a museum." They were calling it that, but the meetings, I think, had been mostly about pleasing people or, you know, paying someone back for what they had done. It was a kind of service attitude they had. And the building was, at that time, valuable, but valuable mostly as a location for state events, city events. [00:38:07] In that city of formalities, you can imagine how many receiving lines line up in a year's time. So, I don't want to say that the museum was using its artworks as a backdrop, but I sometimes felt that way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, it had a distinctly social and an even political—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —role?

SUE M. THURMAN: And not of—not so friendly a social role. It was a very—it's one sector of the community but not a community-wide sort of thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that one sector sort of an elite—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, it was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —or *the* elite?

SUE M. THURMAN: I think it was. That would be my opinion. Now, they had certainly made some progress. And by the way, I was not the first director. The first director—I will just not name, I suppose, in this discussion—he was actually the subject of contention because he had been asked to leave and people were torn asunder. Some thought this was just right, others thought it was just wrong. And that his—it was everybody's feeling that it wasn't really functioning as a museum. I mean, that they were coming to about the time I got there. Something, which had precipitated a lot of strong feelings about the museum, was the acquisition of one part of the Kress collection, which you know was being given around the country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: About that time, right?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And this had caused great pleasure to some. It had caused stress to others. As we both know, you can't please everybody.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why were some stressed? It was—[00:40:01]

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, feeling that is this really, you know, do we really have here the work we think we have here? Everything had in it a sort of looking at the backside. You know, is—what's the real fact about it all? Well, it was a—I don't want to say that it was a suspicious environment, but it bordered on to that at first, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, what were—was it mostly men or women involved in power in these things or—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, let's see. There were two sets of people, and as you know, in an institution when there is a clear line of power, things go better [laughs] basically than when there is a struggle for power. They're—at one time, the museum had been in charge in the hands of, in the fiduciary realm [laughs] of the City Park trustees who were old and distinguished gentlemen. They were not doing things in a way that pleased the art community, and the socially adept, and so on. But suddenly, they all found themselves at the same table, because I believe it was the city, the mayor? I'm not sure—who had said, "There's much going on out there that the only way to take care of it is to put everyone together and let them figure out a way to run the museum." And there was an art association, which was made up mostly of artists. Now, you certainly know that in any situation where you suddenly said to an art association, "How shall we do this? Are we doing this right" or whatever, you would have many different responses. [00:42:03] So, it was the makings of a really, um—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, this was the way—what you found—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a rather loosely structured, different idea—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and more recently—

SUE M. THURMAN: And people—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —artists themselves have been brought on?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, and people asking—saying, "Wait until I tell you how it is," kind of.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. So, you went down—

SUE M. THURMAN: [Clears throat.] Excuse me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —after your weekend visit. You talked to these people?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. I went down, met them, thought they seemed like very nice human beings, and I met both groups, not even separated. I think that maybe it was one of the first times they had had dinner in each other's homes. There were lovely dinners held at which I was a guest, and people from both sides were present. So—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you want to go in museum work? I mean, had you made up your mind after your—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I think that I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: —intended to. But also, we were having great fun. We had a farm that we had taken over on the Ohio just—in—towards the end of the Louisville years. And I found it rather tempting and Hal did too, and he taught some classes at Newcomb over there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, so he was willing to come along as—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, it was—it was—who wouldn't be willing to go to New Orleans, you know? It was a wonderful city.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was it? But it had a reputation, perhaps it was more myth than reality, as an art center, an art city, lots of artists,

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, artists—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and—

SUE M. THURMAN: —more than art institutions, artists.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But were they, in fact, artists who were tuned into the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —art world, or was it rather in-grown and old-fashioned or—

SUE M. THURMAN: It—um, I would say there was, certainly, an element of what we think and what we know, and our way of doing things. [00:44:00] But on the other hand, the grand total, if you just look at it, was pretty interesting. I mean, the restoration of [William] Weeks Hall's home. I mean if every—just in all directions, people were beginning to realize, and they would take themselves to task for the fact that they had not done well by the city. They were beginning to realize that we have here some really magnificent things, you know, so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You're talking about restoration—

SUE M. THURMAN: And in general, in this whole realm that people who concern themselves with the culture of the city think of. And certainly, the French quarter was being restored. Money was coming into New Orleans, I gather, to a degree that it hadn't always. I mean, there had a kind of shabbiness, maybe at one time, and it was quite beautiful, and a wonderful place to live. You almost got accustomed to the pressure, the emotional struggle because it was a part of life there. It really wasn't that somebody is doing to bother the museum director. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see. You mean the—

SUE M. THURMAN: It's just that there's always a kind of tension, and nobody's holding back. People are saying what they think, and they're doing this sometimes 24 hours a day. I mean, it's just not your standard place to live.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And was this—

SUE M. THURMAN: It maybe now. Things must have—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you think part—

SUE M. THURMAN: —changed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But then do you think part of it is because these people had known each other forever, and they could take liberties with each other?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, some had and some hadn't. Because the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Some were new.

SUE M. THURMAN: —that association group was made up partly of local artists. [00:46:00] But think of the gang of artists and art teachers, and others of that sort who were at Sophie Newcomb and all of the other schools around there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. You—

SUE M. THURMAN: So, they were not all—yes, a number of them are from somewhere else like—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who were some of it? Can you recall or mention some of those artists associated with—both those associated with the institutions and those who were on their own?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I guess the people who were out at Newcomb, I of course remember, well, George was there as head of the department, I believe, at the time I went.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you had gotten to know or at least had a pleasant relation when he installed—sent something to Louisville, right? That same—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. I had met him there. Right. He had been—he had provided movable works, which were then quite not known so well around, and had come one Saturday to give it in the show we called *Wind Art*—

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ROBERT F. BROWN: —George Rickey then who you got to know a little bit in—even in Louisville.

SUE M. THURMAN: In Louisville through the children's gallery, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Wilke you had known him how? How have you gotten to know him maybe—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, he was out at—out at the art center in Louisville.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In Louisville?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And George, in those days was, at the university—in Indiana University, so it was a small world.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, in your years in New Orleans, 1957 to [19]61, did you—you saw of an awful lot of Rickey, yes?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, right. He was on the board already and had taken this job of helping find a director. But do you notice, I'm sure you do, the way one job hunted? I wasn't job hunting actually when I got this letter. But the way one got a job was literally through your connections, who you knew, what they knew you could do. There were probably some letters that came in just because the newspaper had made such a big thing of all the strife, so there must have been some people who said, "Well, if you—if you've dismissed one director, I want to apply." But there wasn't any big search. I asked about that, "Is there a major search?" and they said, "Well, that depends on—you know, we're going to talk about your visit, and after that, it will depend on the outcome of your visit, and how you feel about it." So—and that continued after New Orleans to my next job, that business that the person who is there and is responsible professionally has decided to ask you to apply.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this person was—

SUE M. THURMAN: In this case here,—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in this case was George Rickey.

SUE M. THURMAN: —it was George Rickey. When I left there and came, I had never thought of leaving there. [00:02:02] I mean, I don't mean that it thought I would stay forever, but I was not looking to leave. But I was called by Tom Messer who was here and was going to the Guggenheim and so Tom said, "Come up and visit." It was the same message.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you had known him or gotten to—

SUE M. THURMAN: I had known Tom by—I've forgotten how—borrowing works, I suppose.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that in the case of Rickey then, do you suppose his opinion carried weight? He was on the board—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it carried weight in that he would be analytically correct. He would bring out in any one's case—I don't think he had any particular, anything invested in me, but he knew, for one thing, that this wasn't a plushy job. He knew they needed an energetic person [laughs] who wasn't afraid of the fight that was going and who had been known to organize and move at the speed that things had happened in Louisville. I think it's the pattern of what you have already done, as they say about the horse race, that decides what you will do next.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your track record.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was George like, now, Georgie Rickey? Was he—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Can you describe him a bit as your first—as you first got to know him?

SUE M. THURMAN: A very polished, erudite sort of person, extremely articulate. I think if he was better at anything than at constructing moving sculpture, it may have been at assembling words. George could say whatever needed saying clearly, so that made him invaluable as a board member. [00:04:02] And it also spoke well for the art field and creative people because when that is the person at the table who can bring it all into balance, something surprising has happened.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he's an artist, right?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. We had—they had on that board, I guess, four or five lawyers, a judge, you know, very serious people. George didn't try to—he was never trying anything tricky. He was always sincere and very, very conscious of his duty. But I don't remember seeing or hearing him come out on the losing end of many discussions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, on the other hand, these lawyers and judges, uh, how did they function? How effective were they, and what effect did they have—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —on the institution?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yeah, it's the same the world over, I believe. Institutions cannot exist. They are not allowed to exist without dignity. I mean they get money without taxes. They have all sorts of special privileges, and people think—and I'm not expressing a negative opinion or a positive opinion—people think that the way to be sure it all works is to have a beautifully balanced, that means some are very kind—group on the board. Now, I think that same feeling should carry, should be taken just that seriously vis-a-vis the staff. [00:06:00] I wish it were true that the highest moment of the board in its progress-making would always transfer and be reflected in the operation of the organization. But there's a link missing if you don't have people of the quality to—on the one hand—understand what the plan is, and on the other hand, to—it's sort of a circular thing. Many of their ideas must have gone through the board level in order for the board to be thinking in a direction that will be useful. It can't be a separated, never-meet, [inaudible] thing. So, you need a staff that's just as talented, just as balanced, just as reliable, and that's hard to attain because the pay in those days was extremely low. There was a pattern of—and I think that's why the reaction had come when the first director was let go—but there was a pattern of if a few people get upset, you could always think about firing the director or some staff member. So, it was a kind of perilous road to be in and probably should have had—what do you call it—hazard pay? What do you call it?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Combat—

SUE M. THURMAN: Combat pay. Yeah. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, there had been a disconnection between the two then?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, there really wasn't a staff. I mean, I came and I started bringing staff, and I must say we didn't have any battles while I was there. [00:08:04] That was because we were too busy. I mean, if y'all get good and busy on what needs doing, some of those people who couldn't wait to get their hands on everything will soon depart and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, but did you also though stay in your—some of your staff members in pretty easy, in continual touch with the board? Was there—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —channeling up and down?

SUE M. THURMAN: I did primarily, yeah, because it was such a—I don't want to say stressful situation. But it was a situation that you could continue forever with difficulties if you're going to let everything anyone can think of to bring up be brought up, you know? So, I tried to edit out what the salient points were [laughs], and I think that's what they wanted. I think they were surprised when I said that I thought we were talking totally about people when we should be talking perhaps about inanimate things, like this magnificent building, which had been built and accepted by the city almost 50 years ago. They hadn't thought about that, that they had a 50th anniversary coming up in two years while I was likely there [laughs]. And I said that I thought it was unfortunate that the skylights were leaking and other such things are happening. So, we started getting stories in the *Times-Picayune* that the skylights are leaking instead of that people are unhappy with each other. And the fewer names anybody got called, the better even if you're having to say that your building needs care, which of course, is not a good image to get across. [00:10:01] But in a few months—I've always tried to remember how on earth it could have happened that I think it was only two fall—two autumns that I was there before the autumn that we were—we knew we were leaving. So, I know I'm looking—let's see now. We have the *Early Masters of Modern Art*. We had gotten to the point of doing that, and that was in '59. Now—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was a show you conceived over the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, this was a show that the Hunt Hendersons owned there—

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were the collectors—

SUE M. THURMAN: —there in the Garden District, and this—they had asked over and over to borrow these works, the museum had, and the Hendersons knew it wasn't ready. It didn't have what would be necessary. And so, I guess, my first great feeling of joy was when I visited Mrs. Henderson, and she said, "Yes, if you think that will be what the museum needs to prove that it's moved to a different level—"

ROBERT F. BROWN: In other words—

SUE M. THURMAN: "— you may borrow the collection—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a different level meaning that it was showing—

SUE M. THURMAN: Professionally. It's going to be a museum—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Professionally.

SUE M. THURMAN: —now. And I had to go through it, by then we will have a curator and we will have—but you see we're running backwards on everything. I mean if you're going to have this show, you should know it many years ahead of time. Because, it had been in their house. That means that the research, though they had lots of paperwork on it, but there was this—this just represents an amazing effort to put this show together and have it after restoring the building. You see, I used this as the way to be sure the building got restored.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, once she—you had her, Mrs. Henderson's permission—

SUE M. THURMAN: And then went to the city council and said—[00:12:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, Let's take care of the building.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. "We don't have enough in any of our small teapots of money in our little accounts to

do a decent job. Why don't we simply get the money wherever the city has some money in surplus and make this work?"

ROBERT F. BROWN: And did they follow to the council?

SUE M. THURMAN: They did. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then we had, you see, one member on that council, one member of our board. So this proves the wisdom of that day when they said, "If you people can't get along, you're just going to all be put together." So, he stood up with me and assured them that everything was getting lovely, and that we were—it was going to be wonderful. And, as a matter of fact, this catalog then got—and we had the full restoration. It was a beautiful museum—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And by then you were able—

SUE M. THURMAN: It had been enlarged.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were in to hire in a curator too?

SUE M. THURMAN: And I did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And who was that, do you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Brody [ph] was his name. And he is now in the west—southwest, I think Santa Fe. I'm not sure about Santa Fe but I think so. Now, so we had the show and the museum is all dressed and that included—oh, it wasn't just a gift from the city. Everything is always contingent on everything else. You know that. And so, I said that I felt sure of some people, but this was taking on too much fundraising, too much everything. But I felt sure several families would dedicate certain galleries if the city would do whatever it was, the whole outsider something, and it worked. But there was all of that making—getting acquainted with people. I didn't even know them. There, again, one member of our board felt that her mother and aunt would want to give a great deal in memory of their parents. [00:14:12] And so, people came forth who had not ever said anything before because it was all—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It didn't look like it was—

SUE M. THURMAN: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —had a program.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Now then this show right here that we—

ROBERT F. BROWN: *The Early Masters in Fine Art.*

SUE M. THURMAN: The Henderson collection. By the way, he was—they were in the sugar business, and they had a marvelous home—the Garden District.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's sort of a Greek revival area, isn't it?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. The spring that I was—let's see—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, this—

SUE M. THURMAN: —when would this had been. Well, this is that same show. See, what I'm doing now is showing you that that same show from the fall of '59—of course, it went back to their house afterwards.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The collection. They weren't ready to—

SUE M. THURMAN: No. Oh, heavens, oh.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or they—you didn't bring up?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, this was courtship—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, so, and not even heavy courtship. I mean, in fact, I think I said it would not, and I think we wrote into the minutes that it would not, in any way, imply what they were doing with it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was a victory enough to get them to lend it to the museum.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Right. But then, the last big hurrah of the New Orleans era, of the one I think of that way—was in the spring of '61, a year and a half later. And this cover was made to go on that jacket, of that catalog of which we're sure we made many [laughs] to begin with. We went to New York and arranged a recognition of the Delgado, now the New Orleans Museum of Art, in New York, an evening. [00:16:10]

ROBERT F. BROWN: A?

SUE M. THURMAN: An evening at Knoedler Gallery with this same collection and this same catalog.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, this early—

SUE M. THURMAN: The whole thing—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —modern art.

SUE M. THURMAN: —which would show the—you know, which would present the museum in a credible way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what about the Hendersons? Were they—they didn't—did they want such publicity by this time?

SUE M. THURMAN: That was fine.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was fine.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In fact, Mrs. Henderson came, hundreds of people came to the reception from New Orleans, hundreds came from—it was a marvelous event. It was a two-city party, and it isn't often that a collection of mostly impressionists is as unknown as this has been hiding away, you see?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: So the people in New York weren't just doing a favor to it—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, no, these were—

SUE M. THURMAN: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Knoedler's was a dealer.

SUE M. THURMAN: Of course, and they, too, knew that this, of course, we all laughed—you know, obviously, it gives them some future advantage to be called on for help or whatever. But that the collection—the—I don't know every detail about this—the collection at this moment, but I think that it—a number of things went to—where they should went to the Delgado, to the New Orleans Museum of Art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, with this—

SUE M. THURMAN: But look names here. I mean—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, [cross talk]—

SUE M. THURMAN: —the number of names who were on the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is the New York, the jacket—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, you've got—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you have been showing.

SUE M. THURMAN: You have both. You have the sponsors from New Orleans and then you have the benefactors, I think, from New York. I'm not sure. Let me look at this. Anyway, it was one of the things, yes, these are the Kocher, I see all these—[00:18:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Other galleries.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, Bill Lieberman, and so on, yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, Tom Messer. Well, I think it was about a month before Tom called about the Guggenheim—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: —that I saw him at this. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You know about coming up here?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Who was—of your list, New Orleans list, are there any of those people you could to talk about if you look at the names and then some—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —particularly active or [inaudible] so?

SUE M. THURMAN: —what wonderful people were there. My favorite one is no longer living, Muriel Bultman Francis. And Muriel Bultman—her maiden name was Bultman—lived in—well, she was from the family of the undertakers—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, yes, from which comes the artist—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Fritz.

SUE M. THURMAN: Fritz. They lived on a plantation home, an absolutely amazing house. I think the first time something happened to the museum—I don't know what it was. I've forgotten now, maybe some seagulls had gotten splotches on the front wall, or something that could've been an expensive thing to tend to because of the column height and everything. [Laughs.] Mr. Bultman—Freddie everyone called her father—and Freddie came out. He was a member of the association, by the way. Freddie said to me, "Now, any time you need anything that my men can do, just call me." Well, of course, I mean, I wasn't sure what his men do, you know? [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: At that point.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. He said, "I mean, we have ladders, we have trucks, anything you need." He said, "If you just want to get that problem off the wall, we'll be right out this afternoon." [00:20:00] He was a wonderful man.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Freddie Bultman, huh?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes and then the son was named Fred for him. The people of New Orleans, how could I ever—I mean, the thing that crushes me is that when you move, you leave the people. And you plan to go back, and I have been back but not enough.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you know the man who was, I guess, an architect and big in the restoration of the Garden District, Samuel Wilson. Was he—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, I do.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Was he involved with you at the museum?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, they were members. I'm just looking. They're just too many people to cite individuals here. But the thing is they were interesting in a way that people—well, I think people travel a great deal now. A lot of people travel a great deal. I think that—my feeling was that these families had many of them spent more time—well, they were in New Orleans but not much in the rest of this country, and that they had spent a great deal of time far abroad traveling by ship, and so on. And that they had collected art kind of as an obligation, some of them had. I mean that's what you do when you're traveling. So, some of it was quite good and quite valuable. Other sources we had, the museum's collection, when I got there, it certainly was spotty. But such an—such an event as the party in New York, of course, was meant to say, "We need collections. [00:22:03] We have some very good things. Such people as this are backing us, and we'd like you to remember us if you haven't already planned the dispersal of your collection." So, we had Degas, one of the dancers. That was because he was there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Had It been in a New Orleans family collection?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It tended to be that people had come there and brought art, rather famous artists, or that the people of New Orleans had gone traveling and had gotten what we might call art history [laughs] examples. Then there was that other thing where people were a little restless that well, "We're live artists today, and we're making art, so the museum should have a plan for buying or"—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was such a plan developed under you for—

SUE M. THURMAN: To the extent that you can.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —contemporary local artists?

SUE M. THURMAN: I mean, prizes awarded, purchase prizes, and so on. I never heard as much anywhere else about the annual competition, how to do the purchase prizes. More of that, maybe it was the time and the place, not just the place, but it seems to have faded a bit, faded quite a bit.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. In those days, there was great interest in competitiveness?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, and in getting into collections. Now, there's still—people like to be shown by good museums, and they certainly like their works to be bought. I don't know what I'm saying is different, but there was a earnestness about this. When I first sat down to dinner in all those first—that first round of entertaining, there was a lot of very serious investigation of what I thought was fair in the way of giving prizes to artists. [00:24:02] That was because they were very shy, gun-shy. It was this kind of thing, the lack of it that had made some of the trouble brew.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh. You mean artists had come to resent the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, some artists in the association were naturally—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —ignoring by the museum.

SUE M. THURMAN: —wanting certain things, yeah, feeling ignored.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did you suggest outside jurors and things like that?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, all sorts of things. [Laughs.] I can't—I mean the usual things, but also, kind of, not having to win always. It's more of an attitude of true interest that I think artists want than to beat the other guy out at whatever it is.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did the museum allocate funds, some funds for the purchase prizes from—

SUE M. THURMAN: It's of money—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: At that time was so limited. It looked as if it had more money than it did because the city had allocated that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Spruced up the building.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But—

SUE M. THURMAN: But when we put out one of these catalogs, I mean as I remember, we were always getting a contribution for this, and a contribution for the paper. I mean, it was the usual scrounging around. Now, but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The wealthy families weren't yet giving cash or pledging?

SUE M. THURMAN: Not huge amounts.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No?

SUE M. THURMAN: No. By the way now, we had that fall in which we were celebrating—fall is a very good time to celebrate. It gets the year started. That fall was celebrating the Henderson collection and the restoration of the building. By the next fall, there we were with our anniversary.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Ah, the 50th anniversary?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes. And I came up and spent most the time in the New York Public Library, of all places, to do the research. Nineteen ten, you know all those wonderful indexes of years where you can get everything that happened during a year? [00:26:08]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: And they have the whole set of them. So, I spent maybe a week and called out everything. Like, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston was built. That building that we look at was built in 1910. So, I was getting every fact that I could about 1910.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It somehow would relate to—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And then—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —American art, the museum—

SUE M. THURMAN: —we installed the show.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in New Orleans?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, we wanted to know what was art at the time that this art museum was given birth. So, we, you know naturally—and see, that would let you take in some Cubism. It—you know, 1910.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right, a marvelous—

SUE M. THURMAN: It's a very good—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —range.

SUE M. THURMAN: —time, right, right. So, again, it was just a big job.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, this, you did mostly on your own or you had a curator—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I had a curator—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —named Brody.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, but I was having—I traveled, did most of the traveling because there were many things to tend to by travel. His strengths were in—by then I think he had taken a new job, and we had the second curator. They were working more as assistant—well, assistant whatever—they were very good detail and they—uh, the jobs that we had their paid so little that one could not have gotten somebody you and I might think of as a curator.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who was your second curator then?

SUE M. THURMAN: And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You remember that name?

SUE M. THURMAN: Isn't that awful? It doesn't come to me right this second, but it would be in here, of course.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is then your 1910 celebration?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: So let me—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: The second curator was Ed Nielson.

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: And was he an art historian by training or?

SUE M. THURMAN: He was an art historian, yes. [00:28:01] He was from Wisconsin.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there any—this is a large city, so I suppose it didn't factor in as much, but was there any resentment of outsiders, non-Southerners being involved?

