

A TEI Project

Interview of Pratapaditya Pal

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1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (October 11, 1989)

RIKALA:

I'd like to start, if possible, for you just to tell us when and where you were born.

PAL:

I was born on September 5, 1935.

RIKALA:

And where?

PAL:

In a place called Sylhet, which is now in Bangladesh. But at that time it was part of India.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

In fact, I've been a citizen of one, two, three, you might say four countries. When I was born, Sylhet was part of British India. Then in 1947 it became part of Pakistan.

RIKALA:

Oh, I didn't know that.

PAL:

East Pakistan.

RIKALA:

Oh, I see.

PAL:

Of course, I became a citizen of India. And then East Pakistan became Bangladesh, as you know. So my birthplace has been a part of four nations.

RIKALA:

Our interviews generally start with some questions and insights into your family background, and if that's all right with you, I'd like to start that way. Where did your family make its home?

PAL:

Well, my father [Gopesh Chandra Pal], with us, left Sylhet for Calcutta I believe in 1938 or so. I'm not exactly sure. And we've been living in Calcutta. I mean, that's our hometown more or less. We've been living there since. He was a businessman mainly. Also, he was very active in the Indian independence movement.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

For instance, he never—he was a lawyer by training. He had a degree in law. He never went abroad. He was very nationalistic; he never wore any Western clothes or dress. He always dressed in the traditional Indian *dhoti* and shirt, *kurta*. And he was what you might call the CEO [chief executive officer] of a large insurance company as well as, at one time, the CEO of a bank. Later in life he owned several tea estates and was an active member of the Indian National Congress, which ultimately was responsible primarily for India's independence. He was jailed, incarcerated several times in his early life by the British government. In 1946 he was elected a member of the legislative assembly of the state of Assam, which is the northeastern state of India. In 1947, because the part which is Sylhet, from where he was elected, became part of East Pakistan, he thereafter automatically became a member of the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly, and I think that assembly lasted for at least six years. And I remember, although we lived in Calcutta, he used to go to Dhaka, which is now the capital of Bangladesh, for the legislative sessions. I was sent to Shillong in 1946, partly because he became a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly, and they used to meet in Shillong, which was the capital then of Assam. I was sent, along with my next brother [Bijoyaditya Pal] to Shillong to a Christian school, a private school. Most private schools in India are run by Christians, both Catholics and non-Catholic Christian groups. We are altogether six brothers and sisters, three boys and three girls. My

mother [Srimati Bidyut Kana Pal] never had any formal education beyond what would probably be equivalent to about seventh grade in high school. In those days, you know, women were not that educated in India, and especially in a sort of provincial place like Sylhet. She is also from Sylhet. She was, I think, seventeen when she was married to my father, who was then about thirty-one. I was born when she was nineteen, so she was—

RIKALA:

Are you the oldest child?

PAL:

I'm the oldest. And then there are two more brothers and then three sisters. So we came to Calcutta, I think, in 1938 or so with three boys. My youngest brother [Samaraditya Pal] had been born in Sylhet also. He was very young, about three or four months, I think, when we came down. And then, later on, the three sisters were born, I think the first one in 1942. And I remember very well, one of the few memories I have of that early phase of Calcutta was the death, I think in 1941, of the great Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore—his death and the huge masses of people that turned out for the funeral procession. I remember that distinctly. I remember the Japanese bombing of Calcutta in 1942 and the panic in the city whereby everyone fled. And that's when I—because everyone fled the city, the rental of houses fell drastically. I remember that distinctly, because that's what led to my father renting a complete and rather large house. We moved into this new house from an apartment. That was, in fact, partly due to the Japanese bombing the Calcutta harbor. It didn't last very long. I also remember the 1943 famine, the great famine of Bengal, where I believe something like 3 million people died of hunger, which is enormous, enormous if you think about it. In a peaceful situation, not in a war situation. What? Six million Jews died in the five years of war, whereas 3 million people died in that famine in the course of only about four or five months.

RIKALA:

That's incredible. That's a horror.

PAL:

Yes. And apparently it was partly man-made famine, you see, because of the war.

RIKALA:

That the British induced the situation?

PAL:

Partly due to the British and, you know, maybe local mismanagement. I don't know exactly. But anyway, I remember very distinctly these huge soup kitchens being formed in all the parks. There was a very big park near our house where we used to go and play, and we were very upset, because the entire park became a refugee—you know. Not a refugee, really, see. All the people from the countryside flocked to the city thinking that's where they'll get food.

RIKALA:

That there was prosperity.

PAL:

So they lived in these parks for months. And enormous cauldrons of soups. You know, rice and lentils used to be cooked together and fed to these people. So that has stayed in my memory of that period, I'd say. And what else?

RIKALA:

In the introduction to the catalog *From Merchants to Emperors*, you mention many of the same things. You described your family in that as very nationalistic and conservative. Can you elaborate on what some of those values were?

PAL:

Well, for one thing, we did not speak English at home at all at that time. And I never did. I never do, still, particularly with my mother, who never speaks English, who never learned how to speak English. And we never spoke in English with our father, also. We lived in, as I said, a large house, not only with our immediate family, but there were always one or two uncles who were in their late teens and early twenties, who used to be guests in our house and

use it like a boarding house to study in the University [of Calcutta] or college in Calcutta, you see.

RIKALA:

Members of your father's family?

PAL:

Well, more from my mother's side. My father was an only son. He had two sisters, but I don't ever recall meeting them, at least then. I don't know if I ever really met any of my father's sisters. They never came out of Sylhet, I think, and I never went back to Sylhet, you see.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

I haven't been back since. But my mother's relatives, a lot of them were in Calcutta, and a lot came to Calcutta to study, and they used to stay—my mother's cousins. So it was a very extended family. They used to live with us. A number of my father's political friends who used to come from Sylhet for political work in Calcutta used to also live in our house. There were many, many—there were at least a dozen servants then in the family, so, you know, I mean, there was no room to be selfish or self-centered in any way. I mean, you were only one very small cog in a very large wheel, so to say, and there were many, many others. So I don't remember ever having any temper tantrums of that kind, although I was generally rather a naughty boy, I'm told. I mean, certainly even earlier still, which I have never—I was told by my mother that when I was a one-year to two-year toddler in Sylhet, apparently I had to be tied up or locked up during the day, because I loved to beat people up.

RIKALA:

Oh, no.

PAL:

You know, with sticks.

RIKALA:

That young?

PAL:

So I was somewhat of a rambunctious, I suppose violent type in my early childhood. I don't remember being spoiled in any way. In fact, although my father was quite well off, we led a rather spartan life. We had very few toys. In fact, you know, I can't remember any toys except cheap things made out of clay that used to be bought, like little birds or animals or little wooden sort of model chariots, but very flimsy and rather ordinary things. Nothing like the highly sophisticated toys and things that children here are used to. All this was unimaginable. As a matter of fact, I remember we used to play train by taking all the shoes from the shoe racks and stringing them up and somehow pulling them or pushing them along the floor. I mean, that was as far as we could go in terms of having a model or toy train. So we had to be inventive to amuse ourselves with all sorts of things. We collected things like cigarette boxes or cigarette packets, you see. And because we couldn't afford to—we didn't collect stamps. Of course, we couldn't have bought any. We never had any money at all. No pocket money. Rarely did we go to movies. Again, one of the most memorable movies that I ever saw was, I think, also during the war. It may have been 1944 or '45, I'm not sure. It was Charlie Chaplin's *Gold Rush*, which we were taken to, which, I think, was one of the first movies I ever saw and was, as I said, a great excitement. We led a very sheltered life. We were not allowed to go travel anywhere by trams or buses by ourselves until I think I was almost, oh, fifteen or sixteen. We had to go anywhere with servants, and preferably in the family car. So we didn't have much freedom of movement outside the immediate house area and the park where, of course, you could go to play. I was sent, in 1943, when I was eight years old, to a Bengali school where the medium of instruction was in Bengali, although I think a private tutor was hired for me and my next brother in 1941—so I was six—really, who taught us at home. And then [we were] admitted to a school, as I said, in 1943, and I studied there '43, '44, '45, three years. And in 1946, which, curiously, was only a year before India got her independence, which she did in 1947, and despite the fact that I had this highly nationalistic home and parents, for some odd reason—or he must have had some sort of a premonition; I really can't figure out to this day why, and I never got an opportunity to discuss it with

him—my father decided to send the two older boys in that year to a boarding school some six, seven hundred miles away from home.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness. That's very far away.

PAL:

Yeah, from Calcutta to Shillong, we were sent off to a boarding school. It was a Christian or missionary school, Catholic, and the medium of instruction was English. I did not speak a word of English when I went to this school. And I remember he taught us a few sentences like, you know, if you wanted to go to the bathroom, you had to say, "Please, sir, may I be excused," or something to that effect. And here we were, two raw boys who had no knowledge, no ability to speak English, bang, in a school, a Roman Catholic school, where English was compulsory. In fact, if you were caught talking—and where, in fact, we had boys from all over the country, including a lot of English-speaking boys, Eurasian boys, and even some European boys, because in '46 it was still under British rule. And it was quite traumatic not only to have to leave home but to suddenly be with people where you could not talk the language. But we learned fast, I suppose, and—I mean, I shouldn't really say traumatic, because I suppose if the experience had left any scar, then I think I could say that the experience was traumatic. Actually, I think it was quite exciting to go to this school, because before being sent there, we had to be taken to an English department store in Calcutta called the Army and Navy Stores, which was shut down soon after independence. But it was in the British area of the city, and very few Indians ever went in there. And I remember how excited we were when we were taken there to be fitted with, you know—

RIKALA:

With your school outfit.

PAL:

—school uniform and jackets and short pants and flannels and everything that you expect in a British public school. And that's what it was; it was a public school. So off we went. I think it was difficult to leave our mother. I'm sure it was. But I don't remember crying or anything or being even that nervous. But,

as I said, there were other Bengali boys, but if we were caught speaking Bengali, we would be caned.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's—

PAL:

It was that strict, yes.

RIKALA:

That's terrible.

PAL:

Yeah, yeah. This was sort of their way to force you to speak English. So that's sort of—you know, you might say I got cut off pretty early, for the greater part of the year, from Calcutta. The school season was from March until early December, so we had a long winter vacation and never a summer vacation in school.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

Yeah, because the winters were rough. Hard. So that upset a lot of things, in a sense, because when we came home for the holidays from the hills—and you know, most of these parochial public schools are in the hills in India.

RIKALA:

Why is that?

PAL:

Because it's cool.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

You see? And they were established by Europeans, who preferred the cool climate of—I mean, there are some in Bombay and Calcutta and these big cities, but most of the boarding schools are all in the hills: Shillongh, Darjeeling, Simla, and all these places. We used to come home for holidays. Everyone else in Calcutta was in school, you see.

RIKALA:

Right. So your friends had a different schedule.

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

And did you travel by train?

PAL:

Yes, at that time we traveled by train.

RIKALA:

That's a very long journey, seven hundred miles.

PAL:

Well, it was, yes. I think it was twenty-four hours almost. I remember we had to change trains, and we had to even cross the—there was no bridge over the river Brahmaputra then, and we had to cross it by—I think twice in that journey you had to cross two rivers. You had to cross two large rivers by boat and then go to the other side and get up on the train again, which was a nuisance. But the train was very wonderful, clean. The catering was very good. We looked forward to the train rides, because the food was excellent then, which I have to say, in all honesty, has deteriorated drastically in India, in independent India. Then, let's see, I was there in Shillongh in Saint Edmund's College for three years. Then what happened is, you see, because my father got transferred to Dhaka, you know, his political—you remember I told you that the assembly was—?

RIKALA:

Uh-huh [affirmative].

PAL:

He became—so he didn't go to Shillong. He felt that we should be looked after by someone in the family, sort of. And I had an uncle; my mother's only brother used to live in Darjeeling. So in 1949 I was taken out of Shillong and sent to a Jesuit school in Darjeeling, Saint Joseph's College, more commonly known as North Point, like your West Point [United States Military Academy], but it's not a military academy.

RIKALA:

[laughter] I see.

PAL:

Anyway, I finished my high school in North Point, or Saint Joseph's College, in 1951. I took the Cambridge school leaving certificate, it was called. It was an exam set by the University of Cambridge and not by an Indian education board.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

So I was three years in Darjeeling, which was also a very nice place, just as nice as Shillong. And I'll give you an idea. Have you been to Idyllwild [California] here? No?

RIKALA:

I haven't.

PAL:

Ah, well then, there's no point in my telling you. But if you have been to Idyllwild there near San Bernardino, the mountain resort here, well, Shillong and Darjeeling have the same kind of feeling. And Darjeeling is about, oh, seven thousand feet above sea level, in the Himalayas.

RIKALA:

What was your religion at home?

PAL:

Hindu.

RIKALA:

Hindu.

PAL:

We are Hindus, yes. And again, we were quite active Hindus in that a lot of the Hindu religious—my mother is a very religious person. She's still alive. My father isn't. We therefore used to observe most Hindu religious festivals at home, and particularly the large and very big ones, like worship of the goddess Durga, which has just finished. Today is the last day, in fact, of this *puja*, so it's sort of serendipitously auspicious that we should begin this interview today.

RIKALA:

That's nice.

PAL:

Anyway, so this *puja* is still performed by my younger brother at home, in our country house, which is about fifteen miles outside of Calcutta. It used to be a country house when my father built it in 1950, because it was in the country then. But Calcutta has expanded and caught up with this area, which has become now a suburb of Calcutta. You know, it's probably like in the twenties, [when] people who built houses in the [San Fernando] Valley thought they were in the country. And now I don't know where you'd have to go to find the nearest country home. So we were brought up in a very strongly—I wouldn't say in an orthodox Hindu environment that way, because we ate chicken and we ate meat and fish at home. So in terms of food, there was no taboo. But we learned a lot about Hinduism automatically at home from all these festivals and all. And other religious rites and observances were performed quite punctiliously. And at the same time, we went to a Catholic school, which didn't really exert any influence on us that way. Although I must say—this is an interesting point—that, you know, before 1947, before fifteenth of August, 1947, which is India's independence day, in all these Christian schools, attending chapel every day was compulsory for everyone, even the non-Catholics. So for three years, almost—well, not for three years. For '46 and

most of '47, so one and a half years, at least, I attended Catholic mass every day.

RIKALA:

Every day?

PAL:

And Sunday benediction and all that, and you know, all the "Hail Marys" and "Our Fathers." So I have a good grounding of Catholic ritual that way. And I suppose—I mean, we never went and took holy communion, because we were not Catholics, of course, but I'll tell you, I was so tempted so often, because it was—I always wondered what it tasted like, you see, this piece of bread soaked in wine, which the priest sort of with such style and mystique handed out to every extended tongue and placed it very gingerly on the tongues. And then, Friday, the stations of the cross I found fascinating. Well, in a sense, you know, Roman Catholic religious service, as well as the use of images in the temples, is very, in a sense, close to Hinduism, you see. We also use images of gods and goddesses, and although the actual technique of worship is different, the ambience is quite similar. So it was a very interesting point, from that point of view, to continuously contrast the Catholic rituals and services with the Hindu services that we observed and performed at home. So that I think has—and yes, I did learn Sanskrit for three years in the Bengali school. And then, when I went to the Roman Catholic school, I learned Latin for three years. Of course, later on I came to realize that they were both—they belonged to the same family of languages, you see, Indo-European, and the similarities were quite striking in the grammar and declensions and the vocabulary. That and the religious practices, I suppose, I think may have laid the foundation of my later and now, at the present, interest in art and religion. I'm sure it did. And I liked reading the Bible very much at the time. As a matter of fact, you won't believe this, but for two years running in Darjeeling, in my final school years, along with the history prize, I also got the scripture prize.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's nice.

PAL:

You know, beating all Roman Catholic students.

RIKALA:

That's very good.

PAL:

So I did like the Acts, you know, the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. I think all that has stood me in good stead in terms of being an influence, I suppose, in my ultimate espousal of the cause of art history, which, in the case of Indian art, involves the deep study of the religion, also, as you know.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

I mean, there's no way you can do one without the other.

RIKALA:

Yes, exactly. Perhaps you can tell me a little bit more about your mother. What sort of person was she?

PAL:

Well, my mother is.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

Well, she is unfortunately very ill now, but my mother was, on the whole, totally self-effacing, utterly dominated by my father. I suppose she was brought up that way, and after all, you know, she was married off at seventeen to this much older man. My father was, I think, thirty-one, so he was about fourteen years older than her. So I don't think they had the kind of friendly relationship that you expect in a couple that's much closer together in age. I think she was quite awed by my father, who was a very strong personality and quite a success in society as well as business and politics and—and also, some big congress leaders used to come to our house and all that.

She was extremely hospitable, gracious, and lived entirely for us. Nothing else in her life was as important as her children. And she, of course, took care of this huge household, of all the servants, and all the guests had to be fed, all the children sent to schools. So she used to get up, I think, at 4:30, between 4:30 and five o'clock every morning.

RIKALA:

My goodness.