SUE M. THURMAN: I don't think so, no. When we first got there, I remember being asked several times, I think by reporters exclusively, "What's it like to be a woman and be a museum director?" [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Do you think that's a question that you might have been asked anywhere or particularly in the South at that time?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, at that time, I might have, but it's a slightly uninformed question because there were women, as you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: And I think it's, uh—it—I can understand it from a standpoint of I think it's really a pretty good question because things would happen that were really—uh. I mean, you have all this going that I've shown you, these catalogs, this business of raising money by doing this and then over here by doing this, and getting in staff as they flow through, and all that, getting these people to remain calm, who have gotten calm. [Laughs.] And then some lawyer calls and says, "You know, I'm handling the estate of Mrs. So-and-So. She passed away recently, and her will says that the director of the art museum, whoever that shall be, and it's you, shall come and go over all her possessions and choose what the museum would like, and write down facts in so far as they can be provided on everything else." [00:30:04] Clever people, huh?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. So, I did a few of those, and I tell you, I thought, I need to be twins if this is my job.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because you'd have a lifetime of—

SUE M. THURMAN: I remember some—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —bric-a-brac and some—

SUE M. THURMAN: —beautiful Chinese chairs in a Charles Avenue home, and a number of jade things. We had a wonderful jade collection, so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That made sense.

SUE M. THURMAN: —I'm sure that I took those. But the conscience of going through it and not taking—I mean it could take a year, but you have a week—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It would take—

SUE M. THURMAN: —at the most.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a while, and so—well, it would have taken a while to get—to check at a library and call experts?

SUE M. THURMAN: Of course and everything could be fake if it—even though it was sold as original and so on. I mean, and you just—that's when I felt somewhat humble about the job because to be director of that size museum, which is not going to have a developed staff, a fully developed staff, makes so many demands that no one could be ready to meet them all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right, yeah. Did your board recognize that and think in terms of it may be adding an administrator in—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I think in those days—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and other departments?

SUE M. THURMAN: —they—it was—they weren't sure that they—know it was like, "I'm not sure that this is working as well as it looks." They—things were happening in a better way than they had.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, they were simply relieved—

SUE M. THURMAN: So it was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that that was the case [laughs].

SUE M. THURMAN: I think so. And then also in the South, people tend to sort of praise themselves for what's going on, and so it was more—you have to appreciate the fact that they did seem to feel pleased, and they didn't seem to be exploring ways of improving the job. [00:32:11] [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, what do you think was your strong point, being able to juggle a number of things? You seem to have mastered the political and the social?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I think I must've had a tremendous amount of energy in those days. You remember

toward the end of this, I became a mother. Blair was born.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, in 1961?

SUE M. THURMAN: When this 1910 show was being researched, Blair was on the way and arrived in due time, so. And we were there, let's see, hmm, almost a year after his arrival. So that, you know, it was, one, a new dimension. We had Augustine, our wonderful, wonderful—well, I don't know. I'm so stuck with the idea that we're all hearing now, the au pair. I can't say what she really was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was she, a live-in?

SUE M. THURMAN: She didn't live-in. She came early every morning, and she was a wonderful black woman with all of the grace of the South, wonderful with children, excellent cook, and so on. She came here with us when we moved to Boston, stayed a year.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So—and your great energy you think is—what—a major contribution you made?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I think if I'm—this—I maybe shouldn't say this, but I think that I did have—I think I picked up on things that happened in situations in Louisville or wherever and carried them with me through the rest of my career. [00:34:10] I think that I was observant and tried not to make the same mistake twice. I often did repeat things that were successes but not sitting down and thinking about it that way. I didn't look in my diary or anything.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No, no, no.

SUE M. THURMAN: But I—I was so into it that I really, uh—I think the—maybe the main ingredient of doing anything as well as you can is to be so dedicated to it that you don't give it little pieces of yourself. I think that my husband at that time, Hal Thurman, was extremely dedicated to all of these projects and that just multiplied the effectiveness.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this the time—this, in the late '50s, early '60s, was it a time of the beginnings of any kind of racial strife or anything? Or was that just ordinary—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, I think it had to do with our finally deciding to accept this invitation to come here. It was hard to tear yourself way from that setup there, that town, that city.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Beguiling?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Very beguiling?

SUE M. THURMAN: —and Augustine [laughs] and all those things, we weren't sure she would come with us. But it's just about the same time that Blair was born, there were police hosing down—in other words to control crowd where something had erupted, the police would be spraying down black people or some group that didn't need spraying down. [00:36:12] We just said, you know, in our kind of young and hopeful way that, "We don't need this. This isn't the atmosphere we're looking for." I think there were some of that that everywhere, but that's what we said.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What about the other stereotype in New Orleans is—well, a couple, but one of them is like the frivolity and gaiety. Is that all—was that all sort of channeled in certain—like in Mardi Gras time and all?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, no. You just had to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this a quality of the people with—

SUE M. THURMAN: It's the quality of the people—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that you got into?

SUE M. THURMAN: And that's why I say when you ask me, I think I answered first that I had a lot of energy at that time, because nothing that was accomplished at the museum could've been accomplished in isolation by the person who went there at time to go to the office. That's true of any museum director, but really true there, the number of parties, the lateness of the hour at which they broke up. Many people there don't go to work. They have their income, and so you know, sometimes you would think, "I'm just going to have to choose between which to do." But then you would go to the next one because every time you go, you would meet

somebody and that person would make something happen. It's—the job of a museum director in that size institution is a mix of things, which as I said before—and I'm not talking about myself. [00:38:08] I'm talking about anyone who does it—it's nearly impossible. It—I'm glad that it has moved on in terms of career advancement to the point where people who do it are now really paid for their professional services.

ROBERT F. BROWN: At a reasonable rate?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. Hmm.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —interviews with Sue Thurman in her home in Brookline, Massachusetts, January 6, 1998. And, I think we're going to talk today pretty much about your time at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. You were in New Orleans where your son was born in early 1961, I think. And you came here with him and your husband Hal Thurman in late that year, late 1961. What was it that drew you to the Institute of Contemporary Art, the ICA, and away from New Orleans?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I think it was partly the—as much as we love New Orleans, there was a time we never would've thought of leaving there. But there had been some kind of touch-and-go illnesses in the family there, and that always sort of loosens you. [Laughs.] You're less afraid of new things after you survive something. And coupled with that was the fact that New Orleans, which had been for all visible purposes, a pretty decent place, [00:40:00] it had treated the races lovingly, though maybe not equally. But suddenly, we started having reactions and street corner groups were being sprayed down by hoses, and some things were happening, which as much as you wanted to look the other way, you really couldn't. So, we were beginning to say, "Do we want to bring up a child in this environment. Do we want to be in the environment ourselves? How fast will it go away?" And so, it was this kind of opening into which came the news that Tom Messer was going to the Guggenheim, and that he would like me to be a candidate for his job here.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you had known Tom from?

SUE M. THURMAN: I knew Tom fairly well through various things we had done in the profession together. I knew that they had recently—had finally gotten—the institute had finally gotten an address of its own. It had built a building, and I had seen the building because I had come here for the museum meeting, the spring that the building out on the river opened. And I paid very little attention to whether that new building might have any problems [laughs] or whether the institute itself might have any. And I was never misled. I mean, there was the usual very courteous but some talk of the fact that it was not an easy field, and contemporary art never is. I think it probably should've gone a bit more deeply into. But—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean here in Boston—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, yes—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —would be at the [inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: —at the interview, and I asked a number of questions, but as it turned out, the institute had a very distinguished past. [00:42:07] It had had some interesting days and evenings out on that new location. But the idea that a community of the arts was going to crop up and thrive right there on the Charles River in those days when traffic was very limited there—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And it was hard. It was a distance from the—

SUE M. THURMAN: It was very hard to get there from public transportation—by the public transportation. It just turned out that almost as soon as I was here, I said, "Let's look at attendance," and I got out the attendance. It was drastically low, and I began to talk to the trustees about the fact that, much as I hated to say it, we might not have a viable organization, whatever it had done in the past. Because, we have also in all our papers, said in this organization that the people had been so generous that they will not be asked to give again—so generous to the building. There were large panels with every name, and they were sterling names. But if all of these sterling names are now null and void for purposes of helping any further—of course, I was—I realized that that might not be so in every case. But it meant that the ICA was on precarious grounds as far as anyone could say. Some people didn't like to hear it because they had liked the idea. Just as we have our catchphrases today, they had liked the idea of getting the Boston arts together in a center. [00:44:00] They were very sensitive about the fact that the previous summer the theater's inflated roof had blown off, and there were just enormous expenses, which every organization there had chipped in to cure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: There was a theater part of the same thing?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, and the ICA never had any extensive reserves because people always said, "I won't give you anything much because you're not collecting art." That was the big argument. So, uh, we didn't have an enormous reserve of cash in any form, trust funds or endowments or anything of the kind. Yet, we had generously in Boston institutional style shared what we had with those [laughs] who needed it more. So, the ICA had some outstanding debts, which were never paid back—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You had—

SUE M. THURMAN: —by organizations, which couldn't play them back.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see. Organizations are really fledgling and struggling?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The ICA then a had associated with it a lot of the moneyed elite of the city.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, yes, and that also went against its real condition because people tended to think that if these people are connected with it, it's okay. It's on the road to security. So, all of these perceptions were part true and part untrue as perceptions tend to be. But we didn't have an unlimited length of time in which to play with them. I know that a person new on any job doesn't—absolutely shouldn't, can't, and mustn't just flip everything over immediately. [00:46:00] But I could also see by doing a little bit of accounting how difficult it would be to seize a better future if we waited very long to do so. Can you imagine sitting in a new building, relatively new, a couple of years old, still under the same group of trustees for the most part who had moved the organization there. Some of them very open-minded and real and saying, "I see what you mean, and we can't possibly say that we can afford this personally." Others, turning the other cheek as it were. It was very difficult. Had I been older and wiser, I might not have been as brave. [Laughs.] But as it was, I think the timing turned out as well as it could've because we went through many stages. Things that absolutely had to be done, people would say, "Well, the MDC will give us money because this or that."

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's the—

SUE M. THURMAN: MDC—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Metropolitan District Commission?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. There were various ways that people felt we could get ourselves helped. Well, you remember when the opera used to be doing this same thing. They, by the way, were in this group, though they didn't ever move out there, but those—that same group of people were involved, Sarah Caldwell and such. And so, the truth was that the way the title was written to that building, the MDC could have it anyway, you know, by taking and putting it on their land—I've forgotten, of course, what the wording was—but you really couldn't suddenly charge them for it and expect to get the money. [00:48:09] Had they wanted to build a building, they would've built the kind of building they needed, [laughs] was what they said to me. So, we went through all the steps and each time, there would be a board meeting, and so on. Finally, it was down to we really do need to move unless we just want to let the institute close. You know, things have a way if you listen to your—sort of the thoughts that you're not consciously thinking, sometimes something surfaces. I had gotten to the point with this problem that I really wasn't terribly reluctant. I thought that anything that had a good chance of working should be tried, and so I put my enthusiasm behind the plan called the Potlatch, which surprised people so much [laughs]. They had sat around their entire lives in Boston hearing that this or that organization is running out of money and that we're going to all need to give it some money, but this was the first time anybody ever said, I think, "We have to have a potlatch." Well, I had just come out of Columbia before going—well, it was not just out of Columbia, but in my graduate work and all around New York, I had been dealing with the art of primitive tribal peoples. And I had loved all the potlatch materials. The Museum of Natural History had—well, that the potlatch peoples had, of course, the totems and every kind of blanket, the Chilkat blanket, the Tlingit blanket, all of those beautiful, embroidered shells that look like murals on skins—[00:50:18]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And these were—

SUE M. THURMAN: —with tassels. These were objects, which in the true sense of their use, were given away at a party, which was designed—and I've never heard of anything more appropriate—for everyone to give away more than they get. So, I mean the Tlingits will float a barge over that has a hundred blankets, and the—some other tribe, Chinooks or whatever, needs to float back 200, or they are embarrassed, you see? So, this was not a point that I made in any emphasis at first, but I knew we had all these good things in there to work with if we could get this thing going.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what was your scheme then? This was in—so to take place early 1963?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. See, we had held our breath for about as long as we could. We had tried all these things, and we had had some shows. And the attendance at the opening, there would be some people and then there would be seven people a day or something like that. So, it was in the winter. Actually, I went to Germany, I went to Europe and made up the Bissier show in the late fall and early winter of '62.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, what's the Bissier—

SUE M. THURMAN: And I may have thought—well, that's a show we had when we first got into the location in town. That's how positive I was about the result. I was there making up a show, which would open a new location that we didn't have yet.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: You see? And this was done under the auspices of the German consulate and Lufthansa. [00:52:04] Everything had to be paid for by somebody. It couldn't be paid for by this system that I'm describing to you. Okay so, whether it was on that trip, I can't remember for sure, but maybe it was while I was going around picking up Bissiers in Europe—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Julius Bissier—

SUE M. THURMAN: —that I thought of the potlatch right—Julius Bissier was by then sort of an elderly fellow and a marvelous host, and I visited them in Switzerland and in northern Italy and then I went to all of the galleries, which were going to lend to that show.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you were planning for a show that you had in mind for—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, you have to keep going.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So now, had the potlatch idea occurred—

SUE M. THURMAN: I think maybe—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to you already?

SUE M. THURMAN: —it occurred to me while traveling. Let's say it might have, but I wasn't doing anything at all on it until the very depth of winter right after that trip. All these works that had to do the Bissier show are now very remote from my interest because we either will or won't ever send for them, you know? But now, we're safe. We have a show that is a very fine show if and when we get to another gallery.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you felt it wasn't worth having it brought over for the soldiers [ph] people—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it's not that it wasn't worth it. It's just that people weren't coming there. I mean, you could blow over in the wind in the winter out there on the—it was really not—

ROBERT F. BROWN: From—

SUE M. THURMAN: —appropriate for the galleries.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —late '62 or early '63, you developed this idea?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, and it had to be done with no loss of time of course. Everybody said, "Why not? Let's do it."

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did you explain it could function—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it would function in that we certainly—every time we talked about our sorrows [laughs], we would touch on, "Oh, the institute has been so valuable to this one or that one. [00:54:08] And, you know, this artist was recognized first by the institute and so on." And I got so I was thinking, well, certainly, you don't go around. The museum world certainly doesn't go around charging artists for what the museums may have done for them. On the other hand, there's nothing wrong with letting certain artists—these, we were saying, are particularly the product of—helped by the institute or—to some extent letting them know the true condition of what we're facing. And saying that, we're not asking you to give us money certainly, and we're not asking you to give us, you know, to select a work that you might give away to some other kind of event. We are asking you if you want to participate in this at all—and there's no harm in not doing so—but if you want to be in it, we think it's going to be a fairly noticeable event. And we think that the people who are in it are going to be

recognized as very generous. It's going to be an outstanding show so that the director of the ICA would, if you want to be in it, select a work from all the works that you can bring out that we would be welcome to have.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you make this presentation yourself for the most part?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Right, and it had—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of course.

SUE M. THURMAN: —and to be made one by one, of course.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, and all within—

SUE M. THURMAN: No one—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a couple of months.

SUE M. THURMAN: —said no, no one. Oh, I had to get rides with people. I didn't even know where everybody lived yet, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you're talking about not merely this region but much more—

ROBERT F. BROWN: All around, all around New England and, to some extent, beyond. [00:56:03] Though I think that with, oh gee, the Hofmann—I've forgotten who transacted that. That was so far into it that, I mean, it would've been foolish to go to Hans Hofmann and tell him that the ICA had made him famous. [Laughs.] Someone—I can't tell you who it was—got that that work, and it was magnificent. But otherwise, the entire collection—I think it was 35 major works—were selected by me, were hung as a show. They had to be gotten on the wall fast because this show had to be educational not commercial.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because?

SUE M. THURMAN: Because, then it has done what the ICA is there to do. You hang the works—

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SUE M. THURMAN: You hang the works, and you make a—everything was contributed. We had a sort of tally sheet. Every visitor who came, and I think there were very few who didn't do this, took the tally and said to themselves, "Now, if I had a choice of everything in this room, if I had my choice of all 35 works to own for the rest of my life, which one would I take first?" Now, we all go to museums, but we don't expect that opportunity, unless we're terribly well-off, and some of us have never given ourselves that thrill of which do I like best. It's a fantastic thing to do in any, any kind of visual experience so that then person says, "Well, if this number one is already gone, what's my second thing?" Well, by the time they get 35 of them done, they're absolutely worn out.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that—how would this benefit? Would they think—

SUE M. THURMAN: They're going to come back to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to put bids in?

SUE M. THURMAN: —to the party.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They'd have to put bids in?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. It benefits them just to learn something while they're there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But in the end, you need—

SUE M. THURMAN: In the end if—and don't think anybody—I don't think many people came and didn't come back to the event, but it was first and foremost, an exhibition. We said, "Keep this tally, and buy one ticket or contribute whatever the amount was for one ticket"—I can't even tell you. I'd have to look it up. It wasn't much—"And you'll be ready then in case—we're going to raffle them and when they are raffled and you hear way out in your tent"—because it got so, there were so many people that were there to be in many outdoor tents. [00:02:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, this became many, many people?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes. It was really—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —got interested, huh.

SUE M. THURMAN: —growing. For the last week, I don't remember coming home. I must've, but I mean it was just everyday order some more tents, get some more volunteers, put up some more loudspeakers, the whole thing. It got to the point where when the event occurred, the rule was if you have bought—I wish I could tell you the multiples, I could find it, but the—a large multiple of tickets, whatever it was. If you have that many stubs, you may sit in the—inside the ICA. Also, you may be seated there if you're one of the artists who made it possible, which was a very pleasant surprise for them. If you have fewer tickets, we're very sorry, but we don't have room. The fire marshal won't allow it. So, you'll go out into the tents where you'll find a big tally card in the middle of every tent, and we'll mark off the works as they're chosen with ribbons, both in the tents and in the ICA. So, if you hear—if you know that your name has been called, some people are going to guide you in. If you know that your first three choices are gone then you're going to look at your card and say, "I want so-and-so, please." And then your helpers will seal that one off with a big, beautiful ribbon. It went like magic. I couldn't have hoped that it would go so well. And when the evening was over, every work had been enthusiastically taken. There was not a single bit of giggling about modern art or any of that, and people were just bowled over that they now owned a work. [00:04:00] Now, before any of this happened so well, there had to be a rule, of course, that said, "This event will not take place, unless the value of the works has been met by contributions." That, of course, accelerated the contributions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really? Because people—

SUE M. THURMAN: Everybody who had bought, wanted someone else to buy so that the thing will now happen.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And they want to be able to get something?

SUE M. THURMAN: Sure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They took advantage?

SUE M. THURMAN: See, all incentives were in the direction of contributing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. But the—whether or not you've got something, you had written down what you wanted was—a raffle was done right?

SUE M. THURMAN: Sure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You took a chance.

SUE M. THURMAN: And 35 people got something, and no one else.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That drew—you drew from a drum or something.

SUE M. THURMAN: And then there was one—well we drew it from—by then the Peabody was lending us authentic objects [laugh] from potlatch.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, the Peabody Museum at Harvard.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, we had all the ethnographic material we wanted by then because all museum directors in town were spending the tickets for us. Governor Volpe was there. Everything was as it should be—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I've got to flip this.

[END OF TRACK AAA_thurma93_7363_r.]

SUE M. THURMAN: —those several rules that made it all work, and as you can tell, it did work because the ICA did survive. [Laughs.] One of the rules was that we won't do anything, unless we get the money equal to the value of the works as it should, rather than insult the whole art field, art group. The other rule was that if—that we will keep a record of who has contributed the most, and only we and the bank knows that. On the evening of the event, we will call out that name, and that person need not wait for chance to work in their favor. The first work will be chosen by having given more than anyone else.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: So that meant that the Hans Hofmann was a rich reward for the person who had—Hans Weston had given the most.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. The Hans Weston?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Hans and Gay Weston.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was a?

SUE M. THURMAN: She was on the women's committee, and he was a banker.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But Hans Hofmann was the prime choice of this top—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it would be from the standpoint of the value of the work of art. It was a very fine Hofmann, and so. But it was—it just fit together in a way that worked awfully well. The money—I can't—in in today's dollars, it doesn't sound like a lot. It was—think it was somewhere between \$35[,000] and \$40,000, and we owed—it wasn't a lot, but we didn't have money. [00:02:04] So, we owed maybe \$33[,000]. We just emerged from—I'm sure we wouldn't gone bankrupt, but we emerged from very uncomfortable position with creditors, which—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was cleared then?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, which became—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that?

SUE M. THURMAN: —part one of a series of events [laughs] because after the artists have done that, and it was the artists, this truce of people put in large amounts of money, but all put together, the people who gave disproportionate to their ability to give were the artists. After this happens, you can make a list of those other people who were on that board that said, "You never have to give again" board. You can make that list. You can put anybody on it. Everybody's game to the idea of saying, "Well, yes, we know now that the ICA got saved by the artists, and that it's going to need to move downtown, and that it doesn't—it has the money to pay its bills, but it doesn't have the money to do the rest of it. So, you need a certain amount of money, and you may put my name on that list, and I will give you the money in escrow. If you don't get the amount needed"—again, I won't try to quote the amount—"then nobody's gift will be kept.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that amount was what you determined it would take to keep the place running?

SUE M. THURMAN: To get it going again, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No mention of endowment or anything.

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, right, just to—[00:04:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Operate.

SUE M. THURMAN: —bridge the gap, get down, restore—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: —well where we went, we turned out we didn't know at that time. We went to the New England Life, first floor.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The insurance.

SUE M. THURMAN: Marvelous space there, and it cost a bit too get it ready to be a gallery, and get simple furnishings, and to keep the staff at work making shows. And—but it was a really interesting support concept, the way it had a chain of events, all of which led to the next.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you led most of those approaches, this—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I had always been in—you know, as we've talked about other organizations, I had always been there when they needed. I don't like to say when they needed saving—[laughs]—but when they were in some straits.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. So, you got—

SUE M. THURMAN: Maybe that's how I happen to be hired. Who knows? In those days, I think if someone had said, "What would the choice be for the museum director?" They might not have said a woman in her 20s or 30s, but I don't like to think it was totally [laughs] because of raising money, but I did raise a lot of it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you're at—it was a small, a much smaller world of museum and museum supporters in those days, wasn't it?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: They would have heard perhaps of what happened in New Orleans.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right. Well, certainly, Tom knew.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. Messer now was—I wonder how—he was a sophisticated Central European—how he had fared here—

SUE M. THURMAN: Czechoslovakian.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —this very low—

SUE M. THURMAN: People loved him.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They did?