PAL:

Without fail. She would wake up the servants. The first thing she would do is ring the bell, which would ring in the servants' quarters, without which they wouldn't get up. She would have her bath, and she would go to the little shrine, family shrine, that she had with all the images of her gods and goddesses, and she would worship there for about, oh, half an hour or so. Then the servants would bring her her tea, which would be by six o'clock, I suppose. And then I think my father used to wake up at about six o'clock, maybe, and if we were at home we would wake up maybe at seven o'clock. But by that time, I mean, the house was in an uproar. It was just going like gung ho. My father would have meetings in the morning. People would come. And again, not only all breakfasts and all, but then tea had to be served throughout. In fact, I remember one oven used to—or one plate, hot plate, used to burn all the time just for tea, you see. And these are all coal, you know, in the house.

RIKALA:

Right. PAL; We didn't have any gas in those days. The servants were always making tea for all these people who used to come: politicians, people connected with business. And then my sisters had to be sent to school. They were also in Catholic schools, but locally. And then I think my father would take his lunch between ten o'clock and ten thirty, and he would then go off to the office. So my mother would be free thereafter. By that time, almost everyone had usually gone out of the house, and so she had the afternoon. She would have her lunch around twelve thirty, one o'clock, and then she would rest. And again, she was up by three thirty to make sure that the servants were preparing the snacks that we would all have to have at four

o'clock with tea or, you know, milk. And the girls would come back from school. Well, the youngest brother, he was also—and he didn't go to the boarding school, so just the two older boys went. Then by five o'clock everyone else would be coming home, and so again tea and snacks would have to be served. So she really spent all her life, as I see it, taking care of food and the kitchen. Supervising and that, that was her whole life, almost. We had cooks always, so she never had to cook the bulk of the meal, but she loved to cook, and she was a great cook. I know you'll say that every boy, every man says that about his mother. But anyway, she was a great cook, and she would always cook one or two dishes, especially for lunch. Don't forget, these were Bengali meals, so usually lunch was, oh, four or five courses.

RIKALA:

That's amazing. That's wonderful.

PAL:

Different curries and *dal* and rice and *chapati* and all that. And dinner was lighter. Dinner was not a heavy meal. It was a slightly lighter meal. So she was a very generous woman and I know helped a lot of people who were much poorer, relatives and friends, and on the whole was—she was the one, really, the peg in our life. You see, my father was a feudal type.

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (October 11, 1989)

RIKALA:

You were mentioning your father as a feudal type.

PAL:

Yeah. He was, you know, the lord of the manor, and we were very afraid of him most of the time. We had very little communication with him as children. He was more like an image. And he was so busy with his own life that we sometimes—I mean, there was no sitting together. And we never had any meals together. This was very interesting. Usually the children would eat together. Well, during the day, of course, everyone ate at different times to get out of the house, and there was no formal lunch at all. And in the evening we would eat—children usually had to eat by seven thirty or eight o'clock,

maybe, then followed by my father and his friends who were living with us, or colleagues or uncles. Well, usually my father and his friends ate, and if there were no friends staying, if my father was alone, then he would have dinner alone. And my mother would sit in front of him and serve with all the servants and cook and everything. And then, when my father finished, the third round would be my mother, and if there were any of her cousins and all that. And when we grew up, from about sixteen, seventeen—after leaving school, when we came home to go to college, let's say, that's when we boys started eating with our mother at the end of the third round. We were the third round. So the last meal, that meal would be served at about nine thirty to ten o'clock, you see. Then the servants ate. So, as a result, we had no communication as such. I mean, the way I spoke to my daughters two minutes ago would be unthinkable with my father. So our mother was—that's why I said she was the pillar. You know, whatever you wanted, if you wanted any money for anything, pocket money, if you wanted to go to a movie or something, money, we had to get it from the mother. Mother was everything. I mean, she regulated and controlled our life. And I think the only contribution my father may have made to my entire upbringing is to have sent me to a boarding school. Of course, I mean, we were terribly afraid of him, and fear of annoying him kept us under some control, because he also had a hot temper. And I remember being caned by him many, many times. Oh, yes, the boys were never spared the rod. Never. Never. We were caned quite regularly for being naughty, or with a belt. Can we stop for a minute? [tape recorder off] And although I remember being, at times, punished by my mother, too, out of sheer exasperation at my naughtiness, on the whole she was quite a softie. So I suppose I may think of other things as we go on about her, but I think that's more or less what I can—

RIKALA:

Essentially, from how you describe it, she was the parent, in that your father was—

PAL:

Yes, yes. In that sense, you might say, my father was an indirect presence. And as I was saying when we stopped, the only thing, that he really decided was he took that decision to send us to the boarding school, public school, or private

school as you say here. I'm sure my mother probably did not care for it. So apart from that, I think our lives were entirely regulated by my mother.

RIKALA:

Obviously you weren't old enough to analyze some of the historical changes, and you've mentioned some of your childhood memories of Indian history, but perhaps we could talk a little bit more about some of the impressions of the changes in India. The Indian independence, on one hand, is a collapse of the heritage of the nineteenth century, the British influence, and then this sense of euphoria that, again, I've read about in history books. Could you tell us about your recollections?

PAL:

Oh, no, no, no. I don't know. I mean, a sense of euphoria may have been with the leaders and with the people who were all—for us, frankly, let's say fourteenth of August, 1947, fifteenth of August, 1947, and sixteenth of August 1947 were simply three days, that there was no difference. I mean, I don't remember at all feeling oppressed in any way by the British, because we never came in contact with them as such. I mean, the daily life moved on as it did, as it has always done. In fact, life was extraordinarily smooth, [more] than than it is now today in India, I have to say, with all due deference. I'm not pro-British particularly, but everything worked very smoothly, so that I didn't feel in any way any sense of difference, except, as I said, immediately after 1947, we were told that we didn't have to go to chapel at all. So while the Catholic boys went to chapel every morning, which was 6:30 to 7:00—yes, in that cold we had to get up at 5:45, I remember. Chapel was 6:20 to 6:50, and breakfast at 6:50. The only thing I remember that we were—we had to go into the study, and we could read a storybook for that half an hour and wait until the other boys came out of chapel to go to breakfast. So from that point of view, I must say, I don't feel the changes. But I remember a lot of things. I remember, for instance, in 1946, some of the political leaders of the district of Sylhet, where I was born and from where my father was elected—or it may have been early '47—they came down and they were going to see the president of the Indian National Congress, who was then Abul Kalam Azad, who later on became the education minister of independent India. And for some reason, the two of us, my—or was it—? Yes, it must have been winter vacation of '46-'47. It had to

be. I can pin it down. We were taken to Abul Kalam Azad, and Mr. Azad offered us some candy. I remember that very distinctly. The other thing was that it was a very important meeting because these leaders had gone to try and save Sylhet from being pushed into Pakistan. Now, this may be a little footnote in the political history of India—in fact, it won't appear at all in any history book—but I remember the discussions very well. And later on, also, my father spoke about it and others also told us. What really happened in 1946 that—you see, Sylhet, as I told you, was part of Assam. But Sylhet was a Bengali-speaking district. And the Assamese wanted the district out of Assam because Assam already had a large number of Bengali-speaking people. In fact, what would have happened if Sylhet hadn't been pushed out, Assam would have had a majority of Bengali speakers rather than Assamese speakers, in which case Bengalis would have formed the government in Assam, and that could not happen. They wanted a separate state for the Assamese. So a referendum was held in Sylhet to decide whether there were more Hindus or more Muslims in Sylhet. And in point of fact, there were more Hindus. But the Assamese leaders, in order to move this Bengali-speaking district out of Assam, brought in truckloads of Muslims from other parts of the state to vote and thereby show a Muslim majority and pushed Sylhet into Pakistan, East Pakistan. I remember that these political leaders of Sylhet, who went to see the congress president and apprise him of this plan on the part of the Assamese congress leaders to push Sylhet out—but I don't think it had any effect, because when the referendum was held, Sylhet was pushed out.

RIKALA:

That's very interesting.

PAL:

Yes, it is. And I will not forget that. I'm sure that is the truth. That is the unfortunate truth that a lot of things happen in life like that, as you know from—well, look what—I mean, in Soviet Russia right now, the Azerbaijanis and Armenians. They want Armenians kicked out and blah, blah, this, that. So this is the sort of thing. And here is a classic instance of something that happened in my own lifetime and that I have firsthand knowledge of. So I remember that very distinctly. I remember once I was going—also, I think for the—just before the elections, when my father was canvassing for his seat,

and Mr. [Jawaharlal] Nehru was in Sylhet canvassing also and my father was with Mr. Nehru, we were going with my mother to a place called Silchar to attend a funeral of my mother's uncle. And at a station, our train stopped, and we looked out the window, because there was another train on the other track, and there we saw our father, so we began yelling. And the man next to him turned round, and it was Mr. Nehru in that compartment.

RIKALA:

Oh.

PAL:

And then my father must have told Mr. Nehru that "That's my family traveling the other direction." And then Mr. Nehru handed him something, and my father came out and came to our compartment and brought us a huge, big lump of hardened condensed milk, you know, which is like—it's very sweet and very tasty. Someone had given it to Mr. Nehru, and Mr. Nehru sent it to us.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's nice.

PAL:

And we took it. So that was one occasion I remember. I remember in 1947 being taken to a prayer meeting of Mahatma [Mohandas K. j Gandhi not far from Calcutta. He had come to Calcutta, and there was a prayer meeting at a place called Sodepur. My father took all of us, and we went and we met him, and we sat very close to him on the platform. Then we saw him once more. In fact, a month before his death in December of '48, we saw him in Jaipur, also at a Congress Party meeting which my father was attending. We were all taken to that congress, because it was the first Congress—no, January '48, he [Gandhi] died. So it was '47, December. And it was the first national meeting of the Congress Party after India got independence. It was very big congress meeting in Jaipur. And again, we saw Mr. Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi, at that time. These are the major figures, I suppose, of the Indian national movement that we came across directly. At that congress meeting, we were privileged to go up to the rostrum or platform where the leaders were sitting. And we still

have a little autograph book where my younger brothers went and got autographs of Nehru and Gandhi. Gandhi signed in Hindi, Nehru signed in English. Ballav Bhai Patel, who was then the second in command, Abul Kalam. Azad—I think these four. But sort of lesser politicians, particularly of Bengal, many of them were my father's friends, so then—and also Assam. We knew quite a few of them and saw them at home quite frequently and served them, in fact. One of the peculiar things, habits, that we were—this used to be, when I was a child, quite common in Bengali houses, that even if you had servants, when important guests came to the house, it was customary for the boys and other young men of the house to serve the food at table or on the floor, if you were seated on the floor. So that was one way, also, you would meet or see these big people and serve them, which was a great privilege and pleasure, too.

RIKALA:

Yeah. Have them in your home and—

PAL:

Yeah. I mean, normally, if they came to the house, they usually sat with my father in the drawing room where we couldn't go. So when they were invited to eat lunch or dinner and they came inside to the dining room, that's where we served them. And I remember once, you know, a great historian, in fact, one of the greatest historians of India, Professor Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, who came to dinner once, and I was serving him. And my father didn't introduce me. Maybe he assumed that Professor Majumdar knew me or something. And while I was serving, Professor Majumdar turned to my father and said, "My God, where did you find this very smart servant boy?" [laughter] See? I was so insulted. I'll never forget that.

RIKALA:

Oh, dear.

PAL:

And many, many years later, when I met Professor Majumdar completely under other circumstances—I mean, in between there was no sort of contact. It was lost between my father and him, because my father had nothing to do

with history, per se. But Professor Majumdar's son-in-law was my father's friend. So that's how Professor Majumdar got invited to some dinner at home on one or two occasions. But then, when I did my M. A. in history, then I again met Professor Majumdar. By this time he was the dean, sort of the doyen, of all historians in India. I had just finished my M.A. and I met him. Then I reintroduced myself. I mean, I told him who I was. I never told him the story, but I never forgot it.

RIKALA:

Sure.

PAL:

I must have been ten, eleven then, when he said that.

RIKALA:

That's really interesting. Let's talk a little bit now about you and shift the focus a little bit. What are your memories of your early interest in art? You talked a little bit about your toys.

PAL:

Zilch! Zilch, zero, absolutely nothing. Nothing! I mean, first of all, I don't think I ever even dreamed I would be a scholar of any kind. My principal interest until I finished school, really, was to play for the school team in cricket and soccer, which I did, ultimately. I was moderately good in studies. I was not—usually I was among the first five students in my class, but at that point my strong subjects were mathematics and physics. And I was going to study physics honors after my high school. I mean, I did get the history prize at school, as I told you, and scripture prize also, but I did not think of becoming either a historian or a historian of religion at all. Not in the least. I mean, it didn't even occur to me that one—art? No. And, as a matter of fact, there was absolutely no interest in the family either. Now, there were some pictures and photographs, I suppose, on the walls at home, but these pictures were just things my father picked up from footpath artists, like the street artists we have. Things like that, you know. And purely for decoration. We never looked at them, even, and there was really no one in the family who was interested in art at all. Music, yes. We listened to a lot, and everyone loved music. My

sisters were taught dancing, classical Indian dancing. But that was about the extent of anyone's interest in art in the house. And I never learned how to sketch or draw, never took drawing classes. I did take up the violin for three years in school. Then I had to give it up because of my overriding ambition to make it to the school soccer and cricket teams, you see, so I had to give up music lessons. I couldn't—

RIKALA:

Time constraint.

PAL:

And also, you know, in school, in boarding schools and private schools, I think, music was considered a bit sissy, sort of. Softies, you know. It was not a macho thing to do. Which is sad. I regret very, very much that I gave up my violin. So you won't find anything there. As I said, the only thing is that I had a good grounding in history and scriptures, which may have exerted some influence in my subconscious, but certainly not in my conscious mind or self at that point in life. I did join, after school, the university, college, and studied physics and science and chemistry and mathematics for one year. And then something very silly happened. Well, I'll tell you what happened, though you might say—that year also, at the same time, I neglected—I came to Calcutta. This was in Calcutta, Saint Xavier's College in Calcutta, where—and I used to play cricket, continued to play cricket, but not soccer. But I became a sort of—it was about then somehow I developed an interest in literature, poetry, particularly poetry. I used to read a lot of poetry. I began reading a lot of poetry at the same time that I was going to college. Then at the end of the year we had to take a test in the college before being admitted to take the university examination. And in that test, I remember the paper was dynamics, a mathematics paper, dynamics. For some reason, the whole year I hadn't been very attentive in this dynamics teacher's class. I'd cut a lot of them, and I knew he was annoyed with me. And when I sat down in the examination hall, he was the invigilator. After the papers were distributed—question papers were distributed to us—he came and stood behind me. And I got very annoyed, and I said to him, I said, "Excuse me, I am distracted. Would you please move out?" You know, he's supposed to walk up and down the hall and not just come and—I mean, he stood behind me in a very intimidating manner. I told him to

move. And he said, "No." He said, "I know you've cut too many of my classes. You probably don't know a thing about dynamics, and if I don't watch you, you are going to cheat from somebody else's paper. " Well, I got annoyed, and I did something very stupid without realizing it. And that's the first time in my life. That's the first incident I remember of being uncontrollably angry. And since then, that has plagued me all my life. I tend to snap. I tend to get angry very quickly, although I cool off very quickly, too. Anyway, I got very angry, and I wrote a poem about him on the answer paper. Because also he was an alcoholic. We knew that. So I wrote a poem about that, you see, and I just submitted that and walked out. It never occurred to me that that's a very, very serious thing to have done. I walked out, all right? And then, I think two weeks later, we were told we should come back with the examination fee to fill out the form and all that. So I came, and I had, whatever, sixty rupees or sixty-five rupees that my father gave me for the examination fee. And I came, and I looked at the list, and my name wasn't there. So I went to the clerk in the office, and I said, "Why isn't my name on the list?" He said, "You'd better go and see Father Prefect." So I went to Father Prefect, who was a Jesuit, Saint Xavier's College, and he said to me that what I did and what I wrote was sufficient grounds for me to be expelled from the college, leave alone being given permission for the examination. They would spare me that and not expel me, because if I were expelled from the college, then, you see, for three years, I think, I couldn't get admission to any other college. So they would spare me that because of my long association with the Jesuit institutions and all that, and because I really wasn't a bad boy, as such, and my academic record was otherwise good, and I had passed in all other—

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

You know, in the physics and chemistry papers and all that. It's just that in dynamics I not only had a zero, but I had written this nasty poem about a professor, you know, about his drinking habits and all. So I was utterly shocked. And not just shocked. I'll tell you how afraid I was of my father: I didn't dare go back home. I ran away.

RIKALA:

Oh, no!

PAL:

I went straight to Howrah Station, the railway station, and I bought a third-class ticket for twenty-eight rupees, which was the fare in 1952, January, I think. And I went off to Delhi, all the way from Calcutta. The reason I went to Delhi was because a school friend of mine, a Tibetan school friend of mine, was going to college in Delhi, Saint Stephen's College and—no, it was '52. Yeah, '52, January. Something like that. He was going to college there. So I said, "Well—." That's one reason why I went to Delhi, a main reason, that I at least knew someone there, and it was as far from home as I could get, which was really getting away from my father. I mean, I was terrified of facing him, having failed the exam, not being allowed to go to take the university exam.

RIKALA:

In a dishonorable way.

PAL:

In a dishonorable way. Now, that's a very interesting point, and I didn't tell you something, for which I should have to go back. Because the third thing, I suppose, you see—as you know, one of the main art historical interests of mine is the art of Tibet, on which I've written a lot of books. And that goes back again to my Darjeeling days where, apart from this friend—there was a huge contingency of Tibetan boys at school in Darjeeling, you see, with me. So I got to know them, and that's when, again, I suppose, in my subconscious, an interest in Tibet developed.

RIKALA:

Curiosity.

PAL:

Yeah, a curiosity about Tibet. We used to hear about their journeys from Tibet to come to school. You know, in those days they had to come by mules and walk and all that. All the way from Lhasa these boys used to come to school. And I used to go and spend my holidays, short holidays, in Kalimpong with my Tibetan friends, in their houses. So I really became very close to many of the

Tibetans, but particularly one Tibetan friend [Jigme Yuthok] who went to this college in Delhi and who now lives in Seattle [Washington] with his family.

RIKALA:

Oh, terrific.

PAL:

So I used to hear, about—in fact, he was one year senior to me, but he then took the school final exams with me, because in 1950 he was co-opted by the Tibetan government to be the interpreter of a delegation that was sent from Lhasa to New Delhi. And my friend was recruited by his government, so he missed his exams that year. Anyway, so I used to hear all about Tibet from him and their family and all that, and so I suppose I got interested in Tibet. Anyway, now to jump once more into 1952 when I ran away. I arrived at Delhi, so this was only twenty-four hours, and it never occurred to me that all hell had broken loose at home because, where was this boy? He had left home in the morning with sixty-five rupees and—yeah, the police were informed.

RIKALA:

Oh, no! [laughter]

PAL:

My picture was distributed in the newspaper and "Where are you? Come home." And, you know, "Blah, blah, your mother is on her deathbed" and all this sort of thing. So I arrived in Delhi—in the evening it was, I think—and for some reason I didn't go to the college that evening. I stayed in a hotel. The next day I went to Saint Stephen's College and sought out my friend and told him what had happened, and he had the sense to immediately send a telegram home telling my parents that I was there with him, which then cooled things at home. Then someone was sent from Calcutta, and I was taken—flown back, as a matter of fact.

RIKALA:

Oh, my.

PAL:

Yeah. Yeah. And I was not reprimanded at all. Even my father—I suppose someone must have told him that there would be no point in beating me up. I mean, he must have done it out of fright. That's when I did two things thereafter. I decided that I was going to go to Saint Stephen's to study and not study in Calcutta, and I was going to study history and not physics. So that's when I applied for admission and got into Saint Stephen's to study history. And the other thing I did right then, within a month or two of this experience, I wrote a short story called "The Runaway," which was based partly on my experience, and it was published in a magazine. And I still remember getting a check for fifteen rupees, which was a princely sum. It was the first money I ever earned. But I suppose, you see, it also showed that I really wanted to be a writer.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

And my first piece of writing, in fact, was creative writing rather than historical. I wrote that. And do you know, subsequently, in college magazines, I wrote, and I wrote a few other short stories that were published in the next few years. But I gave up creative writing, I think, once I got into M.A. After that, I don't think I ever wrote anything. But I wrote poems also and short stories in those—in my undergraduate years, let's say. And all of a sudden, about a year ago, about a year and a half ago, I felt this urge to go back to creative writing, particularly in Bengali, and in the last one and a half years, in Bengali journals here and in New York and in Calcutta, I've already published about eight or nine pieces, including three short stories. Yeah. So I have suddenly, you know—

RIKALA:

Resumed.

PAL:

Yeah, resumed that part of my life.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (October 11, 1989)

RIKALA:

So you did your history degree in Delhi, then?

PAL:

That's right.

RIKALA:

Your undergraduate.

PAL:

Saint Stephen's College in Delhi.

RIKALA:

And then an ancient history degree.

PAL:

Then I returned to Calcutta.

RIKALA:

Back in Calcutta.

PAL:

Back in Calcutta, and I did an M.A. in ancient Indian history and culture at the University of Calcutta. Now, I did my first degree in general history, which means basically political history of India, ancient, and—there were three papers on Indian history: ancient, medieval, and modern. And there was history of modern Europe, international relations. There were three other papers. I forget, anyway. I think some aspect of British history. But there was, again, no art history of any kind. In Delhi also I had no interest in—I didn't know anything about art. Of course, living in Delhi, you couldn't help but see all the Mughal monuments all over the city. But, I mean, I saw them like you or anyone else would, like a tourist, more or less. And I took it for granted, you know. I used to pass by them and never even bother to look inside any. I do remember going to some of the art exhibitions in Delhi. Not so much that I was interested in modern art, but perhaps it was the thing to do with some of the other intellectual friends of mine.

RIKALA:

Sure.

PAL:

And one such exhibition I went to was, in fact, a children's art exhibition. There was a satirical paper, weekly, that used to be published then and was very popular in India. Unfortunately it's no longer published. It was called *Shanker's Weekly*. Shanker was the owner, and he used to organize a children's art festival annually. I remember going to it with a friend. Suddenly we heard sort of a bustle behind us as we were watching, and we turned round, and lo-and-behold, there was the prime minister, Mr. [Jawaharlal] Nehru, who had come to see it. And this is now 1953, okay, 1954. Do you know, he didn't have a single bodyguard. No one. He had a couple of other people with him. I mean, there was a small entourage, but altogether maybe four or five people. And very casually they came in. We were not ordered out of the gallery or anything. And he went around, and we followed him a little bit behind and watched him. He looked at the show for about ten, fifteen minutes and went away. And I mean, look at the dramatic difference now with his grandson [Rajiv Gandhi].

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Who doesn't move about without being surrounded by an army, you see. Or look at the political leaders now. And yet, I'm sure—well, as you know, [Harry S.] Truman used to go for walks in Washington.

RIKALA:

Exactly.

PAL:

But can you imagine [George H.W.] Bush doing that? No way. So I remember this, too. But again, even in Delhi I continued to write, of course, as I told you, for a college magazine and for other papers and magazines. I continued to play both cricket and soccer, and I loved the theater and the movie. I used to

act even then. I was also the general secretary of the Bengali Literary Union of the University of Delhi in my last year. So I was active in many ways in terms of extracurricular activities. I was also secretary of the college musical circle. But I don't remember, again, any real indication of having to do anything with art or art history. At that point I think I wanted to become a historian. I think I will go back to writing history. I probably will write at least one book on political history or history of India or something. I'm going to do that one of these days, I think.

RIKALA:

Yeah?

PAL:

Yeah. I do want to.

RIKALA:

That would be tremendously helpful.

PAL:

Well, I don't know about that, but I think it would be interesting. Anyway, so what else?

RIKALA:

You did a D.Phil, [doctorate of philosophy] at University of Calcutta. What subject was that?

PAL:

Well, no, I—before that, you see—if you jump to that, then you'll miss how I came to be an art historian.

RIKALA:

Okay.

PAL:

Which was that after—what happened is that in the eight papers that I had to do for my B.A. honors at Delhi University, I got the highest marks in ancient Indian history. Got an A+ in that. So when I joined Calcutta University, in

Calcutta University, you can do an M.A. in three different branches of history. You can do an M.A. in ancient Indian history and culture, medieval Indian history and culture, which is basically Islamic history, or modern Indian history. There are these three choices you have. And I opted for ancient Indian history.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

Okay. And I remember, I went to the first or second day of class, and in ancient Indian history, the way the M.A. paper, the class is set up in there, you have to take eight courses in two years, unlike here. Eight courses. We used to call them papers, eight papers. Of course, there's political history, social history, etc., etc., of which four courses were compulsory. Every student had to take [them]. And you had the option to take four others from different groups: social history, religious history, art history, anthropology, etc., etc. Well, I opted for anthropology. And of the ninety students that had signed up for that class, for the whole ancient Indian history of that year, I was the only one who signed up for anthropology special paper.

RIKALA:

That's interesting.

PAL:

So they decided not to have anthropology class at all.

RIKALA:

Oh, no!

PAL:

Okay. So I had to choose one of the others, and purely, purely, for no reason at all, purely by accident, I said, "Well, I'll take art history." Because somehow I thought that would be more interesting than social history or religious history or epigraphy or numismatics or the other groups offered. And that's how I got into art history.

RIKALA:

That's how you came to art history.

PAL:

Purely because anthropology was not offered as a course that semester.

RIKALA:

Anthropology. Is that right?

PAL:

Now, but let me tell you a little funny story. There was one Professor [Nalini Nath] Dasgupta who used to teach social history, and he was the one who in his class discussed with us what special papers—he was like a counselor—we were going to take. So everyone in the class was saying, "Well, we are taking social history or religious history," etc. So when it came to my turn, I said, "Sir, I have opted for anthropology." And he looked at me, and—I'll never forget this—he said, "Anthropology? That's obsolete." And I was absolutely stunned. I thought, "Where have I come? I mean, this guy is crazy. He's saying anthropology is obsolete." What he really meant—you see, he used a word, English word, without really knowing its meaning. What he really meant was that anthropology was not being offered that year because of lack of demand. Instead he said, "Anthropology is obsolete." So I went into art history.

RIKALA:

I see. Such a fortuitous—

PAL:

Yes, very fortuitous. I mean, in fact, you see, my entire life, there have been a lot of such—

RIKALA:

Events?

PAL:

Accidents or coincidences.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

It's very strange. They do happen. They, in fact, continued until I came to Los Angeles, which is where everything stopped. Sort of all coincidences stopped, you might say. So then, of course, it was a two-year course, and I took my M.A. exams. I'll tell you, it was not easy. While I was in fifth year in the university, first year of M.A., my father [Gopesh Chandra Pal] said to me that I should take the All-India Administrative Examination and get into civil service.

RIKALA:

Oh, my.

PAL:

And I didn't still have the guts to say no to him. You see—

RIKALA:

Do you think he'd been planning this all along?

PAL:

No. I don't know. He may have. Yes, he may have planned it. I think he may have thought about it. And, of course, the Indian administrative service is a very desirable service. In fact, a lot of my friends are either secretaries in the government now or ambassadors and all that. So I took it, but I didn't want to take it, because I didn't want to go into the administrative service. But I took the exams. And I knew that if I were called for an interview, if I made the minimum grade, I would have probably gotten it. So I had to make sure that I didn't get called for an interview. And to be honest with you, the exam wasn't difficult. The history papers were pretty simple, and I took a couple of history. You had to take only four papers or something: history and English, and one international law, which I found very interesting, by the way. For international law I had to read a book by a man called Lauterpacht, a German scholar, a German named Lauterpacht. And, do you know, in '57, five years, six years later, I met this man Lauterpacht in Cambridge, England.

RIKALA:

Oh.

PAL:

Yeah, it was very interesting. Anyway, so I did all these papers, and I did okay in them. There was a paper, called general knowledge, and I decided to flunk it. Because I had to. There was no other way to get out, you see. If I didn't, and if I were called for an interview, you see, I would be then putting myself in a very difficult position, because if the job was offered to me, then I'd put a burden on myself to have to say no.

RIKALA:

To turn it down. Exactly.

PAL:

Yeah. I mean, everyone would have said "mad," you know. Well, I am not very good in answering puzzles. The general knowledge had not only things like general knowledge, like who was prime minister of which country and all that jazz, but it also had the quizzes—you know, I.Q. [intelligence quotient] type of questions. And I have a morbid fear of I.Q. questions. I think the I.Q. thing is for the birds, because I don't believe I'm not an intelligent person, but I'd flunk a very elementary I.Q. test. So I couldn't do some of the I.Q. tests there anyway. So that's the paper I flunked. As a result, I was not called, thank God, for an interview for that. Because I think I'd have gone bananas.

RIKALA:

Oh, of course.

PAL:

I could never have lasted. And from '56 to '89, from everything I hear—I mean, it's an awful service. It's an awful service in India. You are entirely at the mercy of often ignorant and illiterate political leaders. You see, they're the elected officials. So I would have never lasted. It's a sycophantic job. You have to butter everyone constantly to go anywhere, and particularly these ministers. And you are at their whim all the time. You know, they can fire you or transfer you from—and I am a very hotheaded person, very independent-minded, so I think I'd have been a disaster. So it was, again, a blessing in disguise that I had the sense then not to—so I wasn't asked by father to take the exam again. And then I did my M.A. and I graduated in with the first class first. So that, of course, changed everything, because by then people—I suppose even my

father—must have realized that this guy probably will do better in an academic sort of thing. So having gotten that, there was a scholarship available for Ph.D. in the university in art history. So I decided to then go in for the D.Phil. You see, in those days, the degree was called D.Phil., doctor of philosophy, like Oxford [University].

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

D.Phil, rather than Ph.D. So I decided to go in for that.

RIKALA:

And then you at some point traveled to Cambridge. Or really that was—?

PAL:

Well, yes, after I did my D.Phil. It took me three years to do. I selected architecture of Nepal for my thesis. And, you know, there's no course work at all in Indian universities, like British universities.

RIKALA:

You do your research.

PAL:

For Ph.D., yes, you only do research. So I spent three years working on. Nepal. And I went to Nepal. I suppose I would have—I may have worked in Tibet, but by that time Tibet was closed, you see.

RIKALA:

That's right.

PAL:

The Chinese had occupied Tibet, and the Dalai Lama [XIV, Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho] had fled to India. So Nepal was the next best thing. Nepal had just opened. You know, Nepal was also a closed country until '56 or so.

RIKALA:

I didn't know that.

PAL:

Or early fifties. Nepal had just opened. And I had a lot of school friends and college friends, Nepalese friends. So they invited me also to come, and I went, I remember, in '58, after my M.A. Or '59, yeah. I first wanted to do my thesis on Central Asian paintings. There's a very big Central Asian collection in the National Museum [of India] in [New] Delhi, part of the Sir Aurel Stein collection. I wanted to do that, but then I realized that you can't work on Central Asian painting without learning Chinese. So I gave it up and instead I selected the architecture of Nepal. I went off to Nepal and spent three months there, which was a very interesting time to be in Nepal, because, as I said, Nepal had just opened up until there was a—I don't know if you know much about the country. Nepal was tightly run by the Ranas, and the king was a puppet in the hand of these Ranas, who always supplied the prime minister, who was the real power. So the present king's grandfather was just a puppet, Tribhuvan, and he then fled to India, and with the help of India, the Ranas were overthrown in the early fifties. Late forties, early fifties, I'm not sure exactly of the date. And then Nepal was thrown open to the [world]. Before that, you couldn't go to Nepal. No foreigner was allowed to go to Nepal. I could have gone as a Hindu pilgrim, you know, but certainly Westerners were forbidden, like Tibet. And once it was open, of course, guess who arrived there first.

RIKALA:

The scholars?

PAL:

The U.S. [United States] cavalry. U.S. AID.

RIKALA:

Oh, [laughter] I see what you mean.

PAL:

Okay. So, in fact, in 1959, when I was in Nepal, Nepal was overrun by Americans. They were all over the place giving aid to the Nepalese, so it was a very interesting time to be in Nepal. And I saw the art firsthand, and the

architecture. I did my thesis and got my degree. Now, one of my dreams from early life was to go to Cambridge University, from my school days. As a matter of fact, this is something very interesting also, which I forgot to say, that in 1951, as I was finishing my school final examination in Darjeeling, I had applied to Trinity College in Cambridge for admission and had been granted admission for mathematics tripos.

RIKALA:

Already?

PAL:

But most of my relatives, father's, my mother's relatives, and all the uncles and all, advised against my being sent to Cambridge at the tender age of sixteen, seventeen. They thought I would be spoiled, or I was not mature enough. So I didn't go. I didn't take that opportunity. But that desire sort of lay latent in me, so in 1961 I applied for a Commonwealth [Fellowship] scholarship to go and work in Cambridge again, and I got the scholarship and admission to Corpus Christi [College] in Cambridge. Actually, I'd gotten the admission before I applied for the scholarship. I had tried for a scholarship, history scholarship, given by Corpus Christi, called the Bridges Scholarship, which I didn't get. But the tutor wrote me a letter saying, "Sorry, we could not give you the scholarship, the Bridges Scholarship," because it wasn't for art history, you see, it was for general history really. "But we will be happy to admit you if you can find funding from other sources." So then I applied for a Commonwealth scholarship, and, you see, I had admission to a college.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

That helped, also. So I got the scholarship and I went off to Cambridge.

RIKALA:

And your dissertation there was on Nepali sculpture.

PAL:

On sculpture and painting in Nepal. So I decided I might as well study all of Nepalese art, which was a wise move, because at that time there was no one who had done any work on Nepal. So I became an instant celebrity, you see, and a so-called authority on Nepalese art.

RIKALA:

Well, I'm interested in your work in the architecture. How did you shape that D.Phil.? Was it a survey?

PAL:

Yeah, a survey, that's right, of the different temple types and architectural styles that have prevailed in Nepal as can be studied from extant buildings. A historical survey, that's what I did. Exactly what you'd do with sculpture and painting, but simply used architecture.

RIKALA:

And what were some of your impressions of England, your preconceived notions of England before you got to Cambridge?