SUE M. THURMAN: He was a charming person. He is a charming person. [0:06:00] His style and mine are very different, but I would say that Tom, and probably rightly so, had put such an emphasis on the relationship with the artists and on the subtleties of exhibitions, and was quite a writer. Tom is a very gifted person. I think that, maybe, the last thing he would let himself think about would be—and I don't mean this as any kind of insult—but just like the total amount we owe the creditors would not be what he would be—I mean, somebody else should do that anyway in any organization. But I've noticed that quite often, the director needs to. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes, you told me earlier that you found that the boards of trustees of most nonprofit organizations and institutions don't really look into how they're run by and large.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, they look into them on a month-to-month basis or maybe a year-to-year basis. But the point is I'm not sure that I believe, though I have spent my entire career or nearly my entire career in nonprofit organizations. There may be a better way to what we're doing is educating with live art as against slides and the kind of thing that happens on a campus if you study art or in a studio, and this is a very esoteric thing. You go to Europe, you go around, you pick up all those Bissiers, you get—it's such a unique, one-of-a-kind—even if it's not terribly expensive, it's terribly nerve-racking and terribly time-sensitive—[00:08:02]—it's a very unusual kind of thing to do. How it happens that small museums even survive has continued to amaze me. I mean, I really—because I could see in a big one, there are always enough people. You divide up the work, and if its big, it means it has some substantial source of money to begin with. But in these, which have a director and some assistant, and a custodian, and a couple of guards, and a few nowadays interns, those are helping a lot. But my theory is that everything that runs that way is running on half-empty a lot of the time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you're—how to get beyond that? How can you surmount that?

SUE M. THURMAN: It's very hard. I mean, that's something that I think maybe I wouldn't have even said—have said earlier on. If on a job, I might not say it [laughs].

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you—and you attempted, among other things, to do that, right?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it's kind of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, you did.

SUE M. THURMAN: —daring, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. You attempted that at the ICA?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah and it's kind of—if you do it, it's a little bit sort of—it's fun. It gets a little bit like—what am I trying to say the use of drugs? What's the word I'm after? It's a little bit you get hooked on it—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You get addicted, yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: Addictive, yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Well, you wanted to talk in general now about your program and various aspects of it. During that time of the ICA, you moved to the New England Life building and had the Julius Bissier show in the fall November-December of '63.

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that the inaugural exhibition there?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, it was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what was the—I don't know if you want to begin by discussing that, but was the reception good? [00:10:02] Was there a large turnout?

SUE M. THURMAN: It was very good.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in complete contrast with the Soldiers Field Road—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —situation?

SUE M. THURMAN: It was just—it was amazing, and it never slowed up, the whole time we were there. Now, I've forgotten when it was that we even knew we were moving there. See the potlatch occurred in the sort of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: In March.

SUE M. THURMAN: —it was getting to be warm, yes, April maybe right after the potlatch when we knew how much money we had or anything. If you're shopping for a museum, it's not quite like looking for a house, you know? So, Joe Richardson of Shepley Bulfinch Richardson—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The art critic.

SUE M. THURMAN: —the late Joe, I remember was such a help. He and I would meet over and over in the early morning, and go somewhere where there was said to be a space [laughs]. Now remember, this is—we're already crowding up on this fall in which we're going to be in somewhere, already had the work done, already installed the Bissier show because our timing is naturally related to money too. We need to get in there and start building friends, and start taking in admissions, and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you—these other months you were just treading water, following the potlatch, right?

SUE M. THURMAN: Sure, yeah. So, we did—I guess it was. I know that in July we were still looking because I remember some very hot summer mornings that we were just, sort of, getting panicky. And we—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he a—

SUE M. THURMAN: He was a trustee—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —member of your board? He was a trustee?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then somehow—I don't remember those details—we got it and we got it on favorable terms because Kelly Anderson who was running the New England Life was a friend of Nat Saltonstall's—[00:12:08]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who was one of the founders of the ICA.

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, Nat was marvelous, and he was so concerned about it all. But he had given eternally to it, so he couldn't be the one who just bailed it out forever. But he had gotten Phil Weld, his nephew, that marvelous Phil Weld who was an editor up in Gloucester who had been [*International Herald Tribune*] editor in Paris I believe, wasn't he?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: Anyway, Nat had put together some very wonderful people, and they certainly came into play at this point. As a matter of fact, Kelly Anderson's wife was a member of this group you wouldn't have today—you wouldn't have a group called the ladies' committee. You might have a group called the committee or the women's committee—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this was—

SUE M. THURMAN: But the ladies' committee—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of the ICA?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. It just didn't fit, you know? You might have the ladies' committee of something, but ICA, you know, the artists were always tittering about that, so. But at that time, those women who were on the ladies' committee did a great job. Once we were on the—down there on Newbury Street, they initiated a thing

called the Gallery-Go-Round, which happened. People still do it occasionally, but this was a huge thing when it was started. We had it, I guess, about five years straight of mounted police.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this crowd were such—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The blocks were all emptied so that people could draw on the street, and every gallery was open. Bonwit's would put those same tents [laughs] that we had out on the river, all over their parking lots.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And they had a—

SUE M. THURMAN: And Bonwit was there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —grand building—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. [00:14:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the department store.

SUE M. THURMAN: And then there would be a champagne meal in that tent.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But did the ICA undertake this sort of as a service to the whole neighborhood?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, we talked people into doing all these things. We promoted it and we sold tickets to it, and we used it as our device for membership. You know, there was always a difference in the price if you were a member or not a member.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you figure that membership would carry much of the operational expenses?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, only a bit.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Only a bit.

SUE M. THURMAN: Membership is there to get you the responsiveness, the people, the visibility that causes somewhere, somebody—that's what's so weird about it. Where is that person who is watching us? Who was often the Amelia Peabody.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, a very wealthy—

SUE M. THURMAN: But except for Amelia Peabody, let's have someone else come along to divide the strain with Amelia Peabody. That's what—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, in fact, some of the very old Boston families, and she being an example of such a background were—had been supporters, Nathaniel Saltonstall, too—

SUE M. THURMAN: Definitely—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and others.

SUE M. THURMAN: She came, her driver brought her, and she still had a dressmaker. You know, in those days, you had your hat and your coat made together. She was such a dear woman, and she would be conservatively but beautifully dressed. She would arrive a few minutes before the meeting, and when Amelia left, the meeting was adjourned. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: That was a kind of understanding what we had. So, what a wonderful person she was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And these people were happy that you were in the New England Life building? They were—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes. And we stayed there until, I think, '68, and left under very adverse circumstances having nothing to do with anything we had done. [00:16:12]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Maybe we can talk about that in the right place.

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure. I think you want to talk about a certain program.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, okay.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You have your general outline in front.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Well, one thing is that while I was the director of the ICA and throughout all the other directorships that I've read the newspapers about, I noticed that people are always somewhat puzzled, a lot of people are, as to what the ICA should be doing. I mean, whatever it's doing, "Maybe this isn't the right thing," they're always kind of saying. I think it gets in that position unavoidably because there are other museums in town, and especially now that they own a few works of contemporary art, people don't stop and think, well would they own them if the ICA hadn't been here encouraging this? They don't maybe stop to think that it still has that role to play and a number of other roles to play. But it is not the easiest organization to understand. It doesn't just fall on one, the understanding of it. So, I think that it's probably a good idea, and we'll fit this, some shows in as examples, but—to talk about the fact since it's almost totally exhibitions and the interpretation of saying. Now, most museums—and actually, it doesn't use the word "museum," it uses "institute" because it doesn't collect. Museums collect art permanently, and somehow the public thinks that that is a great virtue, you know? [00:18:07]

ROBERT F. BROWN: They do. They think it gives you the ultimate in flexibility and—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, and that it makes—that it gives the museum stability? Well, maybe so, but it also cost a fortune [laughs] to take care of the collection. People are a little naïve in the sense of telling you, "You really need a collection," because they don't know what it would amount to. However, when you have one that validly has no collection, you really need to know why we have what we have in the way of things to look at. What's the difference between what we're looking at here, and what we might've looked at had you not put this here? Why do you choose the shows you choose, and what does it mean for a show to be here? Is this the end-all and be-all of this particular person or kind of art? Is it a guarantee that it's worth buying? What is it? Well, that's not too easy to answer. It's easy to say no to all those things. It's not a guarantee that you should buy it. It's not all those things, and you really should get off the idea of investing anyway. That's probably the main advice. Not that you shouldn't ever be an investor in contemporary art, but don't come at it from that angle if you can help it, and you'll do better.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because of—I see. Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, if you're trying to be shrewd, shrewdness and visual, and a good eye are not really the same thing. So, you're going to have all different kinds of shows. For one reason, it would be unacceptable not to. [00:20:00] If you just said, "Well, we're always going to have some outstanding, creative individuals," it's going to be one after the other, after the other, after the other forever. People just wouldn't tolerate. They also wouldn't tolerate any other single category of kinds of shows, but somehow, if you—in my opinion, if you vary, if you go from one to the other and come back again, if you do the cycle, you hold your audience, and they seem to learn more. Now, I think that learning is a part of what they're there for. So, in addition to the creative individual, now for example that would be—nobody could question, nobody could prove to me that Ed Kienholz was not a highly creative individual worth everybody's seeing what he had made. Yet, I know that most people didn't see Ed Kienholz's work and never will. A small percentage—turned out to be a huge number of people when we put his show here and when it was shown in Berkeley—but compared with all the people who look at art, this is another one of the peculiar things about it all. Just like how esoteric it is to put together, well then you get it together, and it's like it's more people that would come to a certain kind of party, but it's certainly not all the people who would like to get there. It's a very strange thing to think about. Now, much better known than Kienholz would be Andy Warhol. We had the first real Warhol show at the ICA. With all of the doubting, and so on that sometimes goes—doubting his sincerity—but here is this very beautiful work. [00:22:14] It was not there to prove whether Andy Warhol—you know, anything about his spiritual condition, but what has he put before us to look at? That was a magnificent show because of Andy Warhol. Now, I would cite those as two examples that everybody—it won't hurt them to look at it, right?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: And if they look at it and dislike it terribly, it still won't hurt them. You know, it has such impact that they must see it if they can.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And these were both held in 1966?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. We were getting into our—we were sort of gearing up by then [laughs]. We had been there three years. Okay. So, from the creative individual, you then have—I would call it—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was the type of show—[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. I would call it regional. In other words, most people might say local artists. It doesn't

have to be local artists. It's any kind of gathering that for some reason, the audience of this particular museum deserves or wants to see, excluding work, which is inartistic [laughs]. You would never put out. If there's the old question of "Is there any such thing as bad art?" You wouldn't hang bad art if you could help it. But regional shows tend to be satisfying and sometimes to turn up work that people didn't know existed. [00:24:00] They are seldom as flashy as some of the other types of shows, but you definitely do them. Now, um—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this was also done as a way of involving, in a manner of speaking, the regional art—artists?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, yes and not just the artist. For example, we had one show called—well, it had the word "collective," what people are now doing to collect. You remember what that is? *New Directions in Collecting*, that was in '67. Now, it didn't have enough words in it. The title should—could've gone on to say "in collecting contemporary art." So, what we did was go to every museum in New England and talk to the director, get a statement from the director, what the present interest of the museum is in collecting contemporary—see, we're back to that old subject whether we should collect. We're working on everybody in this direction. Coming there causes them to think about it—and then we say, "Of the things you've collected, which is your favorite?" and so then we put Perry Rathbone's favorite contemporary in the show. The show is made up of—it lets people see, well, all of these museums that you think highly of are collecting contemporary art. So that's a kind of regional show with a special twist.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you discover—had the ICA had, generally speaking, good relations with all these regional museums?

SUE M. THURMAN: They were getting better.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were getting better and you were—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You felt that was—

SUE M. THURMAN: That was one reason.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —important?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Hostility no longer existed. I mean that was, of course, an old-fashioned thing, but there were still people who just thought modern art was crazy, you know? [00:26:02] So, anyway, then after the region—you have the individual then the regional then I would call it national—issues that are large, they're sort of taking the country. It's what people are thinking about in regard to today's creativity—and those shows—I'll just break in and say—were often organized by us to share with other organizations. Or sometimes they—like the Kienholz show was made in Berkeley and was shared here. But we brought Kienholz here for a couple weeks, and he gave any number of programs and helped install the show. Everybody got just as much out of it as if we had made the show, and we both—we were able to split the cost.

ROBERT F. BROWN: With—

SUE M. THURMAN: —[inaudible]—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Berkeley in this case?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right, so. Then after the national, and I would say Kienholz is both the big individual and the national because—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Berkeley—the university museum was quite new at that time.

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, right, right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: But at that point, were they trying to reach out and become better acquainted nationally, do you think—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, well they almost—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —both in your favor?

SUE M. THURMAN: —didn't have to because, uh—well they had a number of very well-known collectors, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: From the beginning.

SUE M. THURMAN: —that part of California was sort of a heart of a lot of—it wasn't done the same way that we had done ours, but they were not badly off. Okay. So, then you had some need to look internationally, I mean, to finish this list. [Laughs.] And here, you see how they—things dovetailed. But the Bissier show was, of course, an international show, and it was also a highly creative individual. These were little, delicate watercolors, most of them.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Julius Bissier?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, beautiful. [00:28:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, was he brought over? Did you have him?

SUE M. THURMAN: He wouldn't come. He refused to fly. His works could fly [laughs], but he couldn't. [Laughs.] And then the international—another international connection would be the Biennale. Now when our members or our people here in Boston read in the *Times* about the Biennale, there's no reason they shouldn't know what these artist's work looks like. They can't see the Biennale, but we can borrow, fairly easily, a smaller selection of works by the same artist and have a sort of echo of the Biennale here. And that turned out very—it was very beautiful.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that was in 1964 so that was still quite early in that time?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But did you borrow them en route to Venice or?

SUE M. THURMAN: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: These are—

SUE M. THURMAN: No, no, these were not involved. In some cases—borrowing works of art is very interesting. Things, which could go the Biennale, have certain reasons for this, and some things are already near the Biennale instead [laughs] of in Denver, Colorado, or wherever. So, we later learned from Leo Castelli—who was the main lender, I mean a lot of their works were in it. I checked that point of these works that we brought to Boston in our little Biennale—were any of these asked for and declined for the real Biennale? Yes, any number were. So, we had—you know, the quality and the look of it was every bit as valid as the show there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But were they by some of the artists or—who were also—[00:30:01]

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, the very same artist.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The very same artist.

SUE M. THURMAN: And the very same style.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, this was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —catalog?

SUE M. THURMAN: —from the Biennale itself.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In and of itself, in fact.

SUE M. THURMAN: And then we made our own small catalog, see?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: So, um, I don't know just how to express it but it's kind of—it's like grafting. You plant seeds. It's a lot like gardening, isn't it? You plant a lot of seeds in all that you're doing. I mean, I'm talking about museum work as planting seeds. But exhibition building is a bit more like grafting plants to each other—you are making connections.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Hmm. This is—you're talking about building through shipping—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, yes, these—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —this—

SUE M. THURMAN: —these from the Biennale, you know? In other words, that work which couldn't, wasn't—they didn't say yes, they wouldn't let it go to the Biennale, we came along. They didn't say, "Hey, they wanted this, and we didn't give it to them." We just borrowed it straight as an arrow, brought it here. In the end, we find that it's all a piece of the same cloth, which is why we're having it. So, you could go on with that because we did a lot of international—things of international interest because naturally, as the world gets smaller, [phone rings] you're going to always have—

[Audio Break.]

SUE M. THURMAN: —so, how are you going to get to Kienholz?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, we could—let's talk a little further about the Ed Kienholz exhibition of the summer or late spring of 1966. June through July, it ran. Kienholz was a very well-known figure at that moment, wasn't he?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what was he doing? These amazing—[00:32:00]

SUE M. THURMAN: And very well-liked.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —assemblages of the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, on the West Coast, he was very—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: —much of a leader. He was—I think it was environmental art, and I really find myself remembering every wrinkle in it to this day. Now, there were people—I must say I didn't think there many—who couldn't see the worth of it or thought it was junk, or whatever. But they were in—they were pretty sparse, and I had some thank-you letters, and so on, of the kind that you don't often get. I remember a letter from a minister in Worcester telling me how honest the show was and talking about how much we need art for these reasons. Just as you went in—I'll give you an example of what it looked like. We had a small gallery through which you passed into the large gallery, and that was often very useful from an installation standpoint.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. You use it for introductions?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, and also, you could build what you wanted to build in there. The big room, you could see from out on the street, so you installed the large gallery, two directionally. It's the only place I've ever been where you did that. Everything you move an inch, you have to run outside and look—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And see how it looks there?

SUE M. THURMAN: —and back up again, right. But the first room was—had no windows and in there, we had the, uh—gee, I'm not clicking on what we call the—the place—oh, gee. [00:34:01]

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: The first thing is *The Diner* [ph], yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And *The Diner* was really an eerie place. All of his things tended to have this little rickety kind of music going in them like a faraway radio, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: You couldn't really tell what the radio was doing or why it was there, but it was adding to the sort of detachment factor—I mean detachment for practicalities. It was getting you over into the emotions. And then there would be—I think there were real aromas. I'm not sure that this was all imaginary—the aromas that maybe someone had been ill. [Laughs.] I mean it was—it had this kind of raunchiness about it. And figures there—you would pass it, people would pass it thinking there's nothing to see, but then it would occur to them there must be something to see, so they would go back, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: It was very good to see how that show rearranged people. They couldn't do things their usual way. You passed out into then through a little neck of hallway and then you were in the big hall. Now, against the wall there was a piece called *The Wait*. And though I would have no—if I owned it, if it had been given to me, I would have no place I could put it. So, this is a kind of art that you can collect only if you sort of have a museum

of your own or you give it to a museum. [00:36:04] In this case, that's what happened. It went to the Whitney. But *The Wait* was a very sad—a sort of sweet-sour sad commentary on old age. In the middle sat a figure, which you thought was somebody's grandmother. But when you looked back, you realized no, it's cow bones. These were cow bones making the legs, making the arms. We read it as somebody's grandmother, this is what he's telling us in a way, you know, that there are many things that come out the same in our heads. We have this unrecognizable, old person. Somehow, we know it's a woman. I think we know it's a woman because of her kinships. She has around her neck, if I remember, beads but these are beads, which I think they have faces of children in them. All—everything surrounds her that tells you about her life, and it's all pretty horrible because you don't even know that she is still alive. The suggestion is that she isn't. It's wrenching. I can't imagine any woman or a man, but particularly any other woman, who could look at that and give it no mind. [00:38:06] I used to go out and look at it every day. That's one advantage to working in a museum—you can collect in your mind. That's why I remember it so well, and I don't remember it as well as I thought because I'm having to question some things about it but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did the public respond to it?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, reverently. There was no laughing and then there was the Dodge, the *Back Seat Dodge*, which on the West Coast, had created a bit of trouble, or people had created the trouble, the Dodge didn't. It had lovers in the backseat, which was a part of our time as far as he was concerned. There was some talk of maybe this will be difficult or you shouldn't have it maybe, or something. We thought that we really shouldn't not have it. You can't take the man's work and then edit him out. Anyway, it's just a part of the whole scene he's telling us about—the neglected, aged person, the drunk in the little counter-restaurant place.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. *The Diner* or whatever.

SUE M. THURMAN: *Diner*, and the *Back Seat Dodge*, and many other things of this sort. Nothing there was only visuals. It was all spiritual as well as visual. [00:40:02] Spiritual may not be the right word, but it's certainly emotional—I'd go that far—and some of it was spiritual, the old woman. I'm not just sure. She can be Mary as far as I'm concerned.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, Kienholz himself was—came over—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh he came.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a couple of weeks.

SUE M. THURMAN: We had the most wonderful time. He loved the coast of Maine. He had never spent much time on the coast of Maine. We had a wonderful member of the institute who lent us the key to a great place right on the water on Kittery Point. We went up and had, what I remember as a high point of parties and fun. All the young people who by then worked around the ICA were richly repaid because they got to spend that wonderful, long weekend hearing the stories of Ed Kienholz and eating lobsters, and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was Kienholz quite a raconteur, was uh—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, he was really a charming person who—very honest, and he had a humor. He was just a wonderful person. He's no longer living. He was—as I remember, he had two children. He was raising his children. They lived with him, and then when he would go on these trips, art trips, [laughs] he was always calling his children, of course, telling them what he was doing. He was—we really—all of us thoroughly enjoyed knowing him.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did he give presentations beyond his work at the ICA?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I'm trying to remember. [00:42:00] I think he stood around in the gallery a lot and talked with people. But I don't think that we had an audience in that. I'm sure we didn't. We had those—usually, they were more likely to happen with something that had to do with national or some like corporations collect, or something where dignitaries might be involved.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you wanted to also—at this point, you mentioned the Andy Warhol show, didn't you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was another example of a major creative individual.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And the Warhol pieces were absolutely beautiful in that big space, you know? Of course, it was all the Jackies and the flowers, the blossoms, and some of the wrecks. It really just—it was—needed that kind of space. It was really beautiful, and we published. Alan Solomon by then was serving as our guest curator sometimes. See, that was one way I got around not having enough money—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And so what—

SUE M. THURMAN: —and not letting it cause us to just dry up, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Where was he at that point?

SUE M. THURMAN: He was in New York, and this was shortly—he had a sudden illness and died, and this was, the year or two that he helped us were some of his last active years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And there's a fairly considerable catalog put out.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, and Hal designed that. He often—that was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your husband?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. That was—everybody did everything to get it done [laughs] at the least—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, maybe it's—Warhol's—maybe it's premature but he—maybe you could talk even now just the fact that the Warhol entourage, Warhol himself came, did he?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, Warhol, I think he came. You know with Warhol, you're never sure, you were never sure. [00:44:03]

ROBERT F. BROWN: All the look-alikes?

SUE M. THURMAN: The look-alikes. He was certainly invited here, and we assumed that it was Andy Warhol. We had a simple kind of supper down at that French café that used to be on Berkeley. What was the name of it?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Joseph's?

SUE M. THURMAN: No.

[Audio Break.]

SUE M. THURMAN: —there were a number of hangers-on that night and—such that I think maybe he didn't come at all, but that's not the issue. We had The Velvet Underground, and that performance was, of course, a big test [laughs] for our audience. They found it very disturbing, a number of people did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really? Hmm.