PAL:

Well, it lived up to my expectations, I have to tell you honestly. I mean, of course, England wasn't strange in any way, because having been brought up in an English school [Saint Joseph's College] in Darjeeling, we were brought up like little English gentlemen. We ate English-style most of the time and spoke English. And by this time, of course, we were thinking in English. And we read a lot of English literature. I particularly loved things like P. G. Wodehouse. You know, having been sort of brought up even at the fag end of the British raj in India, you just knew England well, and Englishmen. You sort of felt you knew them well. So there was really no surprise. And if I remember, driving into London from Heathrow [International Airport] and—you know, England was a much more pleasant place then for foreigners and particularly Asians than it is now. There was less racial tension and hostility. I never felt any. Now every time I go back to England, the minute I arrive in Heathrow I become very self-conscious about being an Indian or an Asian coming into England. I don't feel comfortable. I don't feel welcome. In fact, it begins not even at Heathrow. It

begins with a visit to the consulate general here. You see, in those days we didn't need a visa to go to England.

RIKALA:

No, of course not.

PAL:

Any Indian passport holder could go in and out of Britain without any visa or permit, which, of course, is impossible now. Although I do have an Indian passport still, I do have my green card here. I'm a resident here. And even though I show that green card at the local consul general here, I mean, they really treat you as if you are someone trying to sneak into London. Now, why would anyone go to England and live there? I mean, why would I, who lives here and has a good job here, want to live in England, anyway?

RIKALA:

Of course. Exactly.

PAL:

I mean, I wouldn't. But that's how bad it is. But in those days, I mean, I had—and Cambridge I think perhaps still is, but certainly then was like a paradise. I mean, it's the closest thing to a paradise I think that I've known in my life on earth. It's just marvelous. Everything was right. Everything. I just don't remember one bad, sad, unhappy moment in my three years in Cambridge. It was fun. It was stimulating. It was exciting. I mean, the England I know is much more Cambridge than anything else, although I did travel extensively. And I must say, all commonwealth scholars were managed in England by the British consul, and they were magnificent.

RIKALA:

Really?

PAL:

They were very, very hospitable and took care of us wonderfully and arranged—I have never seen so much great theater in my life.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

The British consul used to buy tickets in bulk for us, and if the theater tickets were, say, two pounds, then they would subsidize it, and we would have paid ten shillings for those seats or whatever.

RIKALA:

That's wonderful.

PAL:

It's like that. And during the short vacations they would arrange holidays in Wales or Scotland or the Cotswolds or, you know, all over the place. So with other commonwealth scholars and other foreign students from other countries, that's how we got to—and of course, there are a lot of foreigners in Cambridge. There's a huge number of Europeans studying English in colleges in Cambridge. As a matter of fact, life would be terribly dull without them, because the other ones who kept a balance by providing a sufficient number of women for the—yes, you see, at Cambridge, I think the proportion of men students to women students in the university is like, oh, I would say something like a seven-thousand-male to three-thousand-female ratio, which is, you know—so most of our girlfriends were mostly Europeans. And I must say a lot of them were Scandinavians, by the way, if it's of any interest to you. But I continued to play—I played cricket for my college in Cambridge. I learned a new game—two new games—in Cambridge. One was squash, which I had never played in India. But the very first winter of my winters in Cambridge, 1962, was one of the worst snowstorms in the history of England, I gather. I remember the snow began falling about two or three days before Christmas, and it snowed for three days solid or something. And the river was frozen.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

The Cam [River] was frozen, and, in fact, the snow remained solid until early March on the streets, okay.

RIKALA:

Oh, my gosh.

PAL:

Never let up. Never let up. Never thawed. So it was a very harsh winter. So some Canadian friends of mine said, "Why don't—?" You know, they used to play squash in the squash courts of college, and they said it was a good game, good exercise. So I took up squash. So that was one. The other game I learned was croquet. You know croquet?

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Yeah, which we love to play in England. As a matter of fact, I became quite good at croquet, and I liked the game very much. It was a very widening experience for me and sort of something that I'd never had in India. For instance, the college system in Cambridge I think is superb, because you got to meet friends who were in other fields and not just narrow—you see, in the system here, what happens is like you're a history student, and you tend to know only historians.

RIKALA:

You only know the people in your school.

PAL:

And that's awfully narrow. That frustrates the whole idea of a university education.

RIKALA:

Exactly.

PAL:

It should be universal.

RIKALA:

And collegiate, as you say.

PAL:

By definition, collegiate. And that's what I found in Cambridge, which was like going back to my undergraduate days, in a sense, because you have that in undergraduate college, at least in India. And I suppose here too, because it's a mixture in a house, or you live in dormitory. But the minute you go into postgraduate in America or even in Calcutta University, you tend to know only people in ancient history or law or whatever. But here, I mean, I think of the sixty graduate students that we were in Corpus [Christi], I think I was the only art historian. The others were in physics or chemistry and criminology and literature, and I had friends in all. So you got to be—and they were all very bright, and you had to always be on your toes. Of course, I was older than all of them, because I had gone to do my second Ph.D., you see.

RIKALA:

Many years of education, yeah.

PAL:

So I was sort of like a senior member of the community. I already had a doctorate. I got to know the fellows pretty well also, you know, at Cambridge and became very friendly with them. Some of them were very, very eminent men. And the college dining system was a very good system where you—although in the main college, students and fellows dined separately. As you probably know, fellows dined on the high table. I don't know if University College [London] had the same thing. Or did they all eat together?

RIKALA:

No, no. At University College it's—

PAL:

They all ate together.

RIKALA:

It's not a residential college.

PAL:

Well, in Cambridge University, in the dining room there's a high table for the fellows.

RIKALA:

Yeah. Very important.

PAL:

And low tables for—

RIKALA:

For the students.

PAL:

—the students. But Corpus had a graduate center called Leckhampton House, where I stayed with other graduate students, and we had our own dining room there where we had breakfast, of course, every day, and two dinners a week.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's nice.

PAL:

Wednesdays and Saturdays, I think. And the rest of the meals you took in college. But those dinners we ate together. It was one meal. One table. No high table, low table.

RIKALA:

That's very nice.

PAL:

So often a lot of the professors used to come and eat with us. To give you an example, one was, for instance, Sir George Thompson, who was a Nobel Prize winner in physics.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

People like that you got to know on a very intimate basis. This, I thought, was the great advantage of the Cambridge system that I've missed since.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

And I miss that stimulation. I miss the conversations with other colleagues in other fields. We always knew what they were doing, and we would discuss things like fission and fusion and all sorts of contemporary issues. And even though I couldn't go into these things in depth, you picked up a lot of good information.

RIKALA:

Oh, of course. Of course.

PAL:

So that was interesting and it was—in fact, I suppose in a sense you might say that I am in America today because of that spell in Cambridge. If I had not gone to Cambridge, I doubt if I would have come to America at all. The funny part of it is that I did try to come to America before going to Cambridge. I did apply for a scholarship to [University of] Pennsylvania to work under Stella Kramrisch, who is a big name—and is still alive—in Indian art history. Stella Kramrisch is now retired as professor of Indian art history from both Philadelphia—from the University of Pennsylvania—and NYU [New York University], but at ninety-four or so, she is still the curator of Indian art at the Philadelphia Museum [of Art].

RIKALA:

That's wonderful.

PAL:

She is an Austrian who left Austria in the early twenties and went to Santiniketan in Bengal—Vishvabharati University, founded by [Rabindranath] Tagore—and taught there for a year or two and then moved on to Calcutta

University, where she was professor of Indian art history until 1952. In fact, all my teachers were taught by Stella Kramrisch. So by the time I went to Calcutta University in 1956, Stella Kramrisch was a legend. A legend. And it's amazing that I missed her only by four years. In 1952 she left, and I joined in '56. So in 1959 I got in touch with her in Pennsylvania, and she said yes. I said, "I would like to come and work under you." She said fine, she would be happy to accept me as a student. And she said, "But you'll have to, of course, get a scholarship. So you should make an application," and all that. So I said, "Fine, I will." And I did make an application. Then I got a letter from her saying that she was coming to Calcutta. This was in winter '60-'61, I think, that she was coming to Calcutta, and she would like to come to Nepal with me and sort of give me advice and look at the—and I said, "This is fantastic!" I mean, "Look at this woman, she is coming all the way—." I thought she was coming for me. Well, she came to Calcutta, and I went and met her, and we had a long chat, and she said, "Well, we'll meet next in Kathmandu." And I said, "All right." So I went off to Kathmandu, and so did she. And in Kathmandu, she said to me, "Well, you go looking for your art," you know, whatever, "and I will also go around today, and we will meet every evening in my hotel and compare notes." I said, "Fair enough." You know, Nepal was then virgin territory. Nothing was mapped. Nothing. I mean, the bibliography of the art of Nepal in 1958 was all of maybe a dozen articles. Nothing ancient was known. Nothing. No one thought that there was any art in Nepal older than, say, twelfth century, almost. So it was really virgin territory. So I met with her the next day in the evening. And I continued meeting with her for about a week, and I became suspicious. Because what would happen every evening, she would ask me where I had seen what.

RIKALA:

Then she would—

PAL:

And she would take notes. You know, she didn't tell me once what she saw where during the day. She was very vague, and she would say, "Well, I went to this, and I—." So I said, you know—I had heard rather nasty things about her from others in Calcutta, about her using people and all this. But you know how it is, you always learn from your own experience.

RIKALA:

Oh, sure.

PAL:

You never want to learn from someone. That's the tragedy about history, you know. We never learn lessons from history.

RIKALA:

That's right.

PAL:

And that's in private life as well as nations. You know, we repeat the same mistakes. We don't have to impress each other that war is a wrong means to achieve an end, right? History tells you it is wrong. But do we listen? We are still killing each other all over, you see? That's the thing. But I became suspicious. And one of my professors, who was also an ex-student of Kramrisch, had warned me about Kramrisch sort of taking your material.

1.4. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (October 18, 1989)

RIKALA:

There are a few questions I'd like to go back to, if we might. One is to recapitulate once again what your father [Gopesh Chandra Pal]'s reaction may have been, or if there was a specific thought in his mind, to your going into history instead of into physics when your education changed course.

PAL:

I don't know if he had any reaction at all. We never discussed it. I am afraid there's nothing to be said. There's no way I can answer that question, because I don't remember his saying yes or no or expressing any opinion at all.

RIKALA:

I was a little bit more interested, as we talked about your college career, as to the type of study routine and some of your work habits that you established either early in your school career, or then as—you know, how you refined your research techniques that perhaps have taken you now through your life.

PAL:

Well, well, well, well. Well, as an undergraduate, we didn't have to do any research, so all I remember is that we used to study late at night, usually, and before an exam cram as much as possible and burn the midnight oil, drink a lot of coffee to stay awake. That's how we got through the undergraduate exams. For my M.A., I was a little more methodical, but there again, I was good at anticipating the kind of questions we'd get in the exam, so I took chances, you might say, by intensively preparing certain topics well and hoping that I'd get enough out of that to get an A. And that's exactly what happened. But I was more disciplined in the sense that I did not stay awake overnight for M.A. exams. I studied during the day and slept at a reasonable hour and did not cram. Maybe it's something that came back to me that really the Jesuits, I remember, at school—before the school final exams, we were not allowed to—in fact, all the books were taken away, believe it or not, I think three or four days before the final exams.

RIKALA:

Oh, my gosh.

PAL:

All books were taken away. We were not allowed to study during the exam week, which is very good, actually, because your brain is not tired.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

And it makes you think better.

RIKALA:

So you know it, you know it.

PAL:

Yeah. Yeah, you know it, and it comes back. So therefore, my M.A. results are much better than my B.A. results, and I think partly because of that. But I was never a very, very studious type, because I had other interests and played

games and I loved sports. I also took part in other cultural and literary activities, in organizing musical shows. I participated in college, school, and university dramas, so that I didn't have time really to study too hard. And the fact that I took the history of Nepalese art, as my Ph.D. thesis—you know, we did not have any courses for Ph.D. in Indian universities, because you had finished all your courses during M.A.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

So your Ph.D. was really just-doing research and writing your thesis. There are no classes, no formal classes at all. And I did not have to do—I went on field trips. I went, for instance, to Nepal for the first time in 1959, naturally, and stayed there for, oh, something like, I don't know, the first trip four months, I think, in the Kathmandu Valley, looking for art. This was the time—remember, I ended up by talking about [Stella] Kramrisch's visit in the last tape. When I wrote my thesis—and I didn't, fortunately. Because Nepal was totally unknown and Nepalese architecture was unstudied, I really did not have an extensive bibliography to—

RIKALA:

You were the one that then must have compiled—

PAL:

That's right. You see, I was—that way I was a pioneer.

RIKALA:

That's very exciting.

PAL:

See, there's a lot of advantage, also. And if you're smart, you do that. Because, after all, Ph.D. is only a degree which you need in order to get a job, technically, and otherwise it's a useless thing. So I'm called Dr. Pal, but otherwise, I mean, no one cares. In fact, I have two of them, so, you know—

RIKALA:

That's quite extraordinary.

PAL:

Yeah, but it doesn't—you know, to me, I could have had neither, really, and I don't think I'd have been any different. So I didn't have to study. I never went to the National Library in Calcutta, for instance, ever. I must be the only Ph.D. student of the University of Calcutta who never went to the National Library. I never went to the Calcutta University library, either, for other reasons. I mean, you know, it was extremely difficult to get books from that library. So I never went to that, either. Whatever little work I needed to do, research, I did it in the library of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, which is, of course, a very eminent institution for Indology in general and Sanskrit studies and oriental studies and all that. But, as I said, if you look at the bibliography of my thesis, I almost had to pad it up with peripheral subjects, books on general architecture and all that, just so that the examiner would be impressed that I had done some work. But having done an M.A. and having answered questions and written an occasional essay, then writing a chapter for a thesis is quite different. There I had help from one of my university professors, who was not my supervisor. My supervisor was a very busy man when I was doing my Ph.D. under him. He was already a member of parliament, and most of the time he used to be away in Delhi attending parliament or on other government work, commissions, etc. So he had very little time for his students. What I did was I wrote the first chapter of my thesis and took it to one of the other professors, art historians, at the university, a professor called S.K. Saraswati, and I gave it to him to read. He read it and then sat down with me and showed me how to organize it properly. And that's the main thing. You see, organization is what someone has to teach you. Whether or not you have presented the material logically, those are the two things, really, that one has to—I think the only role apart from guiding you in terms of bibliography and all, or where you can find material—in my case, my professor knew nothing about Nepal. He had never been to Nepal; he didn't know anything about Nepalese architecture.

RIKALA:

Your supervisor?

PAL:

That's right.

RIKALA:

What's his name?

PAL:

My supervisor's name was Professor Nihar Ranjan Ray. Whereas the person that helped me with that first chapter was Professor Saraswati. And I remain grateful to him for that. I must say I learned my lesson well, because that guidance was sufficient for me to model all the other chapters on that first chapter, revised first chapter, corrected first chapter. And it went very smoothly, so that, say, six months later or whenever, I finished the thesis and submitted the whole manuscript to my supervisor and said, "Look, this is it, and you—." So I assume he read it, because he gave it back to me saying that it was fine and I should submit it. So I submitted it. And since the two external examiners who later examined the thesis were both English professors in England, the thesis was sent to England, and they commended it highly. I assume it was all right. I mean, they gave me the degree. So I have to tell you, in answer to that question of yours, that by and large I was self-taught in doing research, I would say. The fact that I did not take a very literature-oriented subject, or a subject that was not very well studied or written about, I had very little bibliographical research to do. And this was true also of my second thesis in Cambridge, which again was a subject that had never been really done before. As far as I remember, there was not even a single article on the history of Nepalese sculpture when I—

RIKALA:

That's extraordinary.

PAL:

And there was only one article on Nepalese painting, which was written, I think, in 1933 by Stella Kramrisch. And that was all I had to read, virtually, and maybe some, a dozen or two dozen, small articles on particular aspects of Nepalese art. That was, again, the extent of my bibliography for my second thesis. So I had rather a cushy time in Cambridge. For the first two years, I really did nothing. I attended lectures that I wanted to. I played croquet, I

played cricket, I punted in the river, I enjoyed my pub life thoroughly. I did everything. Attended May balls, organized a May ball, in fact, one year. And traveled a good deal in Europe and in Great Britain. Then suddenly I was confronted with the task of having to present a thesis. And I remember, the whole thesis, I think, took me about six months to write. Again, it was really quite simple, because I had one thesis behind me.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

I had all my photographs, and I organized them by styles and whatever groups or chapter headings I had, and simply sat down and wrote it out. I gave it to my supervisor, who again was not an expert. He is not even an art historian, a man called Allchin, F. R. Allchin, who is reader in archaeology at Cambridge University. So, you see, he is technically an archaeologist, but he is a wonderful supervisor and really a very, very bright man with a very clear mind—and this is very important. You see, students often don't understand. You know, the selection of a supervisor is very important. Don't go for necessarily the most brilliant or the most famous person. One should choose a supervisor who I think has a lot of common sense. That's very important. And one who has a clear mind, thinks clearly, may not know anything. In fact, Allchin knew nothing about Nepal and had never been to Nepal, and yet he was a very, very fine supervisor. To give you an example, he is the one who first expanded my mind enormously. The first supervision I had with him, he told me to forget about art history and he told me to read books on anthropology and also some other subjects, which I found very interesting and I think helped me a lot. You know, Jane Harrison's *Prologemena to the Study of Greek Religion* and things that were very classic books in sociology and anthropology which I had not even heard of till I came to Cambridge. So that was very good. He, for instance, arranged for me to take a couple of supervisions with Ernst Gombrich.

RIKALA:

Oh.

PAL:

Yeah, you see? Gombrich came to Cambridge that year as the Slade professor, '62. This is 1962. So I was, I think, very fortunate. I remember I went to see him one morning, nine o'clock, and he said, "I frankly don't know why your supervisor wants you to come and see me. I know nothing about Nepal." So there you are again. I was sent to another man who really knew nothing about Nepalese art, but we spoke and discussed what I was doing, and I told him, and then he gave me some very useful hints which I think stood me well later on. I mean, those two supervisions that I had with him in a sense taught me how to look at art in a way that I had not looked at it before and to see connections and to look for origins and things like that. For instance, he raised the issue with me—I mean, he said, "Well, how did the artists create all these images? They couldn't have worked in a vacuum." That's the first time that anyone had raised that question with me, and I said, "Of course. That's right." So he said, "Are there any iconographic books or sketchbooks that the artists kept in their families?" This and that. So that sort of, you know, gave me a kind of insight into art history that I'd never had. In fact, in a sense it's because of that conversation with him that we in the Los Angeles County Museum [of Art] now have probably the greatest repository of artists' sketchbooks from Nepal, going back to the sixteenth century, or fifteenth, even.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's wonderful.

PAL:

Fifteenth, sixteenth, right to nineteenth, and a vast collection, because I realized that that material is of fundamental importance. So I went about collecting it. So I owe that to the old man. So that really answers your question. That's a very long answer, though.

RIKALA:

Well, we concluded last week with a—

PAL:

We were discussing Kramrisch—

RIKALA:

—discussion of Kramrisch.

PAL:

My connection with Kramrisch, yes.

RIKALA:

Exactly. And you also mentioned that you probably wouldn't be in America had you not gone to Cambridge.

PAL:

Well, yes. Well, let me just finish the Kramrisch episode. Well, as I said, it seemed to me, back in 1960, 1961, when Kramrisch came to India and when we met in Nepal, that I would probably go and work with her and that I would be getting a scholarship in the University of Pennsylvania. I told you that she asked me to send her a complete set of all photographs of all objects I had seen in—

RIKALA:

My goodness.

PAL:

But then someone at the Calcutta University, one of my professors who was a student of Kramrisch's, advised me not to do that. He said that wouldn't be prudent. So I didn't send any of the pictures. And I kept getting letters from Kramrisch asking for these pictures. You know, I wish I had saved all those letters. Somehow I am afraid I'm a bad letter saver. I never save any letters. Once I've replied to it, I just tear it up and throw it away. Now I'm regretting it, because there are a lot of letters from people like Kramrish and some other eminent people that I should have saved, anyway. You know, I would ignore that plea for photographs, and I never sent her photographs. And slowly the letters stopped. And I had sent in an application for a scholarship and never heard from her or the university. So it was obvious she had decided not to give me the scholarship, which is just as well. Then I applied for a Commonwealth [Fellowship] scholarship, and I got it, so I went off to Cambridge. So '62, I went to Cambridge. And 1964—what happened is in 1963, yes, summer of 1963, I got a letter in Cambridge from Kramrisch, who had completely forgotten who I was and said that she had heard from Dr. Pott, who was the director of the museum in Leiden, ethnographic museum—they had a large collection of

Nepalese paintings, and I had gone to study it. I had met Dr. Pott, and they had one or two inscribed Nepalese paintings, and I had read the inscriptions for him. And what had happened is that Kramrisch needed some inscriptions to be read, so she had written to Dr. Pott, and Dr. Pott had told her that, well, there is this young scholar in Cambridge, and given her my address. So she wrote to me, completely forgetting—it was amazing, because the letter didn't have—it was the same name. And my name is not exactly a common name. But she wrote as if she didn't even know me, and she said, "You know, Dr. Pott has given me your name, blah, blah, blah," and sent me a bunch of inscriptions and said, "Would you help us to read them, help me to understand them?" Oh, and then she said that she was doing an exhibition of the art of Nepal for the Asia House [Gallery] in New York [City]. That's the first time I heard of Asia House. I said, "Oh, that's interesting. That's what I'm doing my Ph.D. on, and she's doing an exhibition." And then it struck me, my God, that's why she was in Nepal in 1961, looking for material. She had no intention—! She simply used me. I said, "Gosh!" Well, I still sent her some of the gist of the inscriptions. What amazed me is that Stella Kramrisch is supposed to be an eminent Sanskritist. She, in fact, claims and did publish—I think in the late 1920s—a translation of parts of a seventh-century Sanskrit text, okay, iconographic parts of fundamental importance for the study of Hindu iconography, seventh-century Sanskrit texts. And yet these inscriptions were in elementary Sanskrit. And I'm no Sanskritist, and yet, I had—Sanskrit, if you recall, I had mentioned before—

RIKALA:

You studied it in Darjeeling.

PAL:

Yeah, but very little. And I could read and understand them, but she couldn't. That's when I realized that she really didn't know Sanskrit. Of course, the truth about that book is that she never translated it. She got a schoolteacher, a Sanskrit schoolteacher in Calcutta, paid him to translate it, and then published it in her own name. Yes, that is absolutely true. And this is convincing, because anyone who knew Sanskrit would not have sent me those inscriptions. Anyway, I did give her whatever help she had. Then I wrote to her saying, "Since you are doing this exhibition"—and the exhibition was for the summer

of 1964—"I would like very much to come to see this exhibition, because I am doing research on Nepalese sculpture and painting." And even then, despite the fact that I had helped her, I heard nothing from her. Okay? I still remember, I was playing cricket. No. Yes, the master of Corpus Christi College, which was my college in Cambridge, was a man called Sir Frank Lee. He was a distinguished, very distinguished, civil servant who had retired as the secretary of the British treasury and had become the master of my Master means, you know, principal of our college.

RIKALA:

Yeah, the headmaster. Headmaster.

PAL:

He and I used to play croquet together, so we had become quite good friends. And don't forget, I was the senior-most student in the college.

RIKALA:

Exactly. Because the degree, full degree—

PAL:

As you know, I already had a Ph.D. behind me. So we became good friends also, and because we played croquet together—I think it was—yes, that's right, it was in spring of 1964. He asked me during—you know, croquet was always followed by a sumptuous tea that his wife, Lady [Kathleen] Lee served in the master's lodge, which was always an attraction also to play with him, because he was rather a bad-tempered player—you know, hated to lose. Anyway, he said to me, "What are you doing during the summer?" I said I really had no plans. "I want to go to New York to see this exhibition, since it relates to my field, but I have no money." I mean, the Commonwealth scholarship wouldn't give me money to travel to America, you know.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

So he said, "Let me see what I can do for you. Maybe I can help. I'll give you the passage money from college funds," which I thought was most generous.

RIKALA:

That's very generous.

PAL:

I decided to go, and I booked ray passage, and—oh, I remember this. He said, "Now, give me, in one paragraph, exactly one paragraph—which should be a quarter of a page—what you want to do." So I did. I gave him like an index-card-sized paragraph. I wrote it, and I gave it to him, and he took it, and I never heard anything from him until—it was early summer, it was June. That's right. And I was playing cricket, I remember, when I got this telegram saying, "Come to America for three months"—or six months it may have said, even—"all expenses paid, travel and all living expenses." And it was signed Porter McCray, director JDR III Fund, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, etc., etc. So I said, "This is strange." I knew the master had written to someone in America, so I went to him and I said, "Do you know anything of this?" And he looked at it and he said, "Well, I don't know what this 'JDR III Fund' is, but I did write to so-and-so, who is the undersecretary for Atlantic affairs in Washington [D.C.], so he may have pulled some strings or—." You know. So I said, "Fine." I mean, I said, "Is this true? I mean, how do I know this isn't a hoax?" But obviously, why should anyone send me a fake telegram to get me to New York? I mean, I'm not mafia or a murder suspect or anything. Anyway, so I called around, and no one knew who this Porter McCray was or what the JDR III Fund was. And I arrived with this telegram at the U.S. embassy in London for a visa. They looked it all up in their books and they also couldn't identify what JDR III Fund is, but to show you how trusting even the U.S. immigration and visa people were then, they didn't doubt the authenticity of the telegram and gave me a visa. Now, you try that today!

RIKALA:

It wouldn't happen, would it?

PAL:

You wouldn't have a clue. Because, you see, anyone can send a telegram like that, and on the basis of that, they'll never give you a visa.

RIKALA:

No, exactly.

PAL:

You see? So I got my visa, and apropos of this, I want to tell you that, as an Indian in those days, I didn't need any kind of visa to go to Britain, either. I could go in and out anytime, which I can't do now.

RIKALA:

With your passport, yeah.

PAL:

I need a visa with my Indian passport. That was when India was a member of the Commonwealth. But none of all these race and other problems had cropped up then. Also, at the airport, I mean, they used to say—well, when I used to come back—say I went home for a vacation—once, for my sister's wedding, in fact, I had to fly back home—and I came back. Or when I went to Europe on visits, which I did frequently, on short vacations. I used to come back, and the immigration officer in London or Heathrow [International Airport], or wherever, would simply say, "What do you do here?" And I said, "I am a student at Corpus Christi, Cambridge." I mean, you didn't need a passport, almost. That was enough.

RIKALA:

It's very important.

PAL:

And the same thing—do you know that in London, anywhere, whatever I bought, I paid with a check? And all I had to say—it was a Cambridge check, of course, Barclay's Bank, Cambridge.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

They saw the check, and they would say, "Which college?" And I would say, "Corpus," and that was all the identification you needed. Never did they ask for your passport or driver's license or anything.

RIKALA:

That's quite different from today. That's so different.

PAL:

Now I'm talking of '62 to '65. Anyway, so I took a flight and I came to New York. And I have to say that first of all, driving from JFK [John F. Kennedy International Airport] to New York, Manhattan, you passed by—oh, it was the year of the—mind you—the great fair, New York fair.

RIKALA:

The World's Fair.

PAL:

The World's Fair, 1964. So that's just before—the site was right near the other airport.

RIKALA:

La Guardia [Airport].

PAL:

La Guardia. Yeah, you see, you pass by it, right down that freeway, to come to the city. And also you pass by a huge cemetery. And I must say, I was staggered by the size of this cemetery. The other thing that I remember of that drive—I mean, I was so awed. I mean, coming from London, England, which was to me the biggest city at that time that I'd been to—but I'd no idea of the scale of America or everything American. I mean, that cemetery was like a city to me. I mean, the space given to it. Or, for instance, I remember also passing one of these—what are they called? You know, the yards where they smash cars.

RIKALA:

Junkyards.

PAL:

Junkyards. Oh I I mean, these huge contraptions were picking up a crashed car. I was dumbfounded, absolutely. Anyway, I came to New York, and I must

tell you two very interesting impressions that frightened—one frightened the hell out of me, and the other—one was that I went next morning at nine o'clock to 30 Rockefeller Plaza. I still remember, I think it was room 6600, and there was on the door "JDR III Fund" again. I said, "What is this JDR place?" I still didn't know what is this JDR.

RIKALA:

That's very trusting to come all that way.

PAL:

So I went in, and there was a receptionist, and I said who I was. And she said, "Oh, yes, please sit down." And then this very dapper man came out. Porter McCray, and said something like, "How do you do? I'm Porter McCray. Welcome. We're so glad you could come," and took me to his office and said to me—and I still didn't have the guts to ask him what JDR III Fund was. I said, "He'll think I'm a fool," you know. And he told me, he said, "Did you know 'Joe Blow' in Washington?" I'm sorry, it's a name I've forgotten now, the undersecretary for Atlantic affairs. And I said, "No." I then realized that this was the result of Sir Frank Lee's letter. And I said, "I'm afraid I don't know him, but in college, my master, Frank Lee, wrote him about me." He said, "Well, they called and they called my boss and said that we should do something to bring you here," I didn't ask who his boss was. I said, "This is strange. He's the director of this fund, so why should he have a boss?" So I let it go. I'm sitting there, and we are chatting, and then suddenly there's a knock on the door. Porter says, "Come in." Then this man looks in. He's a tall, rather skinny man, quite elderly, wearing what seemed to me a very plain gray suit. He looked at us, and he said, "Oh, I'm sorry, Porter. I didn't know there was anyone with you. Please excuse me." And Porter said, "No, no, John. Please come in and meet our new grantee, Dr. Pratapaditya Pal from Cambridge." And I, of course, a little arrogantly sort of got up and shook this man's hand. And he said, "Oh, it's very nice that you could come," and "Please sit down." Then he turned to Porter and said, "Porter, may I see you after you are through with your meeting?" And Porter said, "Pine, John," and John walked away. Our meeting then lasted for another fifteen, twenty minutes. He told me what to do and all this, and then he handed me over to the secretary to make the arrangements and all that of my travel around the States. So I spoke with the secretary. Then

the secretary escorted me to the elevator. And while going she said, "You know, you are very lucky, because very few grantees get to meet the boss." And I said, "Now, would you please tell me who this boss is. Who did I meet? Who is this boss?" And she said, "Why, that's John D. Rockefeller III."

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

Then, of course, JDR III, you see, is John D. Rockefeller III.

RIKALA:

Rockefeller III fund. So a personal fund—

PAL:

He had established this fund, personal fund, about a year ago, or less than a year ago.

RIKALA:

That's extraordinary.

PAL:

It had just been approved in Washington. I was the second grantee of the fund. And no wonder no one had heard of it. You see how self-effacing, that he didn't even want to call it John D. Rockefeller III Fund. It was known only by its initials as long as it lasted. It closed down after his death, I'm afraid, because it was a personal fund. But it was a great fund, because it was the only fund exclusively established to bring an exchange of art historians between Asia and America.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's quite wonderful.

PAL:

Yeah, which you didn't have, and you don't have now.

RIKALA:

No.

PAL:

Not just art historians, sorry, all persons connected with the arts, which included the performing arts: musicians, art historians, dancers.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's very nice.

PAL:

I think it's really—it did more for cultural exchange between America and India than any other organization I know of. But I was so embarrassed, and I rushed back, I turned back, and I said, "Oh, my God, please take me to him, because he must think I'm the rudest person. I didn't even thank him." And the secretary said, "Oh, no, no. You must not do that. He'll be very upset now if you go in. He's always very embarrassed, and he doesn't want people to thank him for anything."

RIKALA:

Oh, my.

PAL:

I was just stunned by the whole experience. So that was my first morning in America.

1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (October 18, 1989)

RIKALA:

Well, most people don't get to meet John D. Rockefeller on their first day in the United States!

PAL:

I know! Exactly, yes. I never thought of that, [laughter] That's another interesting—yeah. Yes, I never even thought of that. You're right. Yeah, I did meet John D. Rockefeller, first day of my—

RIKALA:

Quite a good—yeah.

PAL:

Yeah. And I must tell you, I really didn't even dream he was John D. Rockefeller III. I'd never seen, of course, any picture of him. Because Nelson Rockefeller, you know, you saw him everywhere. There's no reason why, either in India or England, John D. Rockefeller's picture would be anywhere. And secondly, I really thought, I mean, what a shabby gray suit. So I mean, it almost looked shabby, and so—

RIKALA:

[laughter] Maybe that's why he had so much money, right? He saved it.

PAL:

Probably is. Anyway, the second experience that I must tell you is the next day I decided to go to the Asia Society—okay, so at ten o'clock the Asia Society opens—to see the exhibition, the Nepal exhibition. And here I don't quite know, but I got down from the bus, I think, on Madison [Avenue], Sixty-fourth [Street] and Madison, and I had to walk. The Asia Society, the building was, oh, a block—between Park [Avenue] and Lexington [Avenue], or maybe even just after Lexington. Yeah, somewhere there, okay? So I had to walk. So I started walking down, and I was—oh, yes. I came and stood at the light at Park Avenue and Sixty-fourth. And there was this old woman standing, and she turned to me and said, "Sir, do you know where the Asia Society is?" And I said, "This—." I mean, strange that here, you know—

RIKALA:

Coincidence.

PAL:

Well, it is. You always end up whenever you—don't you? This happens all the time. Or you stop someone to ask a question, and he says, "I'm sorry, I'm new here." You know, it's a peculiar sort of a—I've never understood why this happens with everyone. Anyway, so I said, "Well, I believe it's ahead somewhere on this street, and I'm going there, so you are welcome to come with me." And I said, "I'm sure we'll reach it." So she said, "Oh, that's very nice." We walked a few steps, and she said, "Where are you from?" And I said,

"I'm from India." And she said, "Oh, I have a great admiration for a fellow countryman of yours, and I wonder if you know whatever happened to him." And I said, "Oh, who's that?" And she said, "It's Mr. Menon, Mr. Krishna Menon, who was your representative at the United Nations." And my heart sank. My heart sank. I said, "No. This has got to be a CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] plant, and they're after me. They think—." Because Krishna Menon was known for his leftist leanings.

RIKALA:

[laughter] Oh, dear.