SUE M. THURMAN: And that was in the New England Life hall.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was in their main auditorium?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. While that was happening, some of these people who had either followed or I think it was people that he certainly hadn't sponsored, but they went into the restroom, the men's restroom of that auditorium and tore the porcelain fixtures out of it just as a sort of display of mindlessness. Which was of course, a very terrible thing to hear about because we had been good tenants, [laughs] and we were very grateful for our space. We were allowed to stay there a while longer, but this certainly turned the tide as to our keeping forever.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you said the head of the New England intimated that you could—you should look for another place. [00:46:00]

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And he was the very same one who had let us come there. So, I mean, things happen, people do things that they have no idea—uh, maybe they wouldn't have cared, but people can do a great deal of damage without thinking about it. So—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Continuing the interview, it's February 3, 1998 at Sue Thurman's residence in Brookline. We've been talking about the Institute of Contemporary Art, and I think there are other themes, other points you'd like to make about it as we consider your tenure there in the 1960s.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, we were talking about, in effect, where shows come from. At risk of repeating myself since it's some weeks later, I think that it's already been made clear that they are dreamed up over time. Probably the reason a show has a name or a theme is that it gives some sort of handle by which it can be referred to. It opens this day, it closes that day, all of these facts that we need to tell people so they'll come,

almost make necessary a name. You just wouldn't have exhibitions one through eight or something each year.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Otherwise, what? It was all just mechanically—

SUE M. THURMAN: It would just—I think you have to have the appeal of a name. We all—regardless of how abstract or whatever we may think we are, we—I think the public, the large part of the public that attends museums has a great affinity for the name of the show. [00:48:03] And so, by the same token that kind of consideration needs to shift and change. If I always said, "Oh, now, we had a show on collecting, and we had the following collector, so now who's our next collector?" it would just get utterly boring. We would also play way out of scale the importance of certain people. I mean, they need always [laughs] to stay in their—I think in their category and sort of represent the category. And by coming back and forth, you make that point with any person who lives in the community with the institution.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So—and you were going in cycles, you explained last—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, yes, and obviously, many things affect it. There are times when you could have this batch of things, and years when you couldn't have them. So, you just—it would be counterproductive to say, "Well, it's time to have so-and-so." You have to be flexible, but I think, you also have to be variable. One focus—I mean, examples of this, I think we had already talked about having a show, which we did have in which the directors of all the New England art institutions were asked to make a statement on their regard for, or lack of it, contemporary art and then say what, if anything, had been going on in the way of collecting it in their museum. Well, that had—that was obviously a—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, now, you gave it a tricky—a catchy title, *New Directions in Collecting*. [00:50:00]

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And that was a show with an agenda because if you had to say, "Well, frankly, I don't like contemporary art, and I never collect it," you would stop short of that if you possibly could. Any director would feel a little bit limited making that kind of statement. And I think—although I don't claim this, but I think that after such a show as that happens several times around the community—and it's more likely to happen in an institute of contemporary art than anywhere else—it has an effect. Maybe the present collecting would have happened anyway, but I rather doubt that the quantity or quality would've been what it has been. I think institutions do uphold each of other's efforts even when they're not talking about—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You're saying that the institute show in 1967 did have—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, not necessarily that one show. But the general ideas represented by that show, when woven into the texture of the institution, and when spread on the community at large—it's other institutions, other art museums—these things have their effect. It isn't just that large institutions befriend small institutions. Quite often, small institutions, having more flexibility and having less to lose as it were [laughs], spread a kind of motivation over larger institutions—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the ICA, in a sense, convened these the institutions from around?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see. At that time, was it your impression that smaller institutions around New England had not, uh—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, they—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —they weren't too interested in contemporary art, many of them, but also they didn't mesh together very well? [00:52:01]

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, and for all reasons. Certainly, I won't claim it for the ICA. We had a lot to do with getting people together because that was part of our philosophy. I don't limit that idea to our institution. However, it was more emphatic there because of the fact that it was an institute. A museum which has a collection and has taken a sort of policy towards art—which is what the ICA has always refused to do for the right reasons, I think, those—more of those regular institutions just aren't going to be as likely to stir up a discussion, or whatever, on arbitrary things—the kind of thing that needs to happen sometime, somewhere. I think that the *Times*, themselves, have brought on that conversation. Many things have brought it on, but we may as well think about it because it may be weakening now. Think what the arts council did in all of its strongest years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The state arts council?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And the NEA in its strongest years. We must keep these things in mind, not just think that everything beneficial would occur whether or not we made it possible or there was any funding or whatever. Of course, in my time at the ICA, those things were just about to get started. And I had—I think I was at the first

meeting of the council, and I know I was there getting votes for the NEA. But for the most part, it was every ship, every tub on its own bottom, mm-hmm [affirmative], in those days. [00:54:03]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—but talking about collecting was one kind of show and then you can take that same idea out and all its ramifications, for example, when in Washington, Nancy Kefauver started the art for the American embassies. This—you know, there was not even any question in my mind whether we should immediately say when the first objects have been drawn together to be sent to the embassies, before they go, may we show them in Boston and have people in—have some of the artists in who were lending the works, and so on, some of the committee, and I was on that committee. So, if you walked into a room and you didn't know the name of the show, and you had the works that were collected to go to the American embassies, American works made mostly by—I think maybe all of them were by living artists—you really wouldn't have a clue. You would know that you were seeing American works if you were an experienced gallery goer. You wouldn't know that fact about them as to what had pulled these together, what's the unifying factor here?

ROBERT F. BROWN: How do you make this apparent?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, through the name but in—and that's really—the name has limited use but a very significant use.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You called it *Art for United States Embassies*.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this the title you gave it here?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, and once we got it on the wall—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Straightforward.

SUE M. THURMAN: —once we got it on the wall, you didn't have to think about that. You know, you looked at the works, which is nearly always true. Whatever got you there, I think, need not be what keeps you there. [00:56:03] What keeps you there is the—whatever profundity there is in the work itself, whatever creativity there is, whatever value it has to be looked at and responded to, not how it has been re-sorted by the community.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Related to that, maybe is what was—did you feel the—how much—to what extent did you employ elaborate brochures or catalogs or labels, and not only object labels but panel labels?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, we had—oh, there was always a lot of label writing in my career. I remember way back in the Louisville project, I think the most label writing I ever did was in that show *What Makes an Art Reproduction*, because at that time and in that place, more people knew art as reproductions—

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ROBERT F. BROWN: But in the case say of this—in general it the ICA, did—you said you wanted the works to speak for themselves for the most part.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, would you keep most wall—most—in most cases, keep wall labels to a minimum?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it's a case of where you put them. I mean, I think that nobody has the right to, as it were, get in front of the art. It will be a kind of ego to do that, I think, a kind of arrogance. I mean, it's wonderful to walk into a space in which art sits or hangs just as it's wonderful to walk into a forest of trees. You really don't

need to know the Latin name for the tree, but if you are in the Arnold Arboretum or some other learned place like the Harvard Forest or something, those facts are going to be there, and you're going to seek them out. [00:02:00] Now, in an exhibition, what I think I usually tried to do was pitch the labeling so that it didn't lead the object. The person who has the wit and the time and the care to want to know as much they can in the verbal sense about this object will read those, but remember how many people there are who don't operate verbally? They either don't want to or they can't. There are all those people Lowenfeld would have called haptic around. The first—the important thing is look at it, feel it, respond to it, and if you're verbal then find this identification, use whatever that you want to use. Don't use the rest. And from that same philosophy, you can go to a point in which you install an entire nook or some sliding panels or whatever with even more information. In fact, you can lose all control putting out information. You can, as it were, write a book on it, but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you occasionally provide them—

SUE M. THURMAN: We had catalogs, which for the most part, we published them. We listed and identified the works, and that would be like the label. I mean, if you want to know, look, and if you don't, you don't have to—some plates, some photographs so that you had something to remember the show by. If you just collect these over the years, it's nice to be able to remember what it looked like. [00:04:03] But we were never—we never had the kind of budget it would take to really do a definitive publication such as you do from time to time in the Archives. Because we just don't—didn't have that plant. I guess, it's the nature of a small and a—what should I say? An institution that exists as much to stimulate attention to a group of things or a subject as for any other purpose isn't likely to be funded so heavily that it—or even to want to take that fixed a position toward it. Think how the reception of objects changes through the years. Even in my decade at the ICA, there were things which pass through. I think when the first hints of Warhol were coming along, it was sort of, is this art or is it not? Of course, we didn't ask that but people in general did. By the end of that time and the end of that show, you know, it didn't matter much what we thought because Warhol had taken care of himself with his talent. So that kind of focus is one thing and then there are matters having to do with technique. I'm just saying if you're fresh out of ideas for a show, you think through all of these like you—[00:06:00]

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SUE M. THURMAN: —according to technique.

ROBERT F. BROWN: According to artistic medium or thing?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right. Quite often, this—I think if you went into the room and someone said to you, "Now, you don't know the name of this, but what do you think it might be?" you could guess a little better in those than you could in any other kind. For example, we had a show—I think we had the first show, and we named it *Art Turned On*. That meant, does it have an electrical cord and a plug, and will it move, or will it do something all the time? This—it didn't mean that everything that had a plug hooked to it would wind up in the show, but everything in the show had that in common. And obviously, that's a pretty big hint, [laughs] more than the hint of all these works are going to go to the embassies—overseas to the embassies. I mean, this has to do with the object itself.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It relied on power, on electrical power—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, and it has to do with the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —power?

SUE M. THURMAN: —inherent nature of the object of art, not the societal use that's being made of the art. We had one called *Painting Without a Brush*, which may have been pushing it a little. I thought of it because I had been seeing—as you make one show, you're always having ideas about other shows. I'd been seeing quite a few things, a surprising number of things, which were using paint and using some sort of flexible surface, often canvas but not always, and getting the paint on the canvas without a brush, doing it some other way. [00:02:06] And part of it was a bit contrived. I remember putting in the show a work that was made with—by having the surface laid on the ground, and a tire with a very nice tread was driven over it in all sorts of directions. I don't know that that's a work that will live forever, but he got into the show, and it didn't hurt anybody. It did show everybody that you really could give some thought to this kind of thing. There's so much yet to be done. It is a kind of idea, kind of tweaking ideas.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, how did you—did you cast a broad net over a number of months because you had to keep several ideas bubbling?

SUE M. THURMAN: I always had three-by-five—I've lived my life, so far, on three-by-five cards, and you see them here. When things get complicated, you go to color, three-by-five cards, but you really, mostly don't want to forget whatever it is that you want to remember. So, you just write a word down, and finally, you have a rubber

band around a bunch of cards, and you have several of these sets of rubber bands and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, one of these sets eventually became *Painting Without a Brush*?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And I always carry empty cards—I still do [laughs]. But certainly, when visiting—I would spend a lot of time out of town making up shows. Any time I was going to be where objects were or artists were or in any fertile territory, I would expect to find more of what I hadn't been looking for than what I had been looking for. [00:04:08] That is one of the refreshing qualities about working for an organization like the ICA. I think life maybe more orderly if you are in a very regular sort of institution, and you take on the assignment of a certain show by a certain date. But I think that—and that's fine, but I think that you may as well pick up a little more while you're out there and then if you don't ever do it—there are some shows I never did, and later, you know, they happened in this town anyway. I don't remember ever saying them to anybody, so I don't think they were taken from us in any way. [Laughs.] I think they were noticed little later and came together anyway. Interesting that there's a lot that we don't do when we think we did do it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You can recall any of these ideas that were—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, there was one on the elements, and didn't the MFA do an elements show?

ROBERT F. BROWN: They sure did within the few years of your leaving the ICA. *Earth, Air, Fire, Water*.

SUE M. THURMAN: *Earth, Air, Fire, and Water*, right. I had a whole lot of cards I could have given [laughs] them if I had known. Now, another show of that sort was *Multiplicity*. There, again, you would be able to guess if you walked into the room just as you could with the electrified art because here, you were going to have units repeating themselves. You were going to have [Donald] Judd hitched to the wall, all those big, nice, plain steel— [00:06:06]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Plates.

SUE M. THURMAN: —rectangles—plates. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

SUE M. THURMAN: —so many other ways of taking a unit and distributing it in a very powerful way so that the same shape said over and over makes a new situation formally and that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: By the very repetition.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, and by the placement.

ROBERT F. BROWN: By the placement.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. So, I give those just as examples. In contemporary art, you have a lot in that category of bags of tricks because—especially when you're in a period in which figurative art is not one of the big things, and—you know—oh, the things that you might have thought would be the standards for what everybody would be doing, the more that you depart from those, as you necessarily do swing back and forth. But in times of—if I should say simplicity, comparative simplicity of art, I think some people would argue with that word but non-complexity—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And those were times of the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Those are times when—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —of that time?

SUE M. THURMAN: —we will invent new ways of handling it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Okay. And that—those were such times, right?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes. Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is it—

SUE M. THURMAN: I think we had at least one show of that kind every year, not because we said, "Well, we've got to have one of these, and it's this year, so let's do it," but there was just—we had about four shows a year, you know? There were people who thought we should have 12 shows. I always thought we could have one show. I mean, we always did so much to get it together. [00:08:03] We always took it down when people weren't ready

for it to go down because some people were ready for it to go down. [Laughs.] It's very hard to balance your audience demands.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did you sustain the interest? Do you think it was just in the nature of the show?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, the more interpretation you do. I think shows that last longer and have more done to bring out their meaning. Not that you are going to dictate, "Look at this and think this," but you can have so many event-types of things happen. We used to bring huge audiences together in the New England Life Hall—

ROBERT F. BROWN: For?

SUE M. THURMAN: Panel discussions. Allan Kaprow came up for maybe eight weeks straight at one point when he was writing his book on happenings.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He would give a performance?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, yes. It would be—on one occasion, he wrapped me in star—Saran wrap—[laughs]—and I was about to keel over. He hadn't done this before, and he was using this as a way to get—well, make his point, whatever it was. I began to realize I wasn't thinking clearly anymore. I saw a woman that I knew to be a doctor stand up in the audience and rush toward me. She had her surgical scissors in her purse, and she cut this off, and she said, "I know, but you'll be all right." So that we had a near miss that night. But he was a person of no caution and lots of invention. And I—he and I had gone to school together at Columbia, so, you know, I probably wouldn't have liked it if most people had nearly smothered me [laughs] but— [00:10:08]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you sustained injuries—

SUE M. THURMAN: —it didn't bother me, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —through programs, but also word of mouth and, I suppose, of course, publicity.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Although publicity was—as now in Boston, somewhat hard to come by, wasn't it?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, that's what—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Not true?

SUE M. THURMAN: —what you hear, but we had a tremendous amount of it. So often, we had an entire page on the front—there used to be a social section, I think, before there was an art section, and it's true, you had to have some kind of potluck supper or something and get together a group of people in order to build this up. The fact that people in town, some of whom didn't like contemporary art, would lend you their prestige by being there, being on your women's committee and being at the supper, and then would, of course, go on and on about the exhibition, and then you would have a whole new wave of visiting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. This was a time—you said it was a time of simplicity—maybe is not the right word—but it also was a time of growing social awareness and unrest, civil rights, the Vietnam War era.

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did that help or were there any ways in which here in Boston that impinged on your time at the ICA, either of those?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, I think not very much. I mean, there were—well, any time you do something like have the Warhol show, you're going to have some things in that show, which represent whatever was going on in society and, uh—but I don't think there were very many times when there were race issues or whatever. [00:12:00] Now then, of course, it's obvious that—while we're laying out these ways to have exhibitions and then I'll let it go at that, but there are other things than the typical media. People think of sculpture and painting and maybe drawings, but we sometimes had—one particularly good show on graphics which was made by four graphic artists from this area. Carl Zahn and Muriel Cooper and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Malcolm Gear.

SUE M. THURMAN: Malcolm and who's the other one?

ROBERT F. BROWN: I don't have the other one. It was *Communication by Design*.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right. So, this brought together an exhibition, which looked very different from most. Everything was small. It was there—well, there were posters, but it was things within the designer's yardstick and lots of gatherings to talk about same. They came, and they were tireless about going around the gallery with people, and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, you've mentioned the artist did tend—or designers and artists tend to do that.

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because like you mentioned Ed Kienholz, that you're saying—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Oh, he was wonderful.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, yeah, related to that and I—was the *Design for Transportation* [ph].

SUE M. THURMAN: That's the other thing, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in 1967, is that [inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: Now, that is a medium you never thought to see in art gallery, although, you might read a book about it. It really was quite an undertaking. It seemed big in those days. Now, I guess, it's faded from our consideration. But the MBTA, which was very unique, at one point, and was distinguished by its age had gotten—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is the old public transport—used to be—[00:14:00]

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, it looked terrible. Every station was just awful and then I forgot where the money came from, I guess it was federal plus state, but anyway, there was a tremendous sprucing up of the subway system here—more than sprucing up. I mean, certain architects built certain new buildings and renovated others. There was good deal of attention to the whole thing. And yet, the average person was just having to step over some mess in the subway station.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Didn't think about it.

SUE M. THURMAN: Didn't think about it and didn't know what was going on. So, we went to the Chermayeffs who were working on it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, yeah, Peter Chermayeff?

SUE M. THURMAN: Peter and Ivan were both working on it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Ah.

SUE M. THURMAN: And said, "Why can't we have an exhibition called *Design in Transit?*" and they said, "Oh, good." Since they never had any idea of limiting anything, they said, "We can put a transit car right down the middle of the gallery." Well, that sounded good to me, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: [Laughs.] We got little samplings of everything that related to the whole transformation. There would be materials such as we're using on the floor, I mean, the whole—like you're doing any interior design show. That's what it really was except that the vehicles were moving items. I know it seems in looking back that I remember most the kind of funny things, but there are so many of those.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you did actually have a car.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes. Yeah, it didn't just happen easily. We decided it easily.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How would you get in your space?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I will tell you. It—remember you're always up against a deadline. [00:16:01] You've taken down a show, you've probably sent invitations out for the opening, and now, you're in between, and people want you not to stay closed a long time. They want you to do it fast. So, you're in there, and you're—you can't really let anything go too far off time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The schedule's going to be—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —much—fairly punctual.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I guess, it was Monday morning when the transit car pulled up out on Newbury Street on an extended kind of platform that somebody had put together, a full-weight, full-length—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Subway car.

SUE M. THURMAN: —subway car with the right, new designs and colors, and so on. So, we thought everything was fine. I mean, the dimensions we had been given were right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this was to stand out—just outside?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, it was going to be inside.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Inside.

SUE M. THURMAN: You can't put it outside. There are all kinds of reasons. The town—the city won't let you do something like that. So, it ended that I had to make one of my rare trips up to see Kelly Anderson.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The head of New England Life Insurance—

SUE M. THURMAN: —sitting in his—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —your landlord.

SUE M. THURMAN: —oriental-carpeted room. I had to say that, "We have a small problem, which is that we are putting a transit car into the ICA on the first floor, you know? And—"

ROBERT F. BROWN: He knew about this?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, we had gone through it verbally, but there's something about the real McCoy that changes things. "So, it seems that we—it won't go in, unless you allow us to do the following, and I'm not trying to influence you, but this is the main object in the exhibition, and so it would be wonderful if you can make this possible." [00:18:05] "Don't worry about the money yet, just what is it?" Now, you have to know that they think—today, I believe, they still think, but at that time, they certainly thought—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that at the end?

SUE M. THURMAN: —that the New England Life building was where everyone would go when Gabriel blew his horn. It was the penultimate in the way of a fine building, which was managed in a fine way and shouldn't be hurt, of course, in any way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, it's very pristine or very almost sterile.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Very formal.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes. And so— and actually, he did allow it. What I was having to ask was, "May we please, with the supervision of everybody you tell us is necessary, take out one of those huge, plate-glass windows knowing that it has to be back within whatever number of hours it would be before dark, because we can't have the perfect building have a hole in the side of it tonight. We have to take this out, and go through whatever we have to go through, and get it back in." Well then, a few people were called in while I was still there. "What are the problems going to be?" said Mr. Anderson, and this one and that one all named a few. Finally—what was his name, the wonderful man who was there on the same floor with us? Davidson, Mr. Davidson was there to make it all work. Mr. Davidson said, "Well, Sue, I hate to tell you," but he said, "Those arborvitaes out there. You can't get the plate out of there without moving those 12 shrubs." [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Meanwhile, the subway car was out of the street?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I think they had maybe—it finally did have to sit somewhere else while some of this took place. [00:20:04] But the crowd that gathered, you can imagine, "What are they doing to this building, they're taking its bushes, and what is this over here? This belongs underground," you know, it was a very confusing sight. Somehow, we didn't get—

ROBERT F. BROWN: A fairly good publicity.

SUE M. THURMAN: We didn't get a picture of it. I never—I couldn't forgive us.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this was fairly good publicity inadvertently—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible].

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, we—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you rolled it in?

SUE M. THURMAN: —got it in.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It must have consumed most of your room.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it consumed what we knew. We are—we had the chalk marks, but it was just the getting it in that was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

SUE M. THURMAN: And so, it was there, and the show was wonderful, and people enjoyed it. We had a big festival of speakers, lots of them from Washington, federal transportation people and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You tied it in. You—saw—drew parallels between Boston and the projects in Washington—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Montréal?

SUE M. THURMAN: And when each one started and then we had—it was—I think we probably drew attention to architects more in that—on that occasion than on any other.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But there were—

SUE M. THURMAN: Both the original architects and the ones that were bringing it back at—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But the architect—this is architecture that's involved with graphic design on a large scale, right?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it is but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I mean, product design.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, but I'm thinking also of the stations. See, those were—we had those on panels. We did a fairly definitive catalog for that. I guess we got some money from somebody for that. So, we were talking about buildings as well as these other things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. So, this was art and technique on a large scale?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. So, that—you know, there was certainly other categories, but that—thank you for letting me think this through because—

ROBERT F. BROWN: No problem.

SUE M. THURMAN: —I had always—I never really put it down anywhere. [00:22:02] I just, sort of, had it in my system that these were the things you did. By the way, you keep doing them. When you're not the director of the ICA, it provides such a wonderful experience for you personally. You know, it makes these habits. So, I could always fill cards everywhere I am with ideas for other shows and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you think it's something that satisfies something in you? That something, uh—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I think that some people are fitted to it and some are not. Evidently, I really liked finding ways to do this. I mean, I really—education has always been my underpinning—how can people learn and how will they learn better? And then when you have a—or the opportunity to run a series of visual institutions, and you get some—all sorts of notions about how people can learn better and then you just keep doing it in a, sort of, rarefied way within your own system. Maybe you were doing it beforehand. It's how you got chosen to hold those jobs. I think we do have some innate—each of us has certain strengths.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But now, you continued at the ICA through—it was 1966 or [19]'67?

SUE M. THURMAN: I have forgotten.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Something like that and then—

SUE M. THURMAN: That's the point at which we had a divorce in the family. Hal and I had almost done that job together. He had contributed a great deal to it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: To you—to the job at the institute? [00:24:00]

SUE M. THURMAN: Right and had published—had done a lot of the graphics. At that point, Blair and I went to Cranbrook. I had—well, actually in-between, I should say, that I was asked by the Ford Foundation to take this conglomerate of information about the visual arts, which I had in my direct exposure to artists, and go to all the locations—30, I believe there were—around the country, which they were funding for the first time. These were campuses, and they were starting a generous scholarship program in fine arts. These such things were just not—nonexistent—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean—

SUE M. THURMAN: —at that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —academic teaching programs?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I mean all the independent art schools had one if they were a good school and then some of the departments within universities had them like Rhode Island School of Design, San Francisco—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the idea of your survey for it?