PAL:

He was the greatest champion of China's entry into the United Nations. In fact, it is because of Krishna Menon and India's pushing that China ultimately got into the United Nations, in my opinion. And Krishna Menon also became very famous at the U. N. for his marathon speeches that—I gather once he spoke continuously for twenty-two hours. And he was virulently anti-American. He used to give America hell in these speeches. So I really—but you can imagine, this was '64, summer, and one still—one had heard of McCarthyism and all that. So that I was very nervous. This was my second day, and here, you know—I said, "This is too much of a coincidence that this lady stops me, asks me where Asia House is, and the next question is—." You know. I said, "Well, why do you admire him?" And she said, "Well, because he was the only man in the world who had the guts to call a spade a spade and stand up to America." And I said, "Well, that's—that's—." You know, I thought to myself, but I didn't know what to say. I said, "Well, he's back in India." Actually, he was in disgrace in '64 already, anyway, so I told her "I'm afraid he's leading a retired life." By that time we had reached the Asia Society, so I just dumped her, and I sort of ran as fast as I could up the stairs to the gallery or something. So that was a rather interesting experience. So you see, in a sense it was because of going to Cambridge and because of Sir Frank Lee being the master, who was a great friend of America and had many friends in high circles in America, that I got this scholarship to come for the summer to America. And when I came, I went to Boston to see the collection, and there I met Jan Fontein, who had just—no, I'm sorry. No, no. I didn't meet him then, on that trip. But—oh, yes, what happened is that it was on that trip that, at the end of the trip, Gordon

Washburn, who was the director of the Asia House Gallery, invited me to organize an exhibition of Tibetan art for them at a future date. And so, you see, in a sense, the seeds of my association with America were really sown in that summer of 1964. It became a very interesting trip. Because I, of course, couldn't stay for three months, as they wanted me to stay. But I did stay for, I think, six weeks or something. And I think I did thirteen cities.

RIKALA:

Oh, my.

PAL:

Yeah, I went all the way across. All the way. Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Minneapolis, Toronto, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Kansas City, Denver, Washington [D.C.]—I can't remember. I mean, I went to almost every major city of the United States and had a great, great visit. I must say, it was just wonderful.

RIKALA:

Looking both at cities and at the art museums?

PAL:

Yes. Yes, almost exclusively at the art museums. Except that I have no idea to this date why they sent me to Los Angeles, because there was no museum in 1964.

RIKALA:

No.

PAL:

I remember—what they did was interesting. They sent me from San Francisco to Los Angeles by train, and I arrived at Union Station, and I don't even—I must have stayed in some hotel downtown. So next day I went to the [Los Angeles County Museum of] Natural History downtown, because that was the only museum in Los Angeles. I went there. And there was about, I think, one gallery this size with some art objects—or maybe two galleries—and absolutely not a single work of Indian art. I said, "What the hell have they sent me here for?" And I asked, and they said, "No, there is no other museum in

this city." I mean, there was no L.A. County Museum of Art, the [J. Paul] Getty [Museum] was not even dreamt of. There was a Pasadena museum.

RIKALA:

The Pasadena [Art] Museum.

PAL:

The Pasadena museum. But that was, I suppose, in another town. I didn't have any car, and no one even mentioned it, you know. I think it was all contemporary art, and I wasn't interested in contemporary art, so I didn't go there. So I remember after I went to the natural history museum and after an hour or so, or a couple of hours—by lunchtime, anyway—I had nothing else to see or do. So then someone said—I saw across from there this big stadium [Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum]. You know, a coliseum. And there were a lot of people going there. And I, being interested in sports, said, "Well, what is happening there?" They said, "Oh, the summer Olympic trials are going on." You know, the American team before the—this was '64, just before the—where were the '64 Olympics? I forget.

RIKALA:

Japan, maybe?

PAL:

In Japan? I don't remember.

RIKALA:

I don't know. [Tokyo]

PAL:

Anyway, the summer Olympics were so—so I said, "Fantastic." So I went and spent the rest of the afternoon and thoroughly enjoyed myself watching the Olympic practice thing and trials. Then I think I left the next day, took the train to Denver, across the Grand Canyon. And that was when I said, "Oh, this city—." I mean, I just—

RIKALA:

There's nothing there.

PAL:

"Believe me, there's nothing here. I mean, it's an absolute desert, cultural desert." I mean, if anyone in 1964 told me that I would be coming back to spend the greater part of my active life, professional life, in Los Angeles, I think I'd have hit him on the head with a hammer or something. But that's how it is. And look, in—

RIKALA:

It was five years later, I think.

PAL:

Six years later I was back here permanently.

RIKALA:

So where were the important Indian collections at that time, aside from Boston?

PAL:

Boston, Philadelphia—

RIKALA:

Cleveland?

PAL:

Oh, yes, Cleveland. I went to Cleveland, of course. Yes, I'd forgotten. There you are. Cleveland. Kansas City had a small collection.

RIKALA:

Was there a substantial interest in Indian art at that time?

PAL:

Not really. Not really. I mean, Stella Kramrisch was teaching at Philadelphia [University of Pennsylvania], Promod Chandra was teaching in [University of] Chicago, Walter Spink in [University of Michigan] Ann Arbor, and that's it. Oh, yes, Ben [Benjamin] Rowland [Jr.] was in Harvard [University]. But I think by '64 he really wasn't teaching Indian art much. You know, he also was

interested in classical and American art. So as far as I know, he wasn't teaching Indian art. There was very little Indian art as such, except for these three collections, the major—Seattle had some, because the director was interested. Dick [Richard E.] Fuller, who was the founder-director of the [Seattle Art] Museum, was interested in Indian art and a very nice man, very nice man. So some Indian art. And San Francisco—no, they had very little there. The [Avery] Brundage Collection I think had been already promised to them [Asian Art Museum], or I think they were negotiating for the Brundage Collection or something. But there was no Brundage Collection when I went there in 1964.

RIKALA:

And how was that exhibition at the Asia Society?

PAL:

Oh, for the period it was a nice exhibition. She [Stella Kramrisch] had quite a lot of things from Nepal she had borrowed and from American and European museums, and it was a nice exhibition, beautifully installed. And I saw her. I went to Philadelphia. I went to see her in her house. She cooked me a chicken lunch, but nothing was said at all of our Nepal episode.

RIKALA:

The first meetings.

PAL:

Or why I didn't come to work with her. It was as if I was a different person, as far as she was concerned. And I'll tell you something else. Many, many years—or, not many years later, but in 1966, I was traveling from Benares to Delhi by plane when I saw Professor Norman Brown in the plane. He, of course, was the chairman of the South Asia department in Pennsylvania and absolutely the dean of all American Indologists in the sixties. I mean, he was the man. And I went and sat with him, and we started talking. I had met him just then, a few days before. Then suddenly he remembered, during the journey, he said, "By the way, didn't you many years ago apply for a scholarship, and weren't you admitted to Pennsylvania in the university?" And I said, "Yes, I was admitted, and I did send an application, a scholarship application, but I never heard

anything about it." And he said, "That's strange, because as far as I remember, we did grant you a scholarship."

RIKALA:

Oh, my.

PAL:

And I said, "Well, I never received that information." And we let the conversation die there.

RIKALA:

There's something interesting that intervened.

PAL:

Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, it's just as well. Believe me, I'm so glad and so grateful that she didn't bring me to America and then to work under her, because I'm afraid, of all her students, I think only one or two have got their Ph.D. in their entire career with her. Secondly, one of my dreams was always to go to Cambridge, and I wouldn't have gone to Cambridge, which would have been a disaster, disaster, because that's absolutely the—as I said, if at all I can talk of any part of my life being the golden age of my life, then I'd have to say those three years in Cambridge—intellectually, culturally, and in every way.

RIKALA:

So from Cambridge you moved to the American Academy at Benares?

PAL:

Well, yes, I did.

RIKALA:

How did your Ph.D. then wind up? And your move to Benares, how did that come about?

PAL:

Well, yes. Let's see, what happened? Well, while I was at Cambridge, I got the following job offers. I got an offer of a job at the University of Utrecht.

RIKALA:

I see. In Holland.

PAL:

In Holland. A lecturer in Indian studies. Then I was also offered an assistant keepership or curatorship at the British Museum, Oriental antiquities department. I turned them both down to—. [tape recorder off] Oh, no, no, no. That's right. I was offered a job at the Boston museum [Museum of Fine Arts] in '64. You know, when I finished in Cambridge, which would have been summer of '65, they offered me the keepership at the Boston museum. That's right. I had three jobs before I left Cambridge. I turned them all down, because, first of all, I did want to go back to India. And, secondly, I was obligated by a contract that the government of India had made me sign and had made all Commonwealth scholars sign like a sort of a bond when we got the scholarship, which is given by Britain, okay? The government of India made us sign a bond saying that we will come back and serve in India for at least three years.

RIKALA:

Oh, my.

PAL:

So I had to come. Otherwise we had to pay the government of India some amount of money. So we came back. So I came back. Also, this supervisor of mine in Calcutta, Professor Nihar Ranjan Ray—I had mentioned his name before, Ray, Nihar Ranjan Ray, Professor Ray—who was the dean of the school of humanities of Calcutta University, said that, yes, I could get a job at the Calcutta University. So I said fine. A lecturer's position. And that's what I wanted, so I came back. Now, when I came back and went to see him—this was August of 1965. I went to see him. He said, "Well, I am afraid I have resigned from the university and I am taking up the position of the director of the Institute of Advanced Studies, which has just been founded, and I am the first director. I am to go to Shimla to start this new organization." So I said, "Well, that's fine." I said, "But I applied for a job." There were something like four lectureships vacant in the university in my field. So I said, "Well, I'll get one." So I applied. August, September, October. Nothing happened. Not even

an acknowledgment from the university. So I became very, very nervous. Also, it was rather embarrassing, too. I had lived quite comfortably in England on my scholarship, and independently. It was sort of embarrassing to have to come home without a job and have to ask your mother, sort of, for pocket money. I was, by then—you know, I had two Ph.D.s, not one. In 1965 I was exactly thirty years old. I mean, it was embarrassing, very embarrassing, and I became very upset. And I said, "Well, this is very strange." I got a small grant from JDR III Fund. Porter McCray and I kept in touch, and we became very fond of each other, and he knew my plight. And to help me out—I had not been to several sites and places in India—he sent me some money to go and see these places, which I did. I went to Bombay and Ajanta and Ellora and several other places I hadn't been to with this money. I went to Nepal. Oh, yes, I went back to Nepal to continue, you know, to see some more stuff, because during my examination, oral examination, Ph.D. oral examination in Cambridge, which was conducted by my supervisor there, [F.R.] Allchin and Professor Johanna [E.] van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, from Amsterdam—she was also the editor of a series of art and archaeology books for [E.J.] Brill in Leiden. So during the examination, halfway through the examination, she had sort of turned round to me and said, "Oh, by the way, I want your thesis for my series." And, you know, you are waiting to get your degree, so you can't say no to your examiner. I said I was very flattered. I mean, I knew—

RIKALA:

Of course.

PAL:

I said, "Sure, sure," and all that. So I had given her my word, so she wanted me to revise and make it for publication. So I decided to go back to Nepal, because I had been there last in 1961 before leaving for Cambridge, and this was '65. So that was all that I did with the small grant that I got from JDR III Fund. I waited to hear from Calcutta, and nothing happened. I think by the end of October, when I finished my trip in November, Porter McCray became rather concerned and said, "This is ridiculous. I mean, you are wasting our time." What was happening is that just then they, the Smithsonian [Institution], were establishing through their foreign currency program [the American Academy in Benares]. You see, a lot of wheat money was tied up in

India. You know, in the fifties and sixties we used to buy an enormous amount of American wheat, and we used to pay America rupees. And that rupee was useless for America. America couldn't bring it out even here and use it, so it had piled up. I think it became like a billion or something, or more, in dollars worth of rupees in India. So part of that money was taken, and JDR III Fund supplied the foreign currency, and with that, an institution was founded in Benares, in India, in late '65, in the fall of '65, then called the American Academy in Benares—like the American Academy in Rome, exactly modeled on that—for Americans and Indian scholars to go and do research in Indian art history. Okay? It had just been founded and funded, with Promod Chandra of Chicago as the first director. Naturally, he had to recruit a number of scholars locally there as senior fellows and junior fellows. And there were two positions of senior fellows of the academy, and I think Porter McCray told him about me and said, "You should hire him. He's got no job right now." So from Promod Chandra I got a letter asking if I would come to Benares for an interview. I went, and we had a chat, and he said, "Well, would you like to come and join?" And since the Calcutta job wasn't forthcoming, the university job, I took this job at the American Academy. I think I joined in January, fifteenth of January of 1966, okay? That's right. Yeah, the fifteenth of January, 1966, I joined the academy as a senior fellow, with the task to set up a research program for the academy, the first. We had a building but no books, so we had to build up the library. So also I was purchasing books, ordering books, and all that. The purpose was to establish an archive of photographs of monuments and sites, so we had photographers and all that, and I had to assign people, photographers, to go and take photographs. So it was interesting. It was a beautiful building which had been very nicely restored. The building had been lying vacant on the Ganges [River], right on the Ganges, a palace, in fact: the palace of the maharaja of Rewa. It was really very badly kept and completely—the beautiful stonework had been completely plastered over the years and all and abandoned. The academy, I must say, did a wonderful job of restoring. If nothing else, this building itself, it was a great pleasure to work in it. So that's how I happened to come to Benares. Again, thanks to Porter McCray, you see? And thanks to Sir Frank Lee that I even met—

RIKALA:

Made that connection in the first place.

PAL:

That connection, or met Porter McCray. So then in, I think, March of 1966, in San Francisco, the Brundage museum was being opened. The building had been completed and the Brundage Collection had been given, so they organized a huge international symposium for that opening. There were three scholars invited from India. One was Moti Chandra, who was one of the senior-most scholars then and the director of the Prince of Wales Museum [of Western India]. The second was [C.] Sivaramamurti, who was the director of the National [Museum of India, New Delhi]. And me! And I've never understood why. I still don't know why they decided to invite me. I mean, I was nobody. I had just gotten a job. Except maybe three or four papers, I had not written any books. I was not even a university professor, but I was invited. I received a formal invitation, not even to read a paper, just to come to the opening and the symposium, for which they were willing to pay my ticket.

RIKALA:

That's wonderful.

PAL:

Yeah. So I said, "Well, why not go?" And so I went. I remember I had to fly. I was a day late. As a matter of fact, instead of arriving the day before the symposium, I arrived the first day of the symposium, even though coming west via the Pacific, I gained a day, you see. But I had some problem. I don't know with what. It wasn't a visa problem. But there was some travel hitch, anyway. I think in those days we still had to get reserve bank permission to leave India or something. You know, some document didn't arrive on time or—anyway, I did leave and came to that symposium, which was really a grand affair. I mean, it was wonderful international exposure. There were people from all over the world. I had a great time. Imagine being invited to a conference and not even having to read a paper! That's the best kind of invitation. Then, it was at that symposium that Jan Fontein, who had sometime in '65 joined the Boston museum as curator of the Asiatic [Art] Department, again renewed the offer of the job that I had turned down in 1964.

RIKALA:

Previously.

PAL:

And this time I said, "I will be a fool to say no." Because all I had in India was a research fellowship at an academy, which had no benefits, number one, and it was almost like a fellowship, because it was not even—no one was certain whether it would be a permanent organization or not. So I said, "I'd better take this job at Boston," and so I agreed to take it. Now, remember that clause that I told you that I had signed? This bond with the government of India?

RIKALA:

Right, for three years.

PAL:

The three years, and this was—so I went back to India, and I decided to consult a lawyer. I felt "This is strange." It occurred to me that I got a—the money was given to me by the British government, and how can the Indian government—? It's like my borrowing some money from you, but then "Joe Blow" makes me sign a bond which he can't—I can sign an IOU to you that I am borrowing from you and I owe you money, and I may have to wash your dishes to pay it off, but why should I—?

RIKALA:

Yeah, another party.

PAL:

Yeah. So I went to a lawyer, and I said, "What do you think of this?" And he said, "It's illegal. There's no way that this paper you signed—you may have signed it, but it's not binding. No court of law will—because all you have to go and say is that the British government can say, 'We are paying for your education, so you come and work for us.' But the Indian government can't." So the education minister [M.C. Chagla] then was—oh, but then the bond also said that one has to come and serve in India for three years, but it had to be a job satisfactory to you and commensurate with your—

RIKALA:

Qualifications.

PAL:

—qualifications. I mean, it's—you know, they can't make you wash dishes. So I wrote a letter to the education minister, who was an ex-justice of the supreme court. So I wrote, "Dear Mr. Minister, this is the case. I came back with all intention for a job. I came back in August, and I applied for a job, and I still haven't heard from the university. And I have been working in this organization, which, by the way, is not an Indian organization, although it is in India—Benares—but it's an American organization. I've taken a legal opinion, and I've been told that this bond or whatever I signed is really illegal and blah, blah, and has no—so, therefore, I have now been offered a job in the Boston museum, and I've decided to leave, and I believe I don't owe the government anything." I sent that by registered mail, and I got an acknowledgment from the ministry saying the letter had arrived. And I said, "Fine." They didn't say anything about you can't leave or anything, so I left.

RIKALA:

That's good.

PAL:

I left in May 1967, so there was plenty of time for these people to—no, sorry. I'm sorry. It was in August; that San Francisco conference was in August. August of 1966. Yeah, I remember, just around or before August, because I went to Rome on my way back. And also, that's when—no, no, not that. The Heeramanek exhibition was already set in 1964, yes. That also was—I met Nasli [M.] Heeramanek in—yes, I know you want me later to talk about him. I will.

RIKALA:

Yeah, we'll come back to that.

PAL:

Yeah. When we come back to that I can talk about that. But I enjoyed my year in Benares. Was it a year? Yeah, it was a year. It was just about a little over a year in the American Academy, from January of '66 until May of 1967. I must say, I did enjoy my time there. I saw a good deal that I hadn't seen before.

RIKALA:

Does the academy still exist?

PAL:

Well, yes. It's very interesting. The academy then sort of somehow fell a victim to local politics of the university and professors there and other people. Also, the government of India, I think, after it lasted for at least four or five years, they objected to the name. You know, they wanted the name to be changed. So it was merged with what was called the American Institute of Indian Studies, which was already an established organization, with its headquarters in Poona near Bombay. So this became a branch of that institution.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

It does exist, but no longer in the Rewa palace. It has moved location across the river to a building given to it, or rented to it, by the maharaja of Benares. So it does exist there, and American scholars and art historians do go there, and the archive is still being formed and they hold conferences. It's like a residence for students and professors from here as well as in India. But I haven't been back to it now for, oh, fifteen years. I think last time I was there was in 1973 or somewhere around there. So I haven't been back to it for sixteen, seventeen years, at least, so I really don't know what they're doing. But it does exist.

1.6. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (October 18, 1989)

RIKALA:

I was going to ask you about the keepership at Boston [Museum of Fine Arts]. Had they had someone there continuously since they had—?

PAL:

No. I'll come to that. Before that, I just want to make a few more comments or observations regarding Cambridge [University] and my '64 America trip. I thought of some interesting things. Not among the students in Cambridge between '62 and '65 when I was there, but there was some anti-American feeling perceptible in the town, because I think there was still an American

presence, an army unit or something somewhere near Cambridge. I'm not exactly sure. So one saw often graffiti on the wall saying, "Yankees, go home," and all that. Now, in the light of that—and also, Cambridge, as you know, after all, all the spies, the [Kim] Philbys and everyone, they're all Cambridge, as you know, in the thirties. So Cambridge is a leftist-oriented university.

RIKALA:

Very much.

PAL:

Now, you lived where?

RIKALA:

I was at London. University College, London.

PAL:

In London, yeah, University College. Anyway, so—what did I read recently that said—? It was in University College, London. Anyway, so there was sort of a slight anti-American bias, I think, perceptible even among the students. And I remember clearly the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. And I think, to a person—of course, we had some American friends. In my college, among the graduate students, oh, there were at least three, if not four, American students. There were four. No, more than four, I should say. There was a guy called Arthur Pike, who was really the quietest and the most unfriendly American I have ever met in my life. He lived in my building. He was a weatherman. You know, he did research, Ph.D., in weather research.

RIKALA:

Meteorology?

PAL:

Meteorology, yeah, meteorology. Then there was a medieval historian. I don't know where he is now. He must be in some university here. Then there was a young man whose name I forget, but he is the one—he was married, so he lived outside. He and his wife were the first Americans who fed me with meatloaf. [laughter] Yeah, yeah. That was my first. Meatloaf is an American thing. I have never heard of it anywhere else. You never get it anywhere else.

He was a great admirer of American cuisine, and he used to miss American food. He said, "You must come and eat meatloaf." You know, he cooked the meatloaf, and I remember that meal. Oh, and also spare ribs. That was the first time I ate, also with him—the two meals that I think I had with him, one was meatloaf and one was spareribs. You know, spare ribs is a very American thing.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Then there was another guy who was, again, a senior sort of guy who had come for one year to study international relations. He was working for *Reader's Digest*, I think. He used to be with *Reader's Digest*. And I think he's left *Reader's Digest* now, because I have tried to find his name in the masthead, but I couldn't. Anyway, he was a very interesting fellow. And he was a very staunch Republican, I remember. He was the one who told me—and I'll never forget this—he said that the biggest mistake America made was that it did not use the opportunities it had when it won the Second World War in 1945. That at no time in history has any other nation had such an opportunity to change the world to its way of thinking as America had in 1945 after defeating Hitler and Germany, and also Japan. But particularly in Europe, that Americans could have dictated all the terms, including to Russia, and we blew it. And I think there's a lot to be said about that comment of his. Anyway, the general, as I said, wasn't very pro-America policy or situation. It wasn't a pro-America situation among the students. I remember during the missile crisis we stayed up all night, virtually. We were all so angry at [John F.] Kennedy. We thought Kennedy and America were the most selfish, self-centered people and leader in the world, who was willing to let loose atomic power in order to secure their own borders, which is really what Kennedy was doing. Don't forget, America—I mean, even though you Americans may think of yourselves as heroes, or Kennedy as a hero, but Kennedy did not, by threatening—unless he was calling a bluff, which he wasn't. And [Nikita] Khrushchev knew that. And I think the real hero of the two is really Khrushchev, who had the sense to back down, which is much more difficult to do than say, "Well, I'm going to shoot you." You see? "And if you shoot at

me—." So it takes an enormous amount of courage. So I'll never forget that. And I still—well, yes, maybe, of course, the future of America may have meant the future of the free world, so that if Russia was successful in bringing in the missiles and setting them up in Cuba so that they could destroy Washington [D.C.] and New York [City] and all, which probably would mean the destruction of America, which, I suppose one could say, in turn, would be the end of the free world, in that sense, I suppose—well, there are two sides to it, but I don't think at that time we thought all this out very clearly, and we were very, very angry with Kennedy. I remember that. But then, we were equally upset a year later when he was shot. I think that also was so shocking to us in Cambridge. Not so much that it was Kennedy who was killed, but the fact that it was so easy to kill someone in America.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

You see. I mean, so many assassinations happened in America. I mean, that was the thing that I think was of considerable concern to all of us. And everyone was very sorry, I remember, with Kennedy's death. Then, when '64 elections came around—I arrived in America in the summer. Elections had just begun. [Barry M.] Goldwater was the Republican candidate, if you remember. '64 it was Goldwater versus who? Who became the president?

RIKALA:

[Lyndon B.] Johnson.

PAL:

Yeah, Johnson, Johnson. That's right. Yeah, Johnson's first term. Yes, Johnson and Goldwater. Of course, we were all for Johnson and all against Goldwater, almost to a man. I remember when I came here and went around the country on this trip, I mean, the thought that they would vote for a man like Goldwater, we really—which I now realize is utterly wrong. Everyone really thought this guy was going to drop atomic bombs all over at the slightest provocation. That was the main concern about Goldwater. I remember traveling from Denver to Chicago. Now, I don't know why that's the only

sector of my entire trip where I was for some reason booked in first class. And it was my first time also. flying first class, from Denver to Chicago. I sat next to this very, very nice lady who—we got to chatting. From Denver we were going to Chicago on a Friday. And she said, "Well, what are you doing over the weekend?" And I said, "Nothing, really." I mean, you know, especially Sunday I wasn't doing anything particularly. You know, I was traveling alone anyway, so all days were Sundays to me. I mean, I was of course lonely, but I was lonely all days, weekend or week, it made no difference. But she was very kind, and she said, "Well, my son has a boat on the lake [Lake Michigan]. Why don't you spend Sunday with us?" "Oh," I said, "fine, very kind of you." Then I met them at the boat on Sunday, and we went on the boat. It was a huge boat. I mean, it was not just a little boat. It was a yacht, actually. And I'll tell you, the whole—I mean, I don't know how long I gave them a lecture on why one shouldn't vote for Goldwater. And they were very nice. I think because I was a guest or something, they didn't argue with me, they didn't try. They listened politely. I must have given them a lecture for an hour or something on Goldwater until it dawned on me, and then he admitted that they were Republicans, so they would be voting Goldwater anyway. Of course, I didn't know then that by definition everyone who owns a yacht is likely to be a Republican rather than a Democrat. I wasn't in the least interested really in American politics and all this—this difference between a Democrat and Republican wasn't all that clear to me as the English system was between the Labour [Party] and the Conservative [Party]. I mean, I knew that very clearly. So I was not telling them not to vote Republican. All I was saying was that this Goldwater is this evil menace, sort of, and don't vote for him, sort of. So that was very, very embarrassing. But they were so graceful about it. And then I enjoyed the day, and they never really held it against me. They must have been amused and found me a very immature sort of young man, who was just voluble and gassing away about things he didn't know a damned thing about. And now that explains—oh, and Chicago, that was very interesting for me and my first introduction, really, to American color prejudice. And it was done in a very interesting way. A very good friend of mine in Cambridge, an Englishman called David Buisseret—with a French name, but he's an Englishman—he was a history scholar and a research fellow at Corpus [Christi College]. Again, he had done his Ph.D., so he and I were very good friends, and we used to play cricket together. So David was married, and his wife was an American Roman

Catholic from Chicago, Pat [Patricia Buisseret]. By the way, they're back in Chicago, and they live in Chicago now, and he works for the Newberry Library there. So Pat had naturally given me the telephone number of her family in Chicago, that I should call them when I go. So I did. I went and had dinner with them, and they were very, very nice. In fact, I invited Pat's sister for dinner the next evening or something. So we went to this restaurant. I don't know whether she chose the restaurant. Of course, I didn't—in England, you see, I was quite used to seeing—I mean, I suppose they were more used to seeing Indians, you know, dark-skinned people, but '64—you know, this was still before the civil rights movement and all that, and there was not a single black in that restaurant. Later on, it occurred to me. I was the only dark-skinned person, and there I was having dinner with this white American girl. And a lot of people were looking at us from the tables. I sort of wasn't self-conscious about it, and I didn't care one way or the other. I thought, "Well, they're looking at a foreigner," you know, and I was a foreigner. And we ate. And then, suddenly, from one of the tables, a man got up and came up to us and shook my hand and said something to the effect, "It's so nice to see this kind of integration." You see, he probably thought she was my girlfriend or wife or something, you see, and we were on a date or something, and he was this—and I was so shocked. I mean, here is a guy I don't even know, he comes up, and I first thought, "Is he pulling my leg?" No, he was really sincere in expressing his admiration in seeing this white girl and this dark Indian eating dinner together. But in a sense, it made me very aware of the race problem that—you see what I mean? I mean, this was sort of almost a—

RIKALA:

Right. That you were an uncommon situation.

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

Having that pointed out to you.

PAL:

And that I was different, and that's why they were all looking at me. If I had been a light-skinned Indian, they would have probably not noticed me and ignored me or thought I was Spanish or something, and it was because of this dark skin. So that was my first and only, I must say, really, experience. Maybe there was another occasion. Later I'll come to it. But otherwise, I have not been personally subjected to any kind of racial prejudice anywhere. But I'll tell you what else I really learned in America, although my first thing was in Europe, but I learned about anti-Semitism also in America. I was never aware of this. Never. I mean, we had a lot of Jewish boys in school in Darjeeling, who were my—in fact, one of them was my best friend. And in India we never had any kind of anti-Jewish thing ever. I never even knew of this. And I was not old enough during the Second World War to understand what Hitler was doing. That I understood later. So I knew that Europeans were anti-Semitic. Certain Europeans, I mean—certainly, Germans and Hitler and all this. But I became a bit aware of it again in a sort of perverse way in Cambridge. We had a student with us called Steve Cohen. He was an English Jew. But he was from grammar school, and you could see from his accent he was—a bright guy from a poorer Jewish family of London, probably from the East Side, and spoke with rather a Cockney type of accent still. But Steve was always cracking jokes about his own Jewishness, sort of, you see, as a defense mechanism. He wouldn't sort of let anyone else say anything nasty. That he was a Jew, he made everyone very conscious about it. So that's when I sort of suddenly realized that this guy has a problem, identity problem. He is very self-conscious about being a Jew and is releasing this defense mechanism, sort of. You know, "attack is the best policy" sort of a situation.

RIKALA:

Right. Say something before someone else does.

PAL:

Yeah, yeah. And he is also the first person who made me first aware of—I think, and it was back in '63—of drugs, the problem of drugs. I'll tell you what happened. I was going home over the Christmas holidays, as I said, to India because of my sister [Bharati Pal Basu]'s wedding. It was the first girl in the family getting married, so my father [Gopesh Chandra Pal] wanted me to come back for the wedding and sent a ticket. So I went. And before I went,

Steve sort of came up to me and said, "Hey, I hear hashish is very cheap in India." And I said, "Yes, but it's available legally in India." In fact, you can get it still I think, I mean in shops, you know, like liquor shops. And I said, "But, Steve, in India it's not smoked by educated people. It's smoked only by poor and lower classes. So why do you want to even experience it?" And Steve said, "Oh, well, please bring some with you when you come" and all that. Of course, I didn't bring any. I mean, I wouldn't be caught seen with it. Not because it was something illegal to import, but it was something infra dig. I mean, you just didn't go near the stuff. But that's the first time, I suppose, in my Western experience—because in India I'd never heard of anyone in college or university when I was studying taking any kind of drug at all, and certainly not—that was the only thing you could get in India, hashish, to smoke it. I'd never, never heard of any—so that was also the first time—

RIKALA:

That's quite Interesting.

PAL:

Yeah. So you see, it was just coming up on the surface in Cambridge in 1962.

RIKALA:

Yeah. That is very interesting.

PAL:

No one else there even talked about it. There was no talk about it. Maybe one or two guys smoked marijuana or something. Certainly I would have known. I lived in the hostel, after all. You know, I would have smelled it. As far as I'm concerned, I mean, I don't think anyone—and I don't think the undergraduates even in 1962, '63 were really smoking. I think it's much more a—it's a phenomenon of the seventies, early seventies. You know, America might blame everyone else now for growing the stuff and all, but I think America is the principal cause of drug culture in the entire civilized world. I mean, it has spread to the Third World, because everything you do, everyone else imitates, you see. If you wear jeans, everyone else starts wearing jeans. If you drink Coca Cola, everyone drinks it. American students are smoking and taking drugs, so it's the thing to do for Hong Kong students and Japanese

students and Indian students and everywhere. And that's what has happened. Because it's only, I think, around—yes, '68, '69 is when I became really aware of some amount of drug taking among the students. And, you see, the Vietnam War was already on, and I think that was a big contributory factor for this mass scale. So I think that observation might be of interest to someone.

RIKALA:

It's certainly interesting. So you moved to Boston?

PAL:

I moved to—

RIKALA:

From Cambridge to Boston.

PAL:

From Cambridge to Boston, via Benares, don't forget. Yeah. I arrived in Boston. Well, my arrival also was rather interesting. So the Boston museum applied for my visa, naturally.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

And I waited in Benares. Well, they first wrote back and said—well, you can imagine, I was offered the job and I accepted it when I was here for the Avery Brundage [Collection] symposium in San Francisco [Asian Art Museum]. So by September I had the job, but the reason it took me until May to join Boston was because I had to wait for my visa. What had happened was that the Indian quota for Indian citizens had filled up, and there was no possibility till the next fiscal year, you see. But the Boston museum didn't want to wait that long, so I gather Perry Rathbone [then director of the Museum of Fine Arts] got in touch with Senator Ted [Edward M.] Kennedy, who was then the junior senator of Massachusetts, I think, serving his first term in Washington. And Ted Kennedy got in touch with the immigration people and said, you know, "Here is this guy."

RIKALA:

Scholar.

PAL:

"We want him, we need him. Is there some way you can bring him sooner than next year?" And that's when someone looked at my application, my particulars, and they saw that I was born, actually, in East Pakistan. Remember, I told you that Sylhet was, in '66, when I came, then part of Pakistan, East Pakistan. And the Pakistan quota had not been filled. And because I had been born in Pakistan, I was given a visa—

RIKALA:

Admitted that year.

PAL:

—on the Pakistan quota, you see.

RIKALA:

That's very lucky.

PAL:

Yeah, if the Pakistanis know, they'll be mad at me for taking away one of their quotas. So the visa was cleared, and the information came to Calcutta and to the consulate, and I went and I filled in all these forms. And I found the forms utterly, totally ridiculous, because I had to answer questions like "Do I swear that I will not try and overthrow the United States government?" I had to also declare that I was not a communist and had never been a member of the Communist Party, which I found utterly idiotic. But, see, that's in 1967. I don't know if those—

RIKALA:

They still do that.

PAL:

They still have that?

RIKALA:

My husband and I just went through that last November.

PAL:

Who?

RIKALA:

My husband, who is from Mexico City, he went through that. Indeed, he didn't—we can talk about this another time. But he had applied and had a J-1 visa given to him at University of Washington, and he was in Toronto at the time, University of Toronto. So he went to the American embassy with his J-1 forms, because they send them to you and you get them stamped. And the man said, "Well, you've been married for quite a few years now. Where's your wife?" And he said, "Well, you know, she's a student at UCLA." And they said, "Sorry, we can't give you this visa. We can't give you a J-1 visa. You now have to go and apply for alien status." So he had to start his whole visa process over again, and I had to go there and submit the papers. It was the same set of questions. "Are you a communist? Have you—?" And my husband, as an astrophysicist, he used to receive Soviet astrophysics journals from Moscow, and all these things came out.