SUE M. THURMAN: And I was going to make a site visit, and there, again, I took my three-by-five cards [laughs] and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your three-by-five cards [laughs], yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. I had all the questions, which I thought they would want to know what I was going to ask, so I made one trip down to New York to go over my plans. They said, "No, no, we don't do that. You know what you want to ask."—it was the most freewheeling job I've ever had. And so, "We just want you to go and do it." And I spent a year, about a year, coming and going. Because I had a young child here in Boston, and my mother came and stayed with him, and I came back to see how they [laughs] were every weekend and went— [00:26:11]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But the Ford Foundation wanted information or?

SUE M. THURMAN: They, of course, are obliged by all the rules of philanthropy to know or to do their best to find out whether they are using philanthropic funds wisely. So, they do lots of checking on themselves, all the big foundations do.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that's what you were doing?

SUE M. THURMAN: That's what I was doing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see. They had sent seed money or more to many of these artist studio—

SUE M. THURMAN: This was a seven-year—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —programs.

SUE M. THURMAN: —program.

ROBERT F. BROWN: These were art studio programs?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, and they were feeding. That's what they mean by fine arts. You and I might include history, but they think of it—McNeil Lowry had his terminology clearly in his head, and when he said "fine arts," he meant studio art. So, it was set up that the schools would get installments—I have forgotten. It was a lot of money—and they would get it for seven years. They would be allowed to make certain plans themselves, but certain other things would have to be according to the foundation. You know, so it couldn't just—money couldn't just vanish and so then it was just my job to go [laughs] and find out whether all this was happening as it should, which is a presumptions thing to agree to do but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. You had to—

SUE M. THURMAN: —I enjoyed it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —listen a great deal—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and ask the right questions.

SUE M. THURMAN: And when I asked questions, I wound up making the questions on color cards, going to each school with the same questions on—it must have been three different sets, three different colors: One being the students, what do they think about this? [00:28:01] I soon saw that I must have a discrete audience. I mustn't blend the people. So, I would have the students together then I would have the faculty together, and I would have the administrative trustees, and so on, people together. But they would all be answering the same kinds of questions. And then, of course, it was not to be believed after I had gone 30 places and found everybody who had ever worked at the ICA would agree to help me [laughs] and spread these cards all over my house. That's before we had computers—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You didn't have a laptop, put it that way.

SUE M. THURMAN: No. So, it worked, but it was ending enormous handling job because there wasn't enough space between the cities. Even though I would go to San Francisco on a Monday and come back here on a Thursday night for the weekend, let's say, then I was supposed to be somewhere else the next Monday, so there was no time to really distill anything until it was all over. And then I just got a bunch of folding tables and long-lost friends, and we did the best we could. It was finished on the day that Blair and I moved to Cranbrook, which wasn't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Very nice—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it wasn't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —timing in a sense—

SUE M. THURMAN: —planned that way, but it's a wonder we ever got it finished [laughs]. A friend from here took it down.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were people in schools and all, were they quite candid helping you generalize?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was 1969, and so.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it had to be made clear to them that what they said didn't have any effect on the money they were still to receive or the money they might someday receive on another grant.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was simply—

SUE M. THURMAN: This is totally—[00:30:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the funder itself or the Ford Foundation then to justify—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And also, they wanted to so that's—it—you're helping the foundation by being candid. And then what I needed to do—it was very hard to know—you are quite an editor. I'm sure you could have thought of something. But I did a sort of chronology on how the schools had developed because I got—picked up a lot of as I—well, they all gave me a bag full of materials as I left. They'd put me on the plane, "Read these," they said. So, in the end, I saw that I could do a kind of history of this type of education. I tried to keep it brief and then a kind of history of the highs and lows it has had. And then I went into each of the schools that were receiving their things and cited some examples of good ideas and bad ideas according to the way they felt. I was—I felt honored to have had a chance. Because I had looked for so much money in my own career, money to do things with, but this was a chance to sort of oil the wheels of future money to other people. You know, I think they weren't necessarily going to do this again, and I believe they have continued.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They have?

SUE M. THURMAN: They have, not constantly, but they certainly didn't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But—

SUE M. THURMAN: —turn against the idea.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was—and so the '60s had been a decade of great growth in fine—in the visual arts.

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: So presumably, some of these institutions had just gotten studio art programs underway or greatly expanded them, haven't they? [00:32:04] Some became immense departments, didn't they?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And some had started and been very creative, but they were death's door financially. Of course, Ford's rules didn't work very well for that kind of situation because any big funder wants to know that they are strengthening something that already has some substance, you know? I mean, they're not throwing their money away. But—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you notice differences, say, between programs that might have 30 or 50 artists on their facilities and smaller ones?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, sure, yeah. Well, when I went to the New York—uh the league in New York, you know, the student's league, I mean it was like just passing through. People would come to teach. They did whatever they wanted to do. They had taught there so long, and people with big names. You could study with anybody you wanted to as long as you could come the third Thursday and the second Wednesday or just anything that the very worthwhile artist set up as his schedule. It was almost like not a school. It had almost no—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that was an exception.

SUE M. THURMAN: —nature. Yeah, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because it takes some of the large state universities—

SUE M. THURMAN: Philadelphia was pretty much the same, the academy, not quite as freewheeling—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But state university art departments got huge, but presumably, they brought in the full panoply of tenure and committee and all that.

SUE M. THURMAN: And there weren't many. I can't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you go to some of those—

SUE M. THURMAN: I wish I could remember an example. I may have made a mistake when I said there were any because of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: These for the most part university—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, you see, there were some, which had started as private and maybe had gotten money as private. I believe that was the way the money was handed out, now that I remember. [00:34:01] But then they were struggling so, and they were always looking for patronage. The university had said, "Oh, come, and we'll give you the building" and then there would be strife within because some thought this would be the ruination of it all. Others thought it would be the salvation of it all. I think we had some that were going through that transition.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you didn't actually survey purely state [inaudible] universities?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, not just go to a big university and do it, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right, which happened to very recently developed studio art.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Right. Right. So, I did go—you and I are both familiar with the Detroit area for various reasons.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: I went to Detroit and that same week I went to Cranbrook, which of course, I had not been to before. Cranbrook is very sort of—it kept to itself in those days, and it was a rather proud—it was like Marienbad. The campus was unbelievable. Everything was there for you. Well, reason I'm going into that is that's where Blair and I wound up for three years. I did the Detroit—the Arts and Crafts, which was a sort of sister institution to the Detroit Institute's—Institute. They had a grant and then someone came from Cranbrook to take me out to

Cranbrook. Little did I know this was the beginning of a new era in my life. I stayed. They were having graduation and everything. They said, "Oh, stay a little longer," so by the time I really left there, they had said, "You know, you're in a state of transition, and we are in a state of need, so why don't you come and vice president?"

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they—had there just come on a new president?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, Glenn Paulson who was a wonderful fellow.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [00:36:00]

SUE M. THURMAN: It had run down in Sepeshy's later years. He had been quite strong as a president, Sepeshy, but the place had—well, it had just gotten poor, and it hadn't pulled itself up in any way. So, Glenn had been, I think, rather brave to take it on. He was a well-known architect, and he talked me into doing that. Though, I had never had a title. "I'm the vice president of an art academy." It was hardly what I thought I was. But as we talked about what needed doing, and it was clear that they needed it for three years and not forever. In fact, they didn't want to commit themselves beyond that. We finally shook hands on it, and it really was that I would be their connection with the outside world, more than they then had. They now probably had more than they did. I don't know. I've lost touch a little bit lately with them. But it was a case of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: Go ahead.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, I'm sorry. No.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Continuing on February 11, 1998. Sue, I thought we'd lead in, perhaps, with talking a bit further back to the ICA, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, just to talk a little bit about your colleagues if we can call them that, your trustees.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this a rather formidable board?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it was. For me, I guess I could see them in a light that some couldn't because I had come here, and they were new to me. I knew their names, and that was the first time I had ever had trustees whose names I knew before I got there. [00:38:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You knew them from?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I mean just because people know the name Saltonstall and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Old Boston name.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, old Boston names. Well, I would say that there has been, I believe, a major change in trusteeship around Boston since mid-century in the second half of the century. I don't really know about the very first part of that half-century, but where I was working in that time, the same thing prevailed. It was that the trustees were basically leading members of the community, and they might or might not be familiar with the subject, very familiar with the subject. But the fact that they were such decent people and, to the extent possible, such generous people made them trustees. Now that was true in Louisville, and I believe it was true in New Orleans. Though I think in New Orleans, there was more of a sort of long-term attention to art on the part of the trustees than there had been in the Louisville project, which was basically run by the library. So, I could see why that was short there. But when I—those were my first two major services with trustees as you remember, and I could soon tell in both of those locations that the heart of the matter was the money. You know, "Do we have enough?" The answer was always no. "Where will we get some more?"—every meeting, every meeting had these things on the agenda. "How much can each of us give?" Well, it would make you wonder how any trustee was ever kept [laughs] in any institution. [00:40:03] Before the meeting was over, there would usually be some agreement. "I'll send \$500 if you will and—" you know, so you just hobbled through the year financially. Now, that was the period in which the arts funds were starting, too, and that was the reason they started—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean the governmental?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, I mean private, and they've sort of been forgotten. They were wiped out by the fact that we thought that the endowment and all of the branches that came out of it were going to be the answer. But, of course, when the funding began to shrink on those things, you begin to wonder, Well, where is it? We've tried this and we've tried that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this you found to be the case when you got to Boston as well?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, in Boston, I had that background that I've described, and I had worked on the arts funds, which were like any other kind of community fund. We went out, we had a campaign, people took cards, they visited everybody. They had luncheons and just announced how much we—how far we are this week, and then that money got apportioned to the organizations that need it. Now, that was one step more enlightened, no doubt, than each trustee having to divvy it up at each meeting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, there were such arts funds when you got to Boston?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, there weren't here, but I had had one in Louisville. Louisville was quite ahead of its time in that sense. Louisville and Cincinnati were both having community funds, and New Orleans had various ways that it called upon people to help. But when I first came here, I couldn't see. It was—people kept saying that every organization, every tub on its own bottom. They had heard the Harvard saying so long that they thought it was workable, and it maybe workable at Harvard. [00:42:07] It seems to work fine at Harvard, but when you have a little organization that's not essential to anyone in the sense of life and death, or in the sense of their making it through the world or through their career or whatever, it's a luxury. It's a wonderful and valid luxury, but it is a luxury. So, how would this populate the board? Well, of course, you would have some people named Saltonstall and Weld. You would usually have, I noticed, pairs of relatives. You would have one relative. It was a little like the Junior League. The older relative would be bringing up the younger relatives being his role model or her role model. And so, we really were blessed by Nat Saltonstall who was just the world's best in his loyalty to the organization. He had started it. It's the only time I've ever had as a board chairman, my first board chairman there, the person who founded it, and who had for years kept this awful job of board chairman. And then when he turned it over, he turned it over to Arthur Solomon who is an outstanding biophysicist. They were quite different from each other. Arthur said at the first of every meeting that he was either going to be the president who raised the most money for the ICA, or the one under whom it closed. We knew what he would say as the meeting started, so we were still stuck with this agony—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, this—

SUE M. THURMAN: —of the money. [00:44:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But he had made rather dramatic pronouncements then, would he?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, he did but then it was all toned down, and he—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Saltonstall, he wouldn't have said a thing like that?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, well, it would just not have occurred to him to say that or Bill Weld, either—Phil Weld. Either—Phil was nephew of Nat and was a very, very dynamic person. I think one of the best trustees I've ever seen because he thought in terms of what needs to happen. He was not the least bit afraid of anything that I could see. I was very, very fortunate to have—we all were—to have Phil. As a matter fact, Phil's daughter has recently shown a lot of interest in the ICA. She has written me several times about things, and I believe she took over his—maybe not—I don't know whether she's editor or not as he was up in Gloucester.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of the newspaper?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But they lived in Europe and were with the *Herald* for many years but then they moved back here and lived in Gloucester, and did the Northshore job. Anyway, that's a great family of people, and to say anything derogatory about fame and fortune is a blind thing to do when we really wouldn't have had those organizations at that time. I can't speak about it now, but I imagine it's still true that we wouldn't have it if we didn't have some people who had the resources with which to challenge other people. They challenge them differently now, and that I might mention. But among the old-timers, the steady-as-a-rock types that we had, we had Amelia Peabody. [00:46:00] We've talked about her.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Also, something of an artist.

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh yes, and in every way a saint. Now, she was on the board when I got here. Some of these—I'm looking over a list, and some of the others were not yet on the board. It was very small at the beginning. I think Phil Walker was on it at the time. That was Dr. Walker—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was he?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I mean what's his—

SUE M. THURMAN: —he had signed—he had signed—well, he's the Walkers of the Walker Art Center, and came from an art family, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: In Minneapolis.

SUE M. THURMAN: He was a very quiet, modest person, but annually, he signed the ticket on—it wouldn't be necessary to say how much money he put up to back the ICA—for whatever it might have to do, or ask for, or borrow or whatever. It was a magnificent gesture.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, he had made the difference at the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, he—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: —protected it. I mean he endorsed things for us. He had securities that he said were doing him no good, and he kept putting them up for whatever we had to have. It was a wonderful generosity. It was a small board there at the beginning. Then we went through a period of—you know, there was a lot of soul-searching. That was a period of soul-searching, and they were saying, "Oh, we must find other people. We can't keep it going forever." So, I think that's quite true. They reached into—they felt guilty that they didn't have corporate people on the board. [00:48:02] They kept looking at each other and saying, "We all know each other, and people must think that we don't want people from other sectors here," which is certainly not true. So, they would talk about outstanding people in the corporate community, and I wanted to say, "But you know the board is one place where the director reports on a number of things or answers whatever she's asked to say." But nobody ever asked me, Do you have any idea as to the prerequisite for bringing in—I hate to use the word strangers, but at that time they kind of were strangers. They weren't heavily visiting the institute for example. Now, that was a little scary to hear that somebody's going to be a trustee who, you know, naturally doesn't know the things we know about our recent ups and downs. A person coming in cold so to speak.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, and they weren't thinking in terms of filling in?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, they didn't— no, no, no. They couldn't because they felt guilty that they hadn't done it already, see? So, had they asked me, I would've said I thought a good test—and I had learned this in New Orleans—that I thought a good test was have they already shown a great interest in the institution? If they have, fine. It's all open as far as courting them to join the leadership. But if we're sitting here saying so-and-so is the head of such-and-such, and his salary is X dollars a year—

ROBERT F. BROWN: As they would, they would come out and say—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it's generous—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: —generous, and we certainly could use the support. We'll you're jumping—you're making an assumption.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: I observed in several instances that when people were brought in because it would be such a favor of them to come, they really never got to the other level of being as stalwart as those people who had devoted their lives to the organization. [00:50:20] It would be hard for anyone to. Some did better than others, but there were some who really didn't do that. Now, there were people who came from the corporate community and were worth a great deal in terms of their skills and their devotion, and their personal attention. One of those was Chuck Withers.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Charles Withers?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes. He had just recently retired, I believe, from the Silver company and had time. He spent it generously. I felt he was a very good, a very complementary person for me because I was not a conservative and he was, but he was a pleasant conservative. So, we worked together very fruitfully I think, and we really wanted the same thing, which was to put this thing on a more stable base. Not criticizing anything that we ever did do in terms of the way of passing the buck at the meeting or whatever, but to get it in a more businesslike situation, protect it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And not have to live from month to month where—

SUE M. THURMAN: That's right. So, he was really a wonderfully helpful person.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this—and this attitude or his approach, his—was appreciated by the other trustees? I mean—

SUE M. THURMAN: It was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —they understood?

SUE M. THURMAN: Definitely. In fact, he sort of—whether they approached him or he approached them, I don't know, but somehow, he was obviously kind of assigned the job of being the bridge to the working group, you know, the staff—[00:52:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: —the director and staff. It was good to have such a person. It really was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: There had not been really been such a person?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, we had those lovely meetings—[laughs]—with tea and lots of polite conversation and a review of the money and a few complements. If anyone had heard any, they were passed along, but they were very sort of esoteric those meetings, the first few years. The more corporate people we got in, the—I would say, the more down to earth we became. Now, that could be a disadvantage because—and it never really was lastingly so—but I would have to be very careful to bring up what the problems might be before the problems happened. [Laughs.] I wasn't a person who thought in terms of problems. But when the Kienholz show was coming here—and by the way, they really believed in the freedom of the professional in any job. That I think goes with Boston, and it's one of the best things—so, they didn't say, "Wait a minute, we'll decide whether to have the Kienholz show or not." I made the decision to have it but then I told them what it possibly could lead to or what it had led to on the West Coast. As long as you kept in touch with them that way, it was fine. It was [inaudible].

ROBERT F. BROWN: What had happened? Was there sort of a cautionary tale to—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, well, I mean the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: On the West Coast.

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes. The newspaper or the media in general had latched onto the *Back Seat Dodge*.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, latched on—

SUE M. THURMAN: And it was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]. [00:54:00]

SUE M. THURMAN: —most shocked by all of this. So, I got their backing to simply do it the way it was, not want to leave anything out, nothing shameful had happened. So then, we were frequently talking about—although you know the institute didn't collect a collection of art—but it was now moving sort of in that direction. It was really concerned even though none of my budgets would even touch the budgets of more recent times. We weren't spending much. In fact, we were making most of what we spent by creating exhibitions and sharing them around the country, rentals, and so on. But even so, they—I guess they would've liked to have paid the staff more or given some benefits. I mean, there was never enough money, and it was a serious thing. So, this kept bothering everybody, and they were always trying to think, well, making—we were getting to the level of making friends with people by putting them on the board because they're collectors maybe. Well, then you're getting to a kind of harder experience.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In what sense was it?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, not necessarily but if you're going to use as your guidelines a kind of objectivity, which is like with the Kienholz show, you're likely to say, "Well, if you've thought it through and you've talked it over, and so on, then I'm voting for it." The director is going to get some competition automatically from a person who is putting his money into a collection rather than giving his money open-handedly to the institution. [00:56:02] That's an indirect sequence there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, and you—this began to happen?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it had to be kept down. I was very conscious of the fact that it would be possible to offend, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you kept it down to a minimum?

SUE M. THURMAN: I think so, but I just—I think there was always—after we got a little bit into that, I think there was always a little undercurrent of "does anybody care what I think?" kind of, meaning from the person who collects and feels, that because they've been able to buy art that they are now totally into it and can educate with it. It's a little bit of a jump there, and that's where the problem lies—

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SUE M. THURMAN: —we were frequently talking about—although you know the institute didn't collect a collection of art—but it was now moving in the direction. It was really concerned even though none of my budgets would even touch the budgets of more recent times. We weren't spending much. In fact, we were making most of what we spent by creating exhibitions and sharing them around the country, rentals, and so on. But even so, they—I guess they would've liked to have paid the staff more or given them some benefits. I mean there was never enough money, and it was a serious thing. So, this kept bothering everybody, and they were always trying to think, Well, making—we were getting to the level of making friends with people by putting them on the board because they're collectors maybe. Well, then you're getting to a kind of harder experience.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really? In what sense was it?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, not necessarily but if you're going to use as your guidelines a kind of objectivity, which is like with the Kienholz show, you're likely to say, "Well, if you've thought it through and you've talked it over and so on then I'm voting for it." The director is going to get some competition automatically from a person who is putting his money into a collection rather than giving his money open-handedly to the institution. That's an indirect sequence there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, and you—this began to happen?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it had to be kept down. I was very conscious of the fact that it would be possible to offend, you know? [00:02:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you kept it down to a minimum?

SUE M. THURMAN: I think so, but I just—I think there was always—after we got a little bit into that, I think there was always a little undercurrent of does anybody care what I think kind of meaning from the person who collects and feels. That because they've been able to buy art that they are now totally into it and can educate with it. It's a little bit of a jump there, and that's where the problem lies repeated, you know—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: Because you really—I would sense—for the first time I sensed that I really can't be candid, you see? I can't be candid if a person is hoping I'll ask what show to have next.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, of course—

SUE M. THURMAN: I mean there are so many factors involved—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And they might favor someone who lives—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, yes, but whatever it is, it's a tangle to begin with, and it's something where you have to be able to switch things around. It really—well, it's just this thing we always get into when a person of higher level, which is certainly a trustee is a person of higher level, has some sort of power over a person whose job description is this. It worked all right, but I'm saying that the old Boston way wasn't bad. [laughs] if we could've found a way that kept the objectivity that existed in the first plan that I discussed, and also drew closer to us the people who had identified themselves as being art experts as it were, see? [00:04:10]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: In other words, this was—it was an uneasy status.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Okay. That's there for you—why you kept these people to a minimum in terms—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, in a way, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were trying?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, yeah. But you see, I can never really—I can say that to you, but I couldn't say it at the

time. It's not kind of thing anyone could be asked to understand. Because you're going to wind up paying twice as much, you know, of that out-of-pocket money to keep the place going if this director we have here doesn't want us to do everything we can to bring in others. Certainly, I did want support brought in, but I'm saying—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean—

SUE M. THURMAN: —just to make sure that I'm being clear what I'm saying, that the status of a trustee played to its full hilt, as it should be, hitches badly to that person's being, I think, competitive from within the arts.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And also, with the director who established that [inaudible].

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: And that's not something that's easy to word. I don't think it was ever—it was not ever used in any negative way by any of the people involved.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you were aware of it.

SUE M. THURMAN: I was aware of it. It added to the stress level. Yeah. Then, of course, I'm seeing other names here that came in as—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were there any others that are rather—were rather—

SUE M. THURMAN: As part of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —valuable or otherwise?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, the people who came in as part of the representatives from successful entities, whatever those were, you had Irving Rabb who was, of course, Stop & Shop. [00:06:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, the supermarket.

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: And then Dick Solomon, his nephew who moved to New York about halfway through my term. But Dick was a wonderful person who wants involved with artists but saw his voice on the board more as a promoter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was his actual business? Was he in business—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, he was at Stop & Shop. He was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, he was—

SUE M. THURMAN: —a high executive there. For example, when we had had the potlatch that I've told you about, it was Dick who could be called and told, "Well now, we need four more tents and we're going to need somebody barking from outside to the inside," and he said, "Okay, I'm doing it, I'm doing it." He was very, very quick with anything that was promotional. And then there was Jeanne Wasserman. Now that could be considered—what I said about collectors certainly didn't apply to Jeanne because Jeanne never said one word about any artist she knew in terms of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because at the very time they were collecting—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right. But she had come—actually, she had come, you could call it, from the corporate source because I forgot to say that in having that jump from the prestigious, old family Brahmins into a mixed board. Most organizations here I believe, did what the ICA did, which was—and whether they did it for this reason, this is the way it turned out. They had some—I think they are subordinate groups [laughs], supplementary groups. In their case, it was the design—what was it called—the design project? [00:08:04] Design—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean at the ICA?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, out on the river. Uh, the design group? I'm sorry. I can't remember—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that was the way—

SUE M. THURMAN: —that's not quite—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —of bringing people in—

SUE M. THURMAN: —its name.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —before—[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: That would—

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SUE M. THURMAN: The—you see this design—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Design—

SUE M. THURMAN: —project, the institute, we haven't talked about the fact that aside from we've talked constantly about the fact that they had no money. But it was always doing things like creating program and charging for it. It really did the impossible financially and not—I'm not saying that because I was there because it had happened before me, and it happened after me. But one of those things that it did was dream up the design project. At that time, people were getting aware of international designers. I mean, it was not just an isolated experience here, but it was something—I guess Jim Platt started it. I think he did and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: He had in the—you mean in the early '50s—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —moving more and more towards that?

SUE M. THURMAN: And he could invite this one and that, and being invited would be a compliment, you see? And then the person would be told that the membership fee is \$1000. Well, in long run, I don't say it was \$1000, but they were having to pay. That was a way of deciding ahead of time that you're going to give money. However, the fallacy in that was that it took all the money they gave. I mean, it was not really realistic to say that, "We can have this, and we could do everything we're telling you we're going to do, which will be seminars. We'll come to your company and give talks, and you'll do this, and that, and the other. And at the end of the year, we're certainly not going to still have that money that you gave for your annual fee." So—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because it had been used up and—

SUE M. THURMAN: And we—you know that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —carried the—

SUE M. THURMAN: —that happens the world over wherever you start projects that are going to support your other project. [00:02:00] What supports the first project is not the next project. It's money, and the—there's just no substitute. The only one of these subsidiaries that ever worked effectively did so because the staff and others worked double-time, making these complex and very good exhibition materials and sending them all over. Now, that did a second good thing. It not only brought back money to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And from whom? Oh, from the people—

SUE M. THURMAN: And you see—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —who pledged?

SUE M. THURMAN: All right. Let's say three places used the show. Well, if we didn't have them, we would've paid the whole thing. They knew we didn't have the money, and they didn't have quite the exposure we had, in some cases, to make the shows, so we made a deal. The three of us will use it and the cost will be divided in half. You two will pay the cost, and we will do the work. So, you can see why I say it really was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And meanwhile, you would then have practically the full amount that someone had given as a member of your design group, right? I mean, if someone was told they had to put up \$1000 a year.

SUE M. THURMAN: Now, was spent on the—you know because you would have to pay—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, in that case—

SUE M. THURMAN: It was a kind of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —oh I see, you're saying the same thing—

SUE M. THURMAN: No, no, no, no. I'm saying the only thing that really worked. It wasn't those things like the design. They had other purposes. They were good in many ways. They were good from a standpoint of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Not financially.

SUE M. THURMAN: Not financially.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or is this—where it is provided the staff worked double-time.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, as long as you could keep people who were willing to bring their husbands and wives, and children, and dogs, and so on, and give their all to the ICA then you could uh—and also, every time one of those shows went somewhere and got reviewed in another newspaper or in Europe or wherever, you mean you had—it was a well-kept secret that this is really a little place, which is going on nothing. [00:04:04] Just sort of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Whereas—

SUE M. THURMAN: —a gutsy little operation.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the general perception was you were an influential and a—

SUE M. THURMAN: Of course—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —presence out of proportion to what you really were.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right and you had to keep that up. You didn't want to be the one who dropped it. [Laughs.] For a long time, I was the longest tenured, I think, director. I was there for nine years. Yeah. And nine years at the ICA will age you. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you've told about that as you pulled away. By the way was it—at that time, you were also a charter member of a committee for the arts at MIT.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did that occur during your tenure at ICA?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. As a matter of fact, I think [Catherine] Kay Stratton is one of the most dynamic people who ever entered the art scene in Boston. I'm sure—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, this is the wife of the then—

SUE M. THURMAN: Of Jay Stratton, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Julius Stratton.

SUE M. THURMAN: And Kay's friend—now wait. I must say the name, just a minute. Kay and her friend Ida [Ely] Rubin from Greenwich, both of them were in and out of New York every week because of their national prominence on doing things. They were both just as serious about what they undertook as if they were going to—about to get their degree on it. They were totally amble, good-looking, brilliant people having parties for 500 without batting an eye every time anything needed to be launched. So, they just said, "Let's get art into MIT," and they started having parties at the president's house and inviting very generously all of us who worked in the field around to help, and inviting artists who naturally aren't going to say no to MIT in a period in which technology is a major base for art. [00:06:16]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And so, they were invited—what—for parties or conferences?

SUE M. THURMAN: Parties, dinners, conferences, and soon, I guess after—we were a small committee at first. See, I got here just when everything was small, and that was on that committee. I believe there were only 10 of us, and the next year, it had—suddenly, all sorts of bylaws and charters. It was a new organization. They really didn't fool around, those two. And now, it was an international organization, and it had—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And its purpose was?

SUE M. THURMAN: Its purpose was to appreciate and attract art, and understand the people who make it, and help in any way possible.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, actually, to acquire art and well—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it was whole bundle, and it was about the same time that György Kepes was setting up the Center for Advanced Visual Studies. So, you see, all of these things were blossoming together. There was a time when I would go over to talk to Dr. Stratton or whoever would listen about the ICA's financial problems because we really were a ready-made organization if anyone wanted exactly that organization. But they were founding, they were reaching out in terms of their alumni.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

SUE M. THURMAN: Also—and they polled the alumni for "what have you collected." I mean, they could go about things at such a wonderful way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, but what did President Stratton say when you suggested or were you [cross talk]—
[00:08:00]

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, he said he would think about it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But it never came to anything?

SUE M. THURMAN: It never came to—well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Take on the MIT was big?

SUE M. THURMAN: You know it was too small a problem for them to tackle [laughs]. It really was, and also it had in it the possibility of offending. They really didn't mean to do that. They would rather do something fresh, and they really did it beautifully, and they didn't hurt the ICA one whit while doing it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, the center that Kepes started?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, and the whole—see I think the Kepes Center was fine. It had a wonderful—it had an annual rotating program as you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. Well—

SUE M. THURMAN: But this other—the Center for Advanced—for the—what is it? I think I have it on—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Committee for the Arts?

SUE M. THURMAN: The Committee for the Arts, visual arts met several times a year. It was a weekend. It was fantastic, the best possible speakers. I remember if we had recently gotten a work such as Sandy Calder's piece that's there—

ROBERT F. BROWN: A great—[inaudible]—isn't it?

SUE M. THURMAN: He came, of course, and talked about it. When he would—see, they just had everything going for them. I say they, I should say we because I was in it. But I always sort of contrasted it with how hard it was to do things when you were totally without the power that MIT had. Oh, and I did suggest what they are now doing, but I'm sure a lot of other people suggested it. And that was do a deal with all the college students so that they can come to all the institutions in town without paying. You will give the institution the money, you know? So that—I'm sure many people came to them with that. [Laughs.] I'm not taking any credit for it, but that happens now I think. Anyway, when you said something in front of that audience, I don't know how much money you were speaking to. [00:10:11] It was an enormous amount. These were mostly people who had reached the stage where they really weren't concerned about how much money they had, and they wanted to do nice things. So, if Sandy Calder, he did come, people heard him, and I think after that for while there was no problem at all in hearing that some other wonderful thing could happen. People began just—they began soliciting themselves for that organization.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I see. You mean soliciting among themselves or—

SUE M. THURMAN: No, I just mean soliciting themselves.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: I mean, they came, and it just warmed their hearts, and it was done so beautifully. Ida and Kay were just ingenious. The style at which they developed that was the best I've ever seen in the arts. I don't think either of them called themselves an artist, though Ida had certainly done a great many projects as a consultant as well.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But she was a person very connected in the organization?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes, very, yeah. And they—I—well, there was one person in New Orleans who was that good. Muriel Bultman Francis that we spoke about. But I think the three of them stand out in my mind. I'm sure they are the best I've ever seen.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, the—who were some of the others on that committee, locals—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, Judd—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: Want to turn the—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, this committee for visual arts or Committee for the Arts, wasn't it?

SUE M. THURMAN: Council for the Arts at MIT. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, they were from all over, and I think it grew to—I wouldn't want to say the number, but it became very large. [00:12:08] Had several meetings a year and put out publications, and so on. People like Leo Beranek—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were the—what did he—

SUE M. THURMAN: —of Bolt, Beranek & Newman, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Can you explain who they are there?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, he was a very prominent—he is—I'm not sure what he's doing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Scientist?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think he's living, and I'm not sure about that. I think so.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But his qualifications would be what—as a collector or?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, he—yeah. Well, he had come through MIT. He was very affable person who was good at smoothing the path for things. I think maybe a little of that would be needed around if you came into a very formal, scholarly place and brought Sandy Calder, you know? [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was Calder—how did Calder behave or—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —his [inaudible]?

SUE M. THURMAN: —he was in his red-and-black shirt.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sweatshirt. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, and he was fun. He had a good time. Let's see. The Connors family were in it. Sarah Caldwell was there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now she was the—

SUE M. THURMAN: She—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —musical impresario here at the opera.

SUE M. THURMAN: Harold Edgerton was there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who is what?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, Edgerton—

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was on the MIT faculty, right?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Pioneer in strobe photography?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He was uncle—they all called him uncle. I can't remember uncle what, but that's—the students loved him. He's the—I saw the other day the boat down at the [New England] aquarium is named for him. He must have—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: He maybe left the boat to them, I don't know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, were these people—

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: —there would be meetings where you would all get together or?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, these were collections. [00:14:00] Let's say twice a year—I hope I'm remembering it right—we came together for a couple of days, at least, and had a theme. It was sort of like a conference, and it would be a report on what has happened since we last met and some sort of wonderful news about what's about to happen.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you also rule on what acquisitions—

SUE M. THURMAN: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No? That was done by—

SUE M. THURMAN: That would be done in committee. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about other faculty involved there was?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, well, let's see now before I come to other faculty—there certainly were many, but Fran Fahnestock is one of those great people. How did I not name her when I was reading off to you—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What ICA trustee?

SUE M. THURMAN: —ICA trustees.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because she was also at ICA?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: And she had—talk about subsidiary groups, people giggle because in Boston the women's committees are named ladies' committees. But she headed the ladies' committee and was fantastic.

ROBERT F. BROWN: At the ICA?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, and so were they. They worked very hard, and they did whatever you asked them to do. She was so good at that they finally said, "Well, come on, be on the board." Fran Fahnestock is as good a trustee as I've ever seen. She was wonderful.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was her background?

SUE M. THURMAN: Music and she was a fine businesswoman herself. Her husband was Fahnestock of the stock exchange in Chicago, Harris Fahnestock. Vince Fulmer was from MIT. He was an officer. I think he was the treasurer. Bart Hayes, another person from the art world was in it—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you get to know him very—too—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes. He's one of the ones of us back when it was a small group.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. What was he like then, would you say? [00:16:01]

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, Bart was very devoted to his field and very much an educator in the literal sense of the word, how to put things across, how to say things so people will understand them.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there an underlying plan as to what you would do for MIT apart from your conferences and all? Those—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes. The underlying plan is in the front of this little book that I'm glancing at. It was a large plan, which left nothing, which didn't cut-off any possibilities, but it would enrich the environment. They didn't say because it's too specialized, but that presumably was what they thought. Jim Killian was on it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that again was a president.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. He had been president.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. James Killian

SUE M. THURMAN: Bill Lane. Now you see, those people who had collected art were really wonderfully placed on a committee like this because they weren't going to have to be going over the operations of a little institution, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, certainly.

SUE M. THURMAN: They had collections and could offer them. People could turn them down if they didn't want them, and so that they were perfect in this. Vera List was here, Bates Lowry.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was Vera List's relation to MIT at that time? She was?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it was because she was an art collector that she was invited.

ROBERT F. BROWN: She was major—

SUE M. THURMAN: It didn't have to be that you had some—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

SUE M. THURMAN: —connection.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And later then came up, I guess, from her a foundation, an art center, a museum—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. See, that's it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at MIT?

SUE M. THURMAN: And whether they—I don't think this list that we one day want an art center and maybe that wasn't even thought of when this started. But those are the kinds of things that happened if you get together enough people, build their interests, and they have already built their money, so—[00:18:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Bates Lowry, he was a big player in the museum world in the '60s—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at least, wasn't he?

SUE M. THURMAN: He had come here to the University of Massachusetts for a few years. Well, there were a lot of— Archibald MacLeish, Agnes Mongan—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, of Harvard.

SUE M. THURMAN: Philip Morrison who was, of course, a faculty member.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, it's pretty much anybody—

SUE M. THURMAN: It was a wonderful group—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —prominent and respected in—

SUE M. THURMAN: I.M. Pei, David Rockefeller Jr. who's certainly made himself useful around this town.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. You mean as a promoter, as a giver?

SUE M. THURMAN: And as a—and as a board member. He's a very good board member. Roger Sonnabend—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, he was a businessman but a collector as well?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Paul Tishman who was a realtor—you know, a very, very well-to-do realtor from New York. But they had wonderful collections—primitive and Lipchitz, I think—and gave from their collections. So, it goes on, but you see—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now—

SUE M. THURMAN: —the caliber of it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, so. And that was pretty satisfying work for you? I mean—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, I loved it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at the same time, you then go back to the ICA and you realize you have an absolute struggle by [inaudible]?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that ever discouraging?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, because I wouldn't have wanted to be left out of this, would I?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Well, when you left because you wanted to leave or—

SUE M. THURMAN: You mean from the ICA?

ROBERT F. BROWN: —was it pressure from the ICA and in '60—

SUE M. THURMAN: I left because of a family situation really. Also, I think you could just say that you have really given all you could give to it. [00:20:00] It was really a total risk as far as what you got out of it personally.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you think the ICA would—

SUE M. THURMAN: And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —would continue indefinitely or did you think it's—it was still rather precarious?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I had always thought that it had to change. It needed directors to stay long enough to do something and then to leave in time for a fresh person to come in.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you feel you were there long enough to really—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, I was there longer—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you had plans underway?

SUE M. THURMAN: —I believe than anyone else.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you felt you had gotten various things underway?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, right. Yeah. At that time, I think that was the general feeling. It's the kind of institution that isn't going to ever look back. I mean, occasionally when you're doing something like this interview, you will look back, but it's not likely to be thinking about what it used to do, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: No.

SUE M. THURMAN: It's—I don't know how aggressive it now feels about what it must do and should do, but presumably that's still its posture.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see. But looking back because they'd say "Well, it was a different sort of place then or it was certainly different at that time, and therefore, we don't bother to look back? We aren't going to learn anything from our past—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to speak of."

SUE M. THURMAN: —I think by nature if something is called contemporary, it takes the liberty to focus on the

present. It's not out of disrespect. It's just that things, which were recent but not current. Think about last year's calendar, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: And I think it's the same way at the institute. Whereas at the MFA or some organization that doesn't have that particular context, you're not working always in any one period or in any one sort of thing. So, whatever happened, you're more—you're going to make a list of the outstanding things. [00:22:00] You're going to keep saying them and keep from—keep advertising them, and so on. But I think that the very fact that this is updated, by nature, keeps it from doing that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Do you think, at some point, it might have or would've at least—in terms of, at least marketing, itself, it might well have pointed to its accomplishments of the past?

SUE M. THURMAN: It kind of did that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It did?

SUE M. THURMAN: When it had its 50th anniversary. It—well, it did it in a verbal fashion and abbreviated it in print. I think it would be wonderful if it did sometime put it altogether as a book of some sort, or maybe that wouldn't seem the right way to do it in this day [laughs].

ROBERT F. BROWN: I mean daily, it didn't really refer—reference—refer to the past—[inaudible.]

SUE M. THURMAN: No, no, no, no. No, there was none of this, "Are we doing it right, let's look and see." Or at least maybe I neglected to do it, [laughs] but there was none of that when I was there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you had it in a year more or less with the Ford Foundation evaluating art schools, which programs which they had funded?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. This happened, I'm sure, right after, out of my activities at MIT because—well, I say I'm sure, but I had always assumed it. By then the Strattons had gone to New York, and the new president of MIT was Howard Johnson. I heard from McNeil Lowry in New York—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of the Ford Foundation?

SUE M. THURMAN: And I had known him because I had always been going there looking for favors. He had not been able to grant them because they didn't have setups to do it for the arts so—for the visual arts. So, he wrote and said, "Well, at last, we're about to do something for the fine arts, and I'm hoping you can spend the year and do it for us." [00:24:07] Well, it was wonderful for me because I was going through this sort of turmoil. In the course of all that, I went to Cranbrook and 29, I guess it was, other independent art schools and brought back tons of material and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you made many contacts in that sense, didn't you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Of course, yes. And at Cranbrook, I didn't realize they were in such a state of flux. They had just brought in Glenn Paulson, a very fine gentleman who was a good architect and very—literally a gentle man. He was coping with a bit of turmoil such as you always have when someone's been present for many, many years and that person is no longer there. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was—that had been who?

SUE M. THURMAN: That was Sepeshy—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, Zoltan.

SUE M. THURMAN: Zoltan.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Sepeshy?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. When I went there for the Ford Foundation, I guess that was Glenn's first year, I believe it was. So, I was amazed. I had the impression of Cranbrook that you had of the ICA. Here is this distinguished place, somehow subsidized, sitting in the sort of a face to the angels kind of position. There were, I guess, six different institutions run by the Cranbrook Foundation, a museum, a cathedral, a girls' school, a boys' school, a graduate art academy, a science museum. Well, it was not expected to just drive along in Michigan, and suddenly, here you have all this. I was really taken with it from the moment I got out of the car, I was really. [00:26:02] I didn't know how could there be anything like this that I didn't know any more about than

I knew about Cranbrook. Well, they were—what it didn't show was that they were very worried because [laughs] they didn't have any money, where have we heard that before? I found that very hard to believe, but I took all of my—asked all of my questions having to do with their grant that I was there to do the site visit.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because the grant had been actually very important to them, is that right?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yes, and it had gone on for years. See, it was a seven-year thing that I was reporting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was it to help strengthen departments?

SUE M. THURMAN: It was to put money into studio art but, uh—and it was, as I say, a seven-year event, so it was a lot of money and a lot of work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you had no indication when you were doing this survey of its precariousness? Or did you —

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, I did. As the survey went on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I see. Paulson and—

SUE M. THURMAN: People said, "Well, you know," and it finally sort of—they said, "Do you know what we could do to get over this stage we're in because people just think that there's no end to the money here and actually there is an end to the money here. We don't have any setup. We don't know how to raise any or nobody thinks we need any." So, after two or three conversations like that, you find yourself giving them some answers, but being very careful not to imply that the Ford Foundation is going to give some more money, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, in fact, they had told me [laughs] to be sure if anyone asks you, be sure to say no—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is the end of the rainbow, huh?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. This—we're here for purposes of making the programs of the future good, not here to see whether you could get some more money. [00:28:02] So, I started talking the conversation. Well, there weren't in any unusual state, you know? But they were right to be concerned. So then Glenn told me that, actually, he does have permission to hire a vice president, and he thinks that vice president should be a sort of troubleshooter for the arts, and should be there a limited length of time, that's the only thing he has permission for it, you know to do something in three years that will get this thing on its feet. Subtle. You know, how the story turned out.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well no, but he then?

SUE M. THURMAN: He then hired me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hired you but even—you were in the midst of your Ford Foundation evaluation?

SUE M. THURMAN: No. Well, I had to finish the Ford thing, of course.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You came back.

SUE M. THURMAN: I came back. That was one of the last places I went, Cranbrook, which meant that back at my home in Boston or Brookline, I had a bag, a shopping bag full of materials from every one of those schools because they didn't want to answer questions. They wanted to tell me things, and would I please write it down? So, I was always writing down what they wanted me to get—

ROBERT F. BROWN: To get, you mean to understand?

SUE M. THURMAN: Understand and then they said, "You could find out those things you want to know from all of this," and of course, they knew what the answers were, but I had to read 100 pages to get it. So, I came back here and called Sue Perry and a few other stalwarts who had worked at the ICA and said, "Could you come here from work each day, and we'll work till bedtime?" I'll work during the day, and you-all will make it up at night." I was trying to do—[00:30:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You got people to come—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in the—terrible—

SUE M. THURMAN: Put it together.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —task of putting it together.

SUE M. THURMAN: And all of this information, which I was so ready to get from them, I had it on my color cards, you know, yellow cards, green cards—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You had—

SUE M. THURMAN: —blue cards.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —pulled it out yourself.

SUE M. THURMAN: I had to pull it out, put it on the cards and then one of these wonderful people would take all the yellow cards and string them through my house. It was just an incredible job before computers. So, we made charts that answered all those questions, putting all the schools together, so you could then see, well, this one is better at this, and this one is better at that, and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What—do you recall what some of those questions were by the way?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they fairly profound or just—

SUE M. THURMAN: I could torture you by getting out the report. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: No, no. Fairly commonsensical kinds of questions?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, commonsensical if you've been dealing with foundation grants, but a little unusual if you haven't. It was like—well, I remember the thing that I didn't know very much about, and therefore, it bothered me a lot to work with it. I had to learn a lot before I could work with it—was the entire picture of financial aid in schools, and how this could be made to fit better with that. So, there were very tough issues there because there's a lot of money at stake. I have forgotten the total, so I shouldn't say the total.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean for the Ford Foundation?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, but it was 30 institutions, seven years, seven times 30. It wasn't any little amount that each one was getting so totally, it was a lot of money. And in anything, the first time you do it, it's going to be awkward in some respects. [00:32:00] So, I think what they wanted, they wanted me to give them their final report and that I did. You have to have a report. A foundation can't just give away money, you know, so there has to be a formal report filed. I did that, and that's probably what the money was for. But I know that he also wanted—McNeil Lowry—wanted some idea of things we've done badly as we laid it out, and things we've done right as we laid it out. And that's what all the charts were about.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you, uh—so when Glenn Paulson who was—what—an architect by training you said or something like that?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: He asked you, well did you jump at a job at Cranbrook or?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because you were going through some turmoil at the time—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: I really hadn't. It's a difficult thing. A year of a divorce is very hard, and with one young child and all of those things. I knew that whatever I did next, it had to fit a lot of things. It couldn't be as we had all gone off to the ICA together. So, this was going to be—but again, in the arts, and if you're in something as specialized as contemporary art for the last 10 years—nine years I had been—if you're going to get a job that might be on par with what you need or should have, it won't necessarily be in the city you're in. It probably won't.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

SUE M. THURMAN: So, it has to be somewhere else, and this was not terribly distant. Michigan was not all that—you know, it was not like West Coast. It was the nicest little community you could imagine. Everybody, it was a residential, the only residential independent art school. [00:34:05] The faculty were—the Saarinens, of course, were the designers. A number of well-known artists—were brought there by the sponsor, and they built each of the institutions. The house that Blair and I lived in was built by Saarinen.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your son and you.

SUE M. THURMAN: It was a wonderful place. We had an Italian gardener who pruned [laughs] our roses. It was like Marienbad. The largest swimming pool. I don't know how far or something, a very large swimming pool, a huge forest surrounding the Booth estate. Booth, of course, were the publishers of the Detroit—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the money comes from them?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah, right. Well, the money came from two families. She was—oh, gee.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Mrs. Booth's family—

SUE M. THURMAN: Mrs. Booth's family and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was a—

SUE M. THURMAN: George Booth were both well-to-do. They were both publishing families.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Scripps family and Booths.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, from Canada. The place was just marvelous, and what we later learned was you pay when you leave, because you can never understand why you can't stay there forever. As we came in—and I could see Blair loved it all, and I loved it all, and I said, "You know, we're here for three years" and then this came back to haunt us—

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was too young to realize—

SUE M. THURMAN: [Laughs.] Came back to haunt us.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The patience.

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. But it wasn't totally joyful because this business—now, you see the fact that the homes go with the jobs, all of these wonderful things. But think about it, what does that mean when some faculty member seems not to be any longer pulling his load or not to be what you need? [00:36:05] So, Glenn had taken the job on the promise that he would do these things that needed doing. And I had no sooner gotten there—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Including raising money.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, finding a way to, which was by hiring me, I think. But giving people notice, and this is a very small faculty, and they were all very well-known because they were Cranbrook.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And did—but the board realized things were very serious?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, but that didn't matter. Glenn told me that the board—I asked him a lot before he was doing it. He said, "One of your jobs is to try to warn me I'm in a very bad situation."

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is before you went on?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, this is after I got there, but before he started giving artists notice, faculty people their notice. Well, on the first one, he drew a total explosion, and everything went into effect. It was a little place where nothing much seemed to be happening, you see. But when this happens, you're taking somebody's home away. You gave it to them, but you're taking it away? You can't do that. So, all the rules of, that you're familiar with having to do with colleges and hiring and firing, and all that, people began to come in, representatives of various unions, I called them. We had—the students had to be told this horrible thing has happened. Well, he then went on and told the next person [laughs]—it was—it got to the point where it was so painful. I am very hard to scare in a situation like that because I had been through a lot in running organizations. [00:38:01] But I got to the point where could hardly eat because—I mean, just sort of choked up. It was such a stressful situation. You walked down the street to your home, you're a newcomer there, and your little boy is having a good time

there, and going to school in children's section, and all that. And then people are getting at war with—going to war with each other, you see.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They did.

SUE M. THURMAN: I represented change, and I'm not sure that some people didn't think I had done these things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, they were—so a good many of the people there became quite hostile?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the feeling—again, was this the board that felt that something had to be improved and soon—

SUE M. THURMAN: No, we're back to that kind of thing where the distinguished people of the community are on the board. It was Glenn. They knew that they had problems with the outgoing regime. And Glenn—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And it did [inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: —was such a gentleman. I doubt that he dragged through all the details of what would have to be done, but maybe he did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But he possibly—he—but he was very aware of the shortcomings?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, he's the one who did the whole thing. But any woman who comes in, moves cross-country with her child, and she's been doing the Ford thing, and she's doing—I mean, it's—somebody is going to think that person must be pulling strings around here causing this—it wasn't happening before she got here, you know, kind of thing, so. But that's not a big part of it. It was not that I thought people blamed me. It's that I—it was such a sad thing to cope with, and it went on. Glenn fell ill. He was taken to the hospital in the middle of the night with a stress-related illness. And then we had the question of who's in charge? [00:40:03] I was in charge according to the board and with Glenn's request. I was elected, at one point, when it was said that Glenn is not well enough to take this any longer, and that lasted about a day until—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were elected the—what—acting—

SUE M. THURMAN: President, no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —president?

SUE M. THURMAN: Acting, I guess. I think though that he had already said he wouldn't take it. But that didn't last long because there was a person, a very nice person, Wally Mitchell—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Wallace Mitchell—

SUE M. THURMAN: —who was a native in every way to the organization.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And had been a teacher there.

SUE M. THURMAN: Charming person, a teacher, artist, all those things that would endear the next person. Nobody was saying, "Is the next person going to be tough enough to deal with problems?" because they didn't want problems.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

SUE M. THURMAN: So that wasn't a qualification. So, it was decided overnight [laughs] as I think most things are—it was decided that I would do all these things that you need to have battled your way through administrative jobs to do. I would do more than I had come there to do.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean not just fundraising but other things?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, the—I would be the point of reference for the administration, and Wally who knew everybody would be the front person. Now, it's amazing that we got along very well.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He, too, was a rather sweet person?

SUE M. THURMAN: He was a sweet person.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Like Paulson?

SUE M. THURMAN: And, of course, I had to be very, very—it was hard to project enough to get everything—get anything done in that environment without projecting too much to look right to these graceful people who weren't accustomed to any activity. [00:42:08]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you had to go very carefully?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes. So, after a little bit of that, I thought, Well what's going to happen around here? Some night, they're going to haul me off with Meniere's disease or whatever because it's—to have the responsibility without the authority is not good.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And would Wally back you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, he would but he was ever so casual. He was really casual. He was smart and in every way, had wonderful qualities, but it was just not consistent really. It was really more like a sort of everything was just another day. It wasn't—you didn't see it as a part of an organization, which has got develop. So, I had heard so much about, We don't have enough money, and I had said to begin with, "Do you have endowment?" there when they were first talking to me. Well, they had one but not much, and they were using it. It was almost gone and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, you hadn't that information before you got there? I mean I thought—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —when you did the Ford survey, you presumably got—

SUE M. THURMAN: No, they didn't keep anything for me. I had to get the information.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you knew that they were—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right. But I also knew it wasn't the worst thing I ever saw, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: It was so far from the worst thing I ever saw that it wasn't funny, but I didn't say that to them. Well, they showed me the collection, which was in storage. The last thing the Booth intended to do in their great vision was to build a museum. They had built—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Booths were gone some years by then.

SUE M. THURMAN: They were gone.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They'd died.

SUE M. THURMAN: But their son was on the board. [Laughs.] He was an interesting person. Anyway, I know several sons were around. They had built a gallery, and that was to have been for current works, a beautiful gallery and a beautiful library. [00:44:05] Everything you could think of with a fountain outside with Milles figures and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's Carl Milles who had taught there?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. So—but they explained to me, the reason we have all these artworks down here in storage is that they never built the museum. I thought that's—something is wrong with this story. You've got world-quality art collection down here, why is—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why was it? How did it come there to begin with?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, so I began to ask questions, and I learned that Berenson had been hired by Mrs. Booth, and that they had gone on many trips, and that most of this was—much of this was bought with Berenson's advice. Well, everything I heard, it got better and better, you know? So, I thought, well, these works, I—even I know coming here from a contemporary institute, I know a sphinx when I see it, and I know some of these other things. I'm kind of kidding. I didn't know what the things were—[laughs]—but it mystified me that they should be down here more or less exposed. Now when I say more or less exposed, of course, the doors had locks on them, but these objects were not stored as you would store an art collection of that quality. They had been assembled, and at that moment, these very—these people of great ambition and generosity had died. Now, the artworks are still sitting here, and the people who come here to go to school are more interested in their own work. We're

back into the contemporary swing, you see?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

SUE M. THURMAN: So, yes we own some artworks, but they never thought much about it. [00:46:03] Now, that's exaggerating a bit. I'm sure there are some people who had thought a great deal about it because they had a Henry Moore you wouldn't believe. They had—oh, they had the best of a number of things, and I could see that. I began to say to everybody, "What is this institution? What do you want it to be?" I talked to the board about that. "Well, we want to be the best independent art school anywhere."

ROBERT F. BROWN: The board didn't mind such questions?

SUE M. THURMAN: No. So, I said, "Well, I'm not criticizing owning a collection, but I'm saying you could be the best independent art school without owning this collection because you don't have a building to put it in. It's in storage. Is it doing anybody any good?"

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did they say to that?

SUE M. THURMAN: "Well, we're paying insurance on it," they said. [Laughs] So, I said, "Well, let me think it over." They began to say, "We could sell a painting." I said, "Please don't do anything negative," you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Meaning? What do you mean?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, if you took something out and sold it, that means you're bad off. If you change your policy and have some reason to share this with others in a grand way, that gets lots of attention and triples what anybody could dream it's worth, then you have made positive news, and that was what finally happened. That's the briefest I can tell the story. It took six months in New York, six months before New York. It should've had several years. I said, "The more years you spend on this, the more you'll make," but they couldn't believe it. It was auctioned.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were there three years, so this was in your last year?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, this was, yes, my last year—

ROBERT F. BROWN: In '73?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Nineteen seventy-three.

SUE M. THURMAN: I tried so hard to make sure they knew. I don't think they could believe what it was going to bring, and therefore, they couldn't believe me until it had brought it. [00:48:05] They couldn't believe all those people from Sotheby's and other auction houses, Christie's because, you know, they're in the business, and they're just pulling our leg. So, there was nobody they could believe, and I made one attempt before the final setting of the dates. I said, "Truly, every day this is advertised adds to the value, when you have something unique, the more people who want it, the more you will get for it. That's the name of the game." I said, "How much—" They were makers of Cadillacs and such, the board were.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Auto industry.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And I said, "How much is the finest Cadillac you can buy nowadays?" So, they told me, and they giggled, and I said, "Well, the sphinx will bring—" I've forgotten how the figures went, but I gave them the sphinx in terms of Cadillacs, and it brought more than I had said. But anyway—

ROBERT F. BROWN: They should have been delighted with that.

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, they were, but I'll tell you it was almost too big an event for the place to assimilate. We had learned that from the coming in of the new president, and he dismisses a couple of staff members, and that was more than they could assimilate. So, they're too easily excited but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Right. How did they decide finally to let—to consider to having the collection auctioned?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did that require a major rethinking?

SUE M. THURMAN: It required many analyses by yours truly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what about the faculty? Were they against the sale?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, they didn't. They really not—they didn't really—they weren't concerned that much about the collection. But the main thing is that it was not done in a way that was easy to criticize. [00:50:05] So much was held out of it, and I'll bet you'll see someday they'll sell the rest—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, you mean they held back?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, I held back. I mean, I said to begin with, "The only thing I would think of sponsoring—after all I have my reputation to uphold too—I wouldn't think of selling anything that I think the school should keep. And I would have a very low ceiling on that. I mean, I would be very cautious in that way, and I think that there should be so much held out that you sell what's left, and you get every dollar you can get for what's left. That's why I want us to use all the time we—time cost nothing. But then they wanted the money. You know they had gotten so they could see the money. They knew it was there, but they didn't know how much. They weren't sophisticated enough to wait. But they kind of divided into two groups. The people who went to New York a lot and could keep up with the sales, they certainly did. You see, there were 12 sales—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Wow.

SUE M. THURMAN: —twelve—and I set up at a hotel and got a different set of volunteers for every sale. The whole idea was to find new buyers, and the volunteers knew that they were there both as helpers and as buyers. Of course, Sotheby's liked that. The more new buyers you can bring in, the more the old buyers will pay. So, it worked very well, and it broke records as of the time in which it happened.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And these were people with some Cranbrook connection in some places?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, depending on—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Not really?

SUE M. THURMAN: I didn't have enough people from Cranbrook to—you know, they—those who were from there and who loved the idea were absolutely inexhaustible. [00:52:05] They were great. The others who were kind of iffy about it, we didn't need around.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the amount raised sufficient to begin a respectable endowment?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it was triple the amount estimated. That was pretty good.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And so—

SUE M. THURMAN: They estimated one million and we got three and a half, but we could have gotten five in another year I feel.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that was put into an endowment?

SUE M. THURMAN: Absolutely. They better still have it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: But the things we took out and didn't sell would also be a very valuable batch of art. Well, the way it was done to show you—I don't know how we got it done in that length of time because it was sometime in the fall when we decided to do it. And then there were all kinds of PR things that could've taken forever like going to the Detroit Institute and saying, "Now, we're going to do this. We don't want to take off to New York anything that you want here. We would accept your offer on any object you want here." They a very nicely said, "Thank you. That's very nice, but we have what we need in each category where you've got something, so go in peace," [laughs] and we did that all over. Then we had—since they didn't hold anything out, we then had an open house at Cranbrook to which we did not invite any of the art crowd. The beautiful people who come in on Friday to Sotheby's, they didn't know about it. The people who knew about it were the directors of museums in Cleveland and Toledo and all around, anywhere that would know about Cranbrook, and some of the kids from here who came out to help me, and by the way, Al Lank [ph] came out to help. [00:54:03]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Al Lank—

SUE M. THURMAN: All this—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the packer and shipper here in Boston?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right. And so anyway, all put together, we went to the Booth mansion, which was now the publicly-used house and had parties for these people. They, if they wanted to, could stay several days and visit the collection, and really think about buying this. Not buy it from us, but come to the sale when it happens. Now, you've really pushed the price some. So, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you've got serious institutions and—

SUE M. THURMAN: Sherman Lee and people as such—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a few collectors came?

SUE M. THURMAN: Sherman Lee was there, and he bought it after he decided to buy it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: From the Cleveland Museum?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. So—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But they couldn't touch. It was going to be only through the auction?

SUE M. THURMAN: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Of course, these people didn't know what was going on. Nothing wrong was going on. It's just that they could—the bottom price was much higher than they were accustomed to. Now, that's what I had to take the responsibility for. It's the most responsibility I've ever taken—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean—

SUE M. THURMAN: —in any of my jobs.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —who was not used to it? People that are—

SUE M. THURMAN: I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in Cranbrook you mean? They weren't—

SUE M. THURMAN: The people, the beautiful people coming in to bid on nice things at Sotheby's.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They felt the price was—

SUE M. THURMAN: This batch had higher prices. That's because we have been pushing up the interest. Not that they don't always push up the interest as much as they can. But I asked them if they had ever had an institution play the game with them before, you know, we'll see what we can do, and you'll see what you can do, and they said no, so they liked that. But anyway, let's see now, what was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, now your—and your board was behind this. You mentioned somebody Jones. Was he the head of your board—

SUE M. THURMAN: Ernie Jones [ph]—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who was he?

SUE M. THURMAN: —was a wonderful fellow.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was a great kind of—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: He was having—some kind of auto promotion in New York at the same time we were doing the first one of these sales. [00:56:04] Everybody came over in black tie, and so on, and then they took everybody back to General Motors, or whatever we were. It was really very interesting. But what I started to tell you about the responsibility, they have to have an officer there. Somebody has to be the responsible person for the institution—

ROBERT F. BROWN: At?

SUE M. THURMAN: While the sales occur. That's why I stayed so much of the time in New York and was the one who got the phone call, oftentimes five o'clock the afternoon. The sale is at eight, and they've run through everything they know in terms of what this may bring and who's looking at it, and you know so-and-so. I mean, it was a real conference and—

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SUE M. THURMAN: —stayed so much of the time in New York and was the one who got the phone call, oftentimes five o'clock the afternoon. The sale is at eight, and they've run through everything they know in terms of what this may bring and who's looking at it and you know so-and-so. I mean it was a real conference. Remember, if you set the bottom too high, it won't sell so that was a lot of responsibility. I pushed the price up. I agreed with them to push it up usually on—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean, you and Sotheby partnering at—with the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. They have to have an officer in the institution.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right, and you—

SUE M. THURMAN: They can't go around doing that, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

SUE M. THURMAN: They can't do it ahead of time because they've just gotten in new facts and all of that. So, somebody has to be the one, and it didn't reverse us in any case. Not one of those changes proved to be bad advice.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you had, uh—you've done a great thing for the Cranbrook, hadn't you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I enjoyed doing it, and I think it was. I'm not sure that they would—I think a lot of people, you would walk down the street and say, "What's an endowment?" Defining the difference an endowment and any other kind of money they might—people just don't know these technical things, a lot of people don't. So, but if anyone really understood that that money, \$3.5 million, how much has it turned into by now? With the market the way it's been, I really can't imagine how much it's—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yet, some of the faculty, veterans were forever hostile, weren't they?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I imagine—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or—

SUE M. THURMAN: —I imagine some.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —so forth?

SUE M. THURMAN: I imagine so.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Wallace Mitchell was okay. I mean, you weren't with—

SUE M. THURMAN: He was okay, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mentioned Richard Thomas was [inaudible]—[00:02:01]

SUE M. THURMAN: I think that he tended to be critical, and if he and he wasn't critical, he was stern enough. He couldn't laugh about anything, and you can't run something like that and be at all times ideal. I'm sure that I called Cranbrook and said, "Somebody, please find me the helmet that goes with the armor, it didn't come," you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, sure.

SUE M. THURMAN: I mean, you just have to make some special requests, and those who knew you were making a special—that I was making a special effort—helped.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But they—there were a good many who didn't think any effort should be made about—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well—or it just wasn't something they wanted to bother with. There are other people who

don't like enthusiasm. Have you ever known any of them?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: Yeah. This was enthusiasm, and I would do it again, and I'm wondering what they are doing with the things that are still there. You see, they kept the—I'm not suggesting that I would sell, it's still there, but they kept anything that was really connected with Cranbrook. Manship, Paul Manship's metals, and so on. Not that they needed it or had any place to install it, but even that they should someday get a museum building, they would have some things of value. So, I think that it was right to leave those there, if only because it was even not harmful to leave them there to the sales because the more impact it had locally, the less impact it had internationally. So, the things we most needed to sell were things like the huge, wonderful Henry Moore that couldn't—reclining figure—which really couldn't be—there wasn't anything you can do with it. [00:04:02] Unless you could install it permanently and have the right kind of humidity, and so on. It was sold anonymously. It was bought anonymously. We heard, but I don't know whether it's true that it was—went back to the Henry Moore collection.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Hmm.

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ROBERT F. BROWN: This is March 11, 1998, at her home in Brookline, Massachusetts. Robert Brown, the interviewer.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: The last time we talked about your time at Cranbrook, engineering the sale of some of its art collection at Sotheby's Parke-Bernet in New York.

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. For the endowment fund.

ROBERT F. BROWN: For the endowment fund there—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and that went on—you were there on through 1973?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then it was—that was it. You were then brought in temporarily and—

SUE M. THURMAN: I had gone in for their very—well, in fact, lots of institutions, the very timid, smaller ones, and it was obvious, it seemed to me, that they needed either to keep me or replace me with a similar person [laughs], in that development was something they weren't thinking about. They were deep in other types of thinking there, and those were wonderful things that were being done, but the school needed a person who was its liaison. Never mind, the auctions did barely get finished within that prescribed length of time, and so very neatly, they just wound up the deal. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well—

SUE M. THURMAN: —then one seized the other half of—as I told my son and I really loved the setting there because it was a beautiful place and all sorts of provisions. We lived on campus, and it was a hard place to leave. It was very—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But they told you in no uncertain terms that, "Thank you but—"

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it was just understood from the beginning that was it. And then, of course, also when you're being provided a wonderful house and so on, it isn't as if you have fooled around a while, [00:02:01] because somebody else from the other side of the school, somebody's going to move into your house, so you really can't say, "Well, I think I'll lock things up for a while." But when I heard—my mother had waited until after the auctions ended. She had attended them, and she could see how—what an intensive experience the whole thing was. She purposely just didn't call after being told that she was terminally ill. So, she called, but she didn't give me the news, and so that meant that, of course, when I called to say, "Well, now, I'm back in Michigan. It's all over. We made the goal, far more than the goal," and so on then I learned what the news was. So that determined many things. I had never thought about what I would do under circumstances like that. But I thought I was the person in the family who was—well, she was the sort of person who would know when you really needed to help somebody else, and I wanted to do what I could.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you—

SUE M. THURMAN: So Blair came back to Brookline and stayed with Hal, his father.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Lived here with his father.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. I just put furniture in storage and went to Kentucky. And from there, there were all sorts of tedious things for her and for me as her attendant, and various efforts were made, and it went on. It was really far better that I wasn't somewhere trying to hold down a brand-new job or for that matter, even an ongoing job, so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this also—and was this a time you could reflect on things and—

SUE M. THURMAN: It—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to some degree or are you—

SUE M. THURMAN: —in a way it was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —thinking? [00:04:00]

SUE M. THURMAN: —but you see, I was back in my hometown where everybody knows everybody. People were all—lots of people responded to—not that they could have taken the place of a family member in taking care of mother, that was just far enough back that you didn't have—we don't like the mechanics of today's health care, but at least, those mechanics exist. Back a few years ago, the way you did it was that somebody in the family just takes the assignment and stays with it. So that went on and then when I came back here, I could realize better than I had before how very much this had changed everything. Of course, the losing someone in your family, but also the timeout situation, you know, just not being in the field and then I realized also though that, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were a bit out of the—

SUE M. THURMAN: This, I was out of the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —loop.

SUE M. THURMAN: But also, the art loop, everybody was [laughs] out of the art loop who wasn't very carefully protected by some wonderful contract. Because in the—along in '73, '74, '75 was when—it seemed to me every *Globe* I read when I first came back to Boston—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, the Boston newspaper.

SUE M. THURMAN: —in my temporary setup here, everything told me jobs are frozen. There's to be not a teacher added to the public school system, and there's to be nobody added to anything. Of course, the museums and places that I could expect to work were far less open than those things that everybody considers essential. [00:06:03] So, it took me a while to figure it out, and I didn't want to recognize the fact. But I finally did tell myself that, whether you have further art career in the future is to be seen, but for now, you need a secondary career. Fortunately, remember I had taken that assignment for the Ford Foundation and had gotten good results from it?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: And that was really a valid development project of going out to all the art schools and evaluating their investment of foundation money.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That led to your Cranbrook job then.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, and that, we never know what—in fact, it's hard to plan. I never would've planned to do that project. It just sort of happened. It really did connect with the Cranbrook, laid that that in my path, and then the fact that I had done that gave me the answer to the question. I really was the serious sort who went everywhere to interviews and consultants and all this because I didn't want to waste time. If I had to suddenly create a second career, I didn't really have much time to do that. So, I think that it was—it was easy to see that I had this in my background, and that people everywhere thought, "Oh, you should be able to do well with that." So, I began to take all the courses. I went Wellesley, and I went to Harvard, and I took courses, but also, I got acquainted with all the people who were recognized in the development field. [00:08:00] The next time the exam came around to be certified and legitimate, I took it and passed it. The thing is I realized, what I had known, was that I had done lots of fundraising, but it had not been my favorite thing. I had done it because the

institution needed it in each case, and now, I was doing it because someone is saying they need it for their institution. You can understand that that—I tried not ever to do less than the best I could [laughs], and I got a lot of money. I guess I've raised about—I think it's nearly \$35 million at this point. But a lot of that was in the days before I was officially into fundraising and a lot of it since. I think the most impressive moment in that regard when I did feel that something had been accomplished, which might—which wasn't automatic was, oh—well, just to fill a few gaps here. After the taking courses and meeting people, and networking, and saying, "Well, I'm going to change. From the art field, I'm changing to development." And this then you have to knit down at something. So, I was offered a job out in the town of Wellesley not the college in connection with the capital campaign, and I took it. While there, I got them very tuned into the women's program at the women's career program at Wellesley College. They were very good to call me each time they heard of an opening or whatever. It was something of a placement project. So, they called one day and said, "Well, you should go to Connecticut [laughs] because there's a job in Connecticut at Eastern Connecticut College in Willimantic." [00:10:08] Well, it turned out to be a very pleasant experience, and I didn't really question doing it. I simply did it because I could see by then that the situation was really horrible around, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: You just might never get a job if you weren't in a job, and you are already middle-aged or beyond, so I wasn't taking any chances. And I lived both places.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You found that these general fundraising jobs, you were able to swing yourself right into them?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You soon lost your—

SUE M. THURMAN: I wouldn't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —nostalgia for the art world?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I wouldn't say that I—I'll put it this way. I lost my nostalgia for the arts without losing my interest in the arts. But I would never, never say that doing the jobs of development work—and the main thing is that difference of getting the money for someone else to use. Anyone who likes to direct and plan, and accomplish is ready to do whatever that takes, and you just don't have that, and you have the other side of the fence. You have some unpleasant people. It's one of the kinds of things that's naturally going to create a little stress sometimes. Because people who may not have any magnificent plan in their field there, feel that they do, and on a Friday, they want you to know that Monday is the deadline, and that you should write them a proposal and get them the money. There some kind of touchy experiences and—but I managed. I guess I was in Connecticut for—[00:12:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: A couple of years?

SUE M. THURMAN: —two years. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think two or three, two probably.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this to supplement state appropriations for that college?

SUE M. THURMAN: It was to run the foundation, which was to get private money, a new foundation, and there was very little money in the town. The second half of the job, which the faculty thought to be the main part it, was to get federal, state, and all sources of grants, primarily grants. And it went—I was surprised really, because my only hesitation about going there was I couldn't see what would likely pull in very much money. I mean there just—it was not visible whatever it was, although it was a nice place. There were a lot of very nice people there, obviously.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But it had a very low—

SUE M. THURMAN: Low index.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —profile.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: So, somehow, when you make your list and you look back on it, it's always surprising that it comes up pretty well. So, I think, they felt it was all right. Then—

ROBERT F. BROWN: When they found you—did you enjoy face-to-face meetings or writing a research or—

SUE M. THURMAN: Actually, it was a lonely job. See, that's the thing about—well, if you're going to be—if you're going to ask for major gifts, that's a different kind of development job. And that's really a better thing for me to do because I'm accustomed to asking for art loans. And I'm not intimidated by people who may or may not have more money than I have or more artworks or whatever. But—so that was my natural environment of conversational jobs, but somehow institutions even now have not caught up to that level, most of them. They still think there's a lot of money to be had in grants, you know, free money. [00:14:03] And the very advanced ones like MIT, which will make a circle of people, and that's going to be the circle, and you're going to talk major gifts from them, they're going to get grants, but they're also going to get millions—

ROBERT F. BROWN: In private funds.

SUE M. THURMAN: —years from now. They're going to work on them from one generation to the next.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And, of course, you'd had experience with that—

SUE M. THURMAN: Right, right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —as a member.

SUE M. THURMAN: And I would still enjoy doing that sort of thing. When I—let's see when—after, uh, let's see, I came back—

ROBERT F. BROWN: When [inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: —here from—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —talks about—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, it was—I— my things were still in the truck. [Laughs.] All my furniture that I had used down there was still in the truck when I got an urgent call—and I never knew what the source of the call was—to come out and speak with the new head of development. I actually think that there had been some turmoil within the department, which is a distinguished, old development department, but there have been turmoil over the fact that this has taken too long, getting the money to start a veterinary school.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Which was very much needed, I guess?

SUE M. THURMAN: We still don't have the money, and Jean Mayer was literally inviting people to come to the opening. He had already decided—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is the president of the—

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, and this was his baby—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: This was his baby—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —sciences.

SUE M. THURMAN: —the vet school. He just didn't let people tell him what he couldn't do, so he was already just making the list, and everything was just clicking along. I don't know at what point someone said to someone, "You know this has got to stop. Get everybody out of here and start over and"—something had just happened. [00:16:02] I don't exactly know what it was. But I know it was a very strange little spot that I landed in, and I inherited all kinds of notes, quite different from each other, many strategies. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I see. So by then you're somewhat used to dealing with such completely new situations?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, new situations, but that was a rather traumatic situation to which I never got the background. I mean, I was a woman—

ROBERT F. BROWN: With this news, it was great [inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: —I was woman. They must have heard something they liked, or they wouldn't have hired me. But I wasn't one of the fellows who had been working there always, and nobody was—I didn't ask it, and they didn't tell [laughs] to use that new phrase. [They laugh.] But I could see that we hadn't gotten it. I said, "Do we

agree that we haven't gotten the money yet?" See, they had had handpicked the Pew Foundation to give it. I can't take credit for having—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But had they approached—

SUE M. THURMAN: —selected them.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the Pew Foundation?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, various ways. [Laughs.] They had upset them very—well, I really shouldn't give out the detail. But the one source that was likely to give, if it could be retrieved, would be one or another of the Pew Foundations, and there were—all the family—each name of the family had a foundation. So, I was just sincerely interested in trying to get it. Certainly, I had no—you can imagine if you or I were writing under such duress, and we were writing for the arts, we would have some advantage because that would be our vocabulary. But what about horses and cats, and dogs, you know? [00:18:03] I mean, I would have to go to the dictionary and look up 10 choices of words, in that I do think the way you write has—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: I'm sure that if they hadn't decided that when such-and-such happens and this works out, we'll give Tufts the money. We've got the money, and we will give it them. I mean, I think that had to be the underlying circumstance. But I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because that wasn't made apparent to you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, no. I could see very well that I would be one more rolled [laughs] in on this whole sequence, you know? So, it would've made a difference. I, of course, had to turn back and found out what I could about every one of the initial dollars people had—well, cat and dog clubs had been giving small amounts. Mayer was a wonderful politician, and he had been having this community support—things had been going—until it got to the point where, "That was enough of that. What we need now is money." But what we really needed when I would—I did talk on the phone with them quite enough, and that was never discussed with anyone because they never told me not to. I would call the—my equivalents at the foundations, the professional staff. At one point, they told me that some charts of the following sorts would take the place of various things that are missing. Well, it was like being told to do up something on Mars, you know? There was nothing to make the charts from, but I did my best [laughs] and got a call one day that said, "This is looking very favorable. [00:20:08] This is looking a lot better." And then one day, I got a call. I was amazed that they called me to say that, "We're letting the university know that it's getting more money," so anyway.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's funny you had the, uh—the foundation also was rather closed about—until you probed a bit—

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, right, well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that it said why we need charts?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Everything has changed a great deal, Bob, in recent years. See, all this is back a little bit, and now—well there are still people holding out on others to be mean. There will always be some of that. But I think now, people like to show off what they have or can get quickly, and they like that more than they like to hide in the corner and hold out on you.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And they are pleased with the publicity.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of course then, they were a bit more—a good deal more discreet, had to be courted.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. Also, I think some of that discretion went with the sophisticate—whatever field the sophisticate was then. And I think that sophistication is almost gone now. I mean it's—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean—

SUE M. THURMAN: —changed

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a sophisticate at the foundation?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, and that, I find it vanishing in many places. Maybe it's that I don't have as much to do with those organizations that are still—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And is this—

SUE M. THURMAN: —that are still that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —what—how would you characterize the behavior of the—or the method of the sophisticate at a foundation, such as the Pew?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it would be holding out. It would be letting you sweat it out [laughs], and that's basically, what it was anyway. But I think they really did—they may—they picture their stand on these things. [00:22:07] A school is after something in particular, a very powerful president, and he doesn't quit. This name changes to this name, and they get letters and phone calls, but the president still says, "Where is the money?" So the foundation, though it is the source of the money, seems to be holding the winning card. On the other hand, I think they're due a little sympathy because the whole thing of getting money without spending it, getting money, which you deserve, charitable money, but charitable money if you think about it is a very strange thing. It's under any circumstance other than the charitable aspect, you would be stealing if you received money without doing something to earn it. So, it's a very tight rope to walk, and they are very, very conscious of being able to prove and show they have done the prudent thing, so.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you were able to get the kind of money to get the veterinary school underway?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it's \$10 million then, of course, they—that was just a drop in the bucket. But I think that that had to happen or the trustees—this was a contingency thing. That's what was so serious about it all. If this first big money didn't become a reality, they were to stop talking about the school until something made the money—[inaudible]. [00:24:05] It was kind of fishing or cutting bait.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Would you, in case like this, meet with the president of Tufts every now and then?

SUE M. THURMAN: I met with him a few times—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mayer?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you would be accompanied by so many people [laughs] that you tended to be overprotected. I mean, everybody had something to get in sort of thinking when anything big is at stake—you just—the nature of survivors on campus is that they're in on all the good things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you continued then well, into the '80s in various—

SUE M. THURMAN: No. I mean that—but the interesting—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —development—

SUE M. THURMAN: —thing is, see, what I never will understand, but I know it wasn't personal, how on earth could they not—you know was this—why are things like that one shot? I said that I had in mind something that very much needed doing because I had found that the—all the past incoming grants weren't clearly—you couldn't clearly find then and there were some research work that needed doing. And that I would be glad to stay and do that if they wanted it done, and they, of course, said yes. They could have very well said no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see. They couldn't even trace all of—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I mean any place that's carrying on a huge program like they are would be in that condition, but it was a chance for someone straighten it out. I did do that, but then it's just another one of those you wonder if this is farsighted or not. Do you just take from one person what their ability is on one project? I don't understand it. It was never—these were not jobs, you see, [00:26:01] they were consultantships, and they may have been—hand administrative worries on setting up benefits and insurance, and things. They just weren't even thinking about keeping someone that they didn't formally have. But, of course, I kept finding myself [laughs] ready to find something else, and that's the nature of consulting work. I think maybe that I really—I believe I worked for about three months for the Haitian community in Cambridge, Shama [ph] in the old Catholic building that's opposite to Bread & Circus. It's been revamped now.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is that where—in Cambridge?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And that was really discouraging because that was—they didn't understand the very basic things about this country, much less about how to raise funds in this country, how to comply with its fundraising laws, and so on. So, it was really sort of heartbreaking because it was just a big effort they would make to make food and have a party, and the party would be a benefit, and they would make no

money on it, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: So, I finally just said that I didn't think I was doing them any good, and that was true. I don't think anyone else did them any good. I think they finally, of course, reached a stage in—of recognition in multicultural senses—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Political.

SUE M. THURMAN: —and of being helped, yeah. But you would never get—from foundations and corporations, and so on, you wouldn't get anything very significant. [00:28:05] You couldn't. So then—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why is that here? Because they were—

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, let's see, they—their behind it all is and how will this turn out? If I put this money in, what will happen? Well, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was too—

SUE M. THURMAN: I thought it was not sure, not certain. So then I suppose I was invited to start a development office at Mass Mental Health by some very fancy psychiatrists who were into research.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, this was an the agency of the state government?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Massachusetts Mental Health?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, it was a private organization, but many of the people there received their salaries from state. So, it was nice mixture. It's a very old institution, but quite amazingly to me, this is a story of fits and starts. Because you would get settled, and they would put in a great deal of effort to make sure that you were talented and everything. There would be many lovely luncheons and things and then you would move into your office only to find a month or two later that they didn't realize you were going to need an operating budget. So, of course, that had been talked about, and it was just—and there's something about money and wanting it, and having it constantly taken away from you if you're running a big institution that causes people to act very strangely about it. So, they just said, "Well, if you have to spend money to take it in then we're just going to discontinue the department" and that's what happened. [00:30:05] [Laughs.] I just bought the condominium at the time and—you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: So—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Here in Brookline?

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I say that because I had to even get a letter that said, "Where do you work, and how long are you going to work there?" And this letter said I was going to work there indefinitely. Only I heard about a week or so later that they didn't want to have the department anymore [laughs]. So, it went on like that. There were bright moments, but they were usually right moments because of bright people who were getting me to help with something. It was not in the sequence of what I have to call somewhat dreary jobs. So, I'll jump on over to the fact that I, somehow, was saved by the bell [laughs] or by my own bad health. I suddenly found that I was pretty seriously ill in '88—10 years ago. This was a difficulty that caused me to have to have a year of being diagnosed and then surgery. One of those jobs that I was on at the time this came up just promptly dismissed me like when they heard I was sick [laughs]. It was like that would just be a complication, so. At that point, I was getting sort of so I could laugh about it all. I did have successful surgery, and the illness was over two years after it started. [00:32:01] I came out feeling very good and very happy about my good fortune. And that was in 1990 when I was invited to blend the museum field and the fundraising, and be director of the tiny, little, new museum up in Lowell. A new museum with old treasures, which was the Quilt Museum. Well by then my—it was clear that my career ascent was in jeopardy [laughs]. Almost everything when you're getting near retirement, you may as well expect that you are looking for something you'd like to do, and you're not really going to get too good a deal on it. So, I was given half salary because that's what they had. I probably should've just moved up there temporarily because I drove there almost every day. I mean, there were some times that I stayed in town on a weekend, but for halftime pay I was working an amazing amount of time. It was the kind of thing where if you were going to do both halves of what had to be done, you had to be there in the day, and you had to be there again in the evening in order to carry out the other half of it. So, it was really I—you know I had to wonder if it was good for me physically, but I found

that I seem to be doing very well, so I couldn't skip out and say [laughs], "This is too hard on me." But I stayed at that for only two years. [00:34:03] It really was too strenuous even.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The two basic things are what? Sort of create the museum and get it organized?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, the running of the museum. It had had a couple of directors., neither of which had any background in museum work, which didn't mean they didn't do a lot of good things. But the structure that you would put into a museum had not been put there. There was a very strong feeling by the quilt makers, not all but some, that that we don't want that structure. We want a quilt maker. In other words, if you're not a quilt maker, [laughs] that puts you in some jeopardy. But the thing is they—now that the museum association has these—has gradations, you know, and you're going to be certified or not. They were too concerned about getting certified. They thought—they were embarrassed that they couldn't get certified immediately meant they weren't very good, or they thought it did. So, they urged me to get the museum certified. Well, the people I know all said, "The museum would be lucky to get certified in 10 or 15 years. It doesn't have the volume of anything right now, and no museum is going to be certified when it's this new." That is how they went out and bravely hired someone that I think wasn't their idea of who should be running a museum, a type of person. In other words, I was a type of person who wasn't expert at quilts. I do collect quilts, and I'm interested in textiles of all sorts, and I have studied textiles, but I can't claim to quilt maker. [00:36:00] Naturally, just as many people running many museums don't claim to be experts at the material, at producing the material—but—the thing I will always remember about the job and I guess the reason that I left after two years of it was that—when I'd only been there only six months, the property was the wrong sort of place. They had rented. To save money, they had rented the basement of a mill, which was residence overhead and millions of pipes, all of which looked old and leaky on the ceiling. When I asked, "Has the insurer seen these pipes?" —because I didn't see how it could have insurance on the collection, and there were those pipes—I would always be told, "Oh, yes." Well, it was not even—I was getting set as we came around to the time of the year to talk insurance again, but we never got that far. There was a Sunday when I was in Boston and got a frantic phone call and was told to drive safely but to come as fast as I could up to Lowell. That there was a flood going on, and that the—who—my goodness, I'm missing the word for those wonderful rangers, the park rangers who were in the building next door. And those fellows—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, there's a national park there.

SUE M. THURMAN: National—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —urban park there, right.

SUE M. THURMAN: And those fellows are trained for the unexpected. They got the image of one of the volunteers. [00:38:00] You see, it was a horrendous thing to be responsible for because they still had just a volunteer that are there on a Sunday, nothing—no—that's why I spent most of my time there. But when those fellows saw this elderly woman flapping her arms and screaming, they came, and they simply didn't panic. They formed a line, and they stepped up and took each quilt down, folded it just right. When they got them all out there, they got them out just in time. The water was getting right up to the edges, and there were many quite old, totally irreplaceable things. They did a superb job. They knew enough that they even took them to the boardroom off the—of their own operation and moved the furniture out of the boardroom and used the floor and laid all the quilts on the floor. It was remarkable, but of course, what that did to us I said immediately, "We won't go back into that space." It was the pipes. We never should have been in there, and we can't go back, so it's—you know. The future is somewhere else. I stayed long enough to set up a future location office and to get in. See, it cut off our money. It was such a weak, little operation that it had only the money paid by ordinary members, of whom there weren't many, and paid for admission, and for publications sold, and just pennies. So, it was my job for the year and a half that I was still there or a year—probably it was a year, to be sure that every day's mail—and I'm talking about mail from strangers—brought in when it was opened as much mail—as much money as the museum would cost if you divide the number of days into the budget. [00:40:17] It was really a very stressful responsibility.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you were mandated to [inaudible]—

SUE M. THURMAN: No, nobody mandated me—nobody—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

SUE M. THURMAN: They didn't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

SUE M. THURMAN: They didn't. They said they didn't know whether they—well, how they would keep operating? They were just ready—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Wringing their hands.

SUE M. THURMAN: —to collapse. Yes. And I said, "Well, one thing is not to give up until we know we have to." And then I was making plans for what would've been a different type of permanent museum. Also, think in terms of collecting very valuable quilts from all over the country and converting those to capital in some splashy auction since I was already familiar with auctions. But actually, it just got the point where they kept wanting to go back and do programming. They kept forgetting that they were in a temporary state and that they couldn't do that. So, I thought before this gets to be a sort of debate around here [laughs], I'm going to say that they need someone who's fresh with new energy, so I resigned in '92 and since then have—the thing that I've—I spent more time on than anything else, and again, things take so much longer than people think they would—our organ at the church over at First Parish here in Brookline had to be restored, and the same story, we didn't have the money. We had a huge endowment, but it wasn't available for restoring the organ. [00:42:01] So, that was a small capital campaign of \$200,000, but to get \$200,000 from tiny congregation, which is not—usually, doesn't give large amounts of money. It—I had worked with Joan Weiss on that and Joan was— getting to know her quite well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was Joan Weiss another—

SUE M. THURMAN: Joan is—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —fundraising consultant?

SUE M. THURMAN: No, Joan is—you may know Bob, he's out at the University of Massachusetts, and his field is gerontology. Joan is a social worker and has—she's very much of an organizational person. She started the midlife crisis group here in Brookline, and I just enjoyed working with her very much. She laughed because what they had been planning to do was sell chocolates, and they just didn't know and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Big sales, yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. So, at first, people don't like to hear, but I could tell that she was different. She was wanting to know the facts. After several people of her sort got the picture that we wouldn't get that much money with any of those little, dinky things, then they were very good to work with and enjoyed it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that was an accomplishment that you carried out for several years?

SUE M. THURMAN: Right. And that was primarily a contribution. At one point, they said, "We can't let you do this any longer as a gift," [laughs] and so they did—toward the end, they paid me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But would you say that you found, by and large, on balance satisfaction in this general fundraising now for one kind of thing, now for another?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, yes, but if I think—certainly I do, and I find satisfaction in various things. [00:44:05] I'm planning to do these little sessions at the Brookline Adult Education called "Conversation Pieces."

ROBERT F. BROWN: And these would be?

SUE M. THURMAN: And this would be that even though we have marvelous inventions now, which keep us from needing to look each other face-to-face and talk, that we really might do well to keep up the habit or strengthen it of being able to hold discussions with each other where the purposes and speed or any of things that are involved when we do our email and all of that. I think I'm a generalist. I was always a generalist even when I was knee-deep in the art world. I've liked many things. I'm very strong on gardening and plants, and all the domestic. I enjoy many things, not just—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you said also, when you were a child, you learned to help people. Was there sort of a basic social ethic that you imbibed in Kentucky?

SUE M. THURMAN: Oh, I think so. Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that—

SUE M. THURMAN: And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —even in your—the dreariest times can sustain you?

SUE M. THURMAN: Well, I think—

ROBERT F. BROWN: In part.

SUE M. THURMAN: —what sustained me in the dreariest times was a good deal of determination not to wilt. Because—particularly a person who has had a lot of thrills—maybe not a lot of income but a lot of thrills professionally, I could see that without an effort, I was simply going to get a long face. [00:46:14] If you aren't having a good time, and you make sure everybody knows it then you're bound to have a worse time after that. So, I think that I feel it's never time to say how things have turned out, [laughs] so I won't say that. But I feel fortunate.

I have my little projects now. My project that I live here in Brookline, not because I have been an unlimited amount of money, but I'm living comfortably, because I have a wonderful little deal, a little project where I'm always having a graduate student usually from Boston University—

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SUE M. THURMAN: —they're both very convenient because it's so right under the roof—is that I'm the person who has done the restorative work to these buildings.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The pictures, a series of condominiums.

SUE M. THURMAN: They were in bad shape. They were 1904, very—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Built?

SUE M. THURMAN: Yes, in the Castle [ph] neighborhood here on Garrison Road. When you need a new skylight, you know it—there has to be somebody around who—well they used to work in an art museum and got a new skylight, which was the case with me. But for some reason, somebody has to know what to do. It really isn't the case of just hiring a management firm for condominiums and saying, "Well, do whatever we need because we would all be charged out of house and home in no time if it were done that way."

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

SUE M. THURMAN: But I've found some very, very good contractors, and a lot has happened to them. These buildings are worth—you know the main thing is that they're functioning right without all kinds of crises.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUE M. THURMAN: But uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So—

SUE M. THURMAN: —I like to take responsibility.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you have.

SUE M. THURMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you know what you find as you take responsibility? I don't like to sound older and wiser, but I will say [laughs] people don't like you to take responsibility. Even though they're benefiting from it, they sort of have to say that they don't think it needs doing, and so you need not to worry too much about that I think.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, good point, very good point.

SUE M. THURMAN: And I want to thank you very much because I—[0:02:03]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Me too.

SUE M. THURMAN: —of the things—well, I just wanted to say that these sessions have been a highlight of this year and last.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, thank you.

SUE M. THURMAN: I've enjoyed them very much.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So have I.

SUE M. THURMAN: Good.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Thanks very much.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]