PAL:

Oh, that's so silly!

RIKALA:

It's just silly as can be.

PAL:

Because there are bona fide American citizens in America who are communists.

RIKALA:

Exactly, exactly!

PAL:

And members of the Communist Party.

RIKALA:

Exactly. And they just—

PAL:

You know, so why should it matter whether—and look at it. They have admitted terrible criminals from Vietnam, from Cuba, and from all places, who are non-communists, but they're murderers and criminals. And yet they have this—they haven't changed the forms yet?

RIKALA:

No, no.

PAL:

Oh, God, it's so silly.

RIKALA:

The same questions. These foundational questions of the U.S.—

PAL:

And, of course, I was also fingerprinted, so—

RIKALA:

Yeah, that also hasn't changed.

PAL:

It was very interesting. And then I had to come all the way carrying my x-ray plate, which was about this big, the size of this table.

RIKALA:

Yeah, the same—. [laughter]

PAL:

You have to carry it all the way from India. You mustn't bend it or fold it or roll it or anything. So it had to be—you know, I was so terrified. What happens if it chips or something? They're not going to let me in? I'll give you a very amusing little story. I came, and I presented my paper in New York [International] Airport [now John F. Kennedy International Airport] to the immigration officer, and he looked at it all, and he said, "Well, what are you going to do here?"

And I said, "I'm going to the Boston museum for this job." He said, "Oh, I'm from Boston." And I said, "Oh, really?" He said, "Yes, and I know the museum very well." I said, "Oh?" And he said, "Yes. And, as a matter of fact, it's very interesting, because there is a statue of a fellow countryman of yours outside the front gate of the museum." You know, I'd been to Boston in '64 and '66, and I didn't see any statue. So I said, "This is odd." I said, "Oh, really?" So when I came to the museum and I came—the next day, I joined, and I had to go in through the service entrance—not from the Huntington [Avenue] side, from the backside. So I went in from the back, because at nine o'clock you can't come through the front entrance. I went, and the first thing I said to the secretary, "You know, as soon as the museum opens, I have to go in front and see this Indian sculpture that you guys have put in front." She said, "What Indian sculpture?" I said, "Well, that's what this guy said, that there's a statue of a fellow countryman of mine in front of the museum." And she started laughing. Then we went out there, and, of course, it's Chief Hayakawa or Hayatowa or something, on a horse, you see?

RIKALA:

An American Indian. [laughter]

PAL:

American Indian. And this immigration officer didn't know the difference between a—

RIKALA:

Why an American Indian would need a—. [laughter] Oh, dear.

PAL:

So that was, again—

RIKALA:

Oh, it makes you wonder, doesn't it?

PAL:

Yeah. Yeah, but this is also America. I think either the first day in the Boston museum at my new job or maybe the next day, I don't know, maybe the afternoon of the first day, I decided to go and take a look at the galleries. So I

went up, and when I entered the gallery—the guard who was guarding the gallery was quite elegant looking, quite old, I think over sixty, rather tall and a fairly lean man, wearing the guard's uniform. He came up to me and said, "You must be Dr. Pal." And I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, I am [Nicholas von] Scerenyi, and I usually am assigned to the Indian galleries, Asian galleries, and I welcome you." He was very polite and spoke with a very strong European accent. I mean, Scerenyi is a Hungarian name, and I later learned he was Hungarian. He said, "I read about you in the paper last week." There was a little thing that "New Indian Curator Joins—."

RIKALA:

Announcement.

PAL:

And there was a brief biography. And he said, "Oh, I read that you went to Cambridge." I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, I am afraid I've never been to Cambridge, but I've been to Oxford [University]." And I sort of understood as if he had gone to study in Oxford, sort of, something. And I said to myself, "God almighty, where the hell have I come? Even the damned guards are Oxonians," you know.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's really good.

PAL:

And this is something. My whole estimation of this institution went up rapidly. And I said, "Oh, really?" He said, "Yes." And then listen, this is not the end of this surprise, my surprise—and he said, "Yes, you see, I went to visit the man who used to teach my children." I said, "What?" He said, "Yes," he said, "He was an Oxford graduate." And by this time I was an absolute physical wreck, believe me. Just as bad as the time when this old lady in New York asked me about Krishna Menon. I said, this can't be true. How can a guard's children be taught by an Oxonian? You know, this and that. I left it at that. I said, this guy is mad. No, I said, you know, America, the thing you hear about America is it's a country of cracks. I said, this guy is cracked. [laughter] I ran down the stairs, went to the secretary and said, "You know, I met a guard up there who I think

is cracked." She said, "Why?" I said, "Because he says his children used to be taught by someone—" Private tutor. That's right, the private tutor of his children was from Oxford. [laughter] And he is working as a guard. So she said, "Oh, you must have met Mr. Scerenyi." I said, "Yes." Oh, before I left—sorry—he said, "You must come and have tea with me sometime." You see? [laughter] And to me, that was another absolute no, because I knew from my past experience that Americans never drink tea, and no one ever says, "Come and have tea with me." [laughter] You know, "At home with me and my wife." And I said, oh, God, this is really ridiculous. So I went down and I said to the secretary—she said, "Oh, that's Mr. Scerenyi." I said, "Well, who is Mr. Scerenyi?" "Well, you see, he is a Hungarian count." I said, "What?" She said, "Yes, his real name is Nicholas von Scerenyi, and he was an Hungarian count, and he had to flee in 1956 with his children, and that's why—" You see, it is true. Before '56, his children were taught in his palace in Hungary by private tutors who were mostly from Oxford, which is true, as you know. Most of these private tutors were usually Oxford people who used to get jobs in Europe teaching noblemen's children. And I said, "Well, that's sort of—" I mean, but then I realized, you know, this is America. This is the leveler that—you know, here was an ex-count working in the Boston museum as a lowly guard. And he was so graceful about it, and it was due to my own upbringing that I couldn't imagine a count working as a guard. So I was completely put off.

RIKALA:

Baffled, yeah.

PAL:

And then I went to his house for tea. He lived in the Fenway in a little apartment. I took an apartment across, almost, from the Fenway, the other side from him. I went for tea. I was a bachelor then. Later on, when my wife [Chitralekha Bose Pal] came and we were married almost a year later, they were very fond of her, also. And he's now died, I hear. I don't know where the wife is. Oh, it was wonderful. They served this most elegant tea in their little living room from silver service. And she wore whatever jewelry she had left and was very elegantly dressed. He wore a suit for the tea and always he did this. And I was not the only one that was invited to tea. He used to invite most

curators in turn, and others, and he always wore his decorations. And he used to go from the Fenway all the way to Cambridge [Massachusetts]. Cambridge, where in Harvard Square used to be, and still is, a very exclusive Viennese pastry shop, and he used to bring pastries and tea cakes from there.

RIKALA:

All the way back.

PAL:

And for every tea.

RIKALA:

How wonderful.

PAL:

I must have had in the three years I lived in Boston at least six teas with them. And she used to have these very fine diamond earrings that she managed to bring out. And yet, the next day I'd see him. There he was in the gallery, a humble guard. But it didn't bother him. And he said when he fled from Hungary and came to America, the first job he took was in a factory. And he had never done any manual work in his entire life, and he had to—some sort of assembly plant or something. And he hated it. He hated it, but he had to do it for three, four years in order to get a footing. Then this job came about, and he loved this job, because he did have a collection in hi palace.

RIKALA:

Oh, my.

PAL:

And he loved to be with art.

RIKALA:

A much more congenial environment for him.

PAL:

Yeah. That was Nicholas von Scerenyi, and that America, too, you see.

RIKALA:

Yeah. What an extraordinary story.

PAL:

Maybe all this has no relevance. I don't know,

RIKALA:

No, I think it's quite interesting. The impressions and your memories are very important.

1.7. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (October 18, 1989)

RIKALA:

Since you mentioned your wife, why don't we talk a little bit about—? Let's skip a year, move on, and we'll come back to other issues in Boston. But talk about meeting your wife and coming to the United States together.

PAL:

No, let's save that for—let's go on with that other question that you asked, since we were in Boston, about the Boston position and all that.

RIKALA:

Had there been previous keepers and what was the situation? All right.

PAL:

Yes, because that's very interesting, because, you see, I had turned down, as I told you, [the University of] Utrecht and the British Museum, which—Utrecht I did not want, because I knew there would be a problem. I didn't want to learn Dutch.

RIKALA:

[laughter] Yet another language.

PAL:

But the British Museum was quite an attractive job.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

To live in London and all that. But, unfortunately, what they said was that ultimately I would have to change my citizenship.

RIKALA:

Yeah?

PAL:

Because it's a civil service job.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

And I didn't want to do that. But Boston was, without question, the plum of—I mean, I cannot tell you how fortunate I've been that way. I mean, in a sense, that—and, again, I think I should really be grateful to my Indian professor, [Nihar Ranjan] Ray, for not giving me a job in the University of Calcutta.

RIKALA:

[laughter] How things work out.

PAL:

Because, yeah, I couldn't have done better as a first job—if you don't count the Benares experience—because the Boston job, the keeper of the Indian collection, which is a unique title to that museum—

RIKALA:

Yes, it's different.

PAL:

Because it's following the British method. And you do expect that only in Boston. I'll tell you in a few minutes why I left Boston—also in one way. You know, at least a contributory factor is that that job had been created for

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, who held it until his death in 1947. Okay? And they had not appointed anyone since then.

RIKALA:

Yeah, that was my hunch.

PAL:

Until I was offered the job with the same title.

RIKALA:

Twenty years later.

PAL:

Twenty years. Exactly twenty years. I remember when Perry Rathbone was offering the job to me and we were talking this and that in 1964. And I kept saying that, well, not really. I wanted to go back to India and all. He sort of sweetened the pie, you might say, by saying, "Well, you know, in fact, we will give you, if you like, the title that Coomaraswamy had, which is keeper of the Indian collection." So that was enormously tempting, because literally that meant that I was stepping into his shoes, in a sense. And to be able to do that—I mean, just imagine. I mean, I don't know who would be comparable. Say, if someone of the stature of [Bernard] Berenson—as a matter of fact, I think Coomaraswamy is a far greater man. But a job as a fresh graduate, you were offered sort of the same title and same job. I mean, it's like—so ultimately, I think that influenced me a great deal to accepting the job in 1966 when it was re-offered, because they had not filled the vacancy, first of all. And then, here I would become identified immediately with an institution that was even better known than the British Museum for Indian art, because of its association with Coomaraswamy, who—and not just in art history, mind you. I'll tell you why. Because Coomaraswamy was more than an art historian. I mean, he was, as you know, an Indologist, a thinker, a philosopher, and was a national figure in India already by the time he died. A lot of people who know nothing about his contribution to art history still know his name and knew his name because he was also closely, closely associated with the [Rabindranath] Tagore family, you see, in Calcutta and lived with them there when he used to go to Calcutta. So, I mean, he was considered to be also a great nationalist

who was a proponent of the greatness of Indian civilization in the West at a time in the early 1900s. Then he was also associated with a lot of the intellectual giants and authors in England and in Boston and at Harvard [University] and all that, so, see, it was—

RIKALA:

Quite extraordinary.

PAL:

I mean, yeah, it was an enormous sort of identification. Sort of, all of a sudden, a tremendous challenge was placed on me, that to some extent I had to live up to the job, to the title, let's say. It was not just any old curatorship or just a professorship. So I suppose that may have contributed considerably to my drive, let's say, to publish and to prove myself and to try and carve a niche in the scholarly world. And always as if he is there behind me and saying, "Well, guy, you've got a long way to go to catch up." [laughter] "You are nowhere near me."

RIKALA:

A lot to live up to.

PAL:

"But keep trying," sort of. And people have said that, you see. I mean, it's not—let me assure you that I have no illusions about my capability in the sense that I do not have anywhere near the breadth, the intellectual breadth or the knowledge of Coomaraswamy. And I'm not saying this out of humility or anything. First of all, don't forget, he was a Ph.D. in geology. He was not a trained art historian.

RIKALA:

And where did he go to school?

PAL:

Oh, he got his Ph.D.—actually D.Sc.—in London at the London University at the age of twenty-one in geology with what I gather was one of the most original pieces of work. That if he had stayed on in geology and if there was a Nobel Prize in geology, he would have gotten it. That's the kind of man he

was. He was a brilliant linguist on top of that, which I am not. You know, he conversed with people in Latin, now, you see. Okay? Yeah, I was told by his wife, his fourth wife, Donna Luisa [Coomaraswamy], whom I knew in Boston—she's now dead—that he was—he never drank, never touched alcohol, but he smoked incessantly. And he used to come down—guests used to be invited home for dinner at seven o'clock, and dinner was at eight o'clock, but he never came down for cocktails and small talk. At exactly eight o'clock he would come down from his study and join his guests and sit down to dinner. She told me that once this Harvard student had been invited who was studying Latin and Greek classics, and he was placed next to Coomaraswamy. And when Coomaraswamy heard that this guy was studying classics, he started talking to him in Greek, you see.

RIKALA:

That's extraordinary.

PAL:

And the guy was totally nonplussed, because his Greek wasn't as good. So that's the kind of guy—I mean, so from that you can imagine—I mean, he was self-taught entirely, I feel. So I have no illusions about it, and I chuckle, and I'm not any longer embarrassed even, because it's so ridiculous when people do bring up the comparison. But I have to say that it was a great help to start so early in life and not to be totally—and I could have become very arrogant, I suppose. You know, people do when something is thrust on them. But sitting there, sitting at his table, which I did, and the chair, the very chair—which was a wretched wooden chair, if I remember, with sort of a thin cushion on top—it was a humbling experience in a way. And I think it was definitely an inspiring factor, because I didn't quite see myself as a scholar. I never thought I'd be a serious scholar, you know. That was really never my ambition. Even while I was doing my Ph.D.s, I am not that serious a person. And I don't know whether being placed in Boston and having all this tremendous sort of model there, or the ghost of this model sort of hovering in that office room in Boston, or not, that made me—because in many ways I'm not a very methodical scholar. You know, I don't take too many notes. I don't have any index cards, any filing system at all. I have depended very largely on my memory. And I told you one of the reasons I suppose I didn't have to take

down notes was because of the subjects I chose for my Ph.D. thesis. So I wasn't trained. And by the time I got a job, I had become too lazy to—and even now I don't like to use too many books when I am writing something or—I like to have the pictures and look at the object. But he was a very methodical man. I know from his manuscripts at the Boston museum and card files and all that. Which I have never been able to do. So I still consider myself—you know, when you asked me earlier this evening about the apparatus or tool or the method, mine is a very loose method of working. And if you look across—look at my dining—do you see the sideboard?

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

You see files and things?

RIKALA:

Papers, yeah.

PAL:

Well, they're half-chewed articles and just files with some pictures of something that I'm going to write. So it's all there. And then, suddenly, two weeks from now, there will be a dinner party, and I will not have finished half of it. So I'll have to clear it up and move it all upstairs to my so-called study, which I never use or rarely use. Then they'll pile up, or I'll go on a trip for a week, and I'll come back, and I'll have to go through it all again and pull it out. And that's how they—it's not indexed, it's just piled up.

RIKALA:

It's just there.

PAL:

And I'm afraid that's how I have been—I'm quite disorganized in that way. But yet, seeing my bibliography—

RIKALA:

No, your work doesn't reveal that at all.

PAL:

—or the amount I've written, or even reading the writing, I don't think you'll get the impression of a disorganized mind.

RIKALA:

Not at all. No, indeed.

PAL:

No, but I'm very disorganized.

RIKALA:

Just the opposite.

PAL:

But I can manage to find things. I do. I mean, sometimes I waste a little more time, you know, half an hour maybe, looking for something that's sitting right there. [laughter] Of course, I can write very fast. Enormously fast. It's amazing. Once I sit down at something and [claps hands], it's go if I—

RIKALA:

Well, that's evident from—

PAL:

Because I think I think all the time about papers and articles and arguments. I'm doing it all the time in my mind, you see. Driving or whenever I'm listening to music or watching TV. So that when I do sit down—although I must say, honestly, I must say that some—you see, I don't know if you—actually, in the last year or two I'm doing an enormous amount of non-art historical writing both in English and Bengali. I mean, I've gone back to creative writing. I'm writing short stories. I'm writing political commentaries. In fact, I'll give you one or two to read. For the *Statesman*, the major English-language daily newspaper in India; for *L.A. India* here—I've been reviewing books for the *L.A. Times* on all sorts of subjects. And the last two books that they sent me had nothing to do with art history at all of any kind. One was on political history, American. So that kind of writing, of course, I enjoy. I mean, a book review, you have to read the book and do it, but articles where they saw the Dalai

Lama or something else for newspapers, I find very easy and very refreshing to write. And I can write up a piece in an hour and a half or two on Saturday morning or something.

RIKALA:

That's wonderful. I'm jealous, being at the other end. [laughter].

PAL:

Well, so that's an advantage.

RIKALA:

Oh, a tremendous advantage.

PAL:

I think that's an advantage that—some of it may be innate. I don't know. Perhaps it is, I think. And some of it is, I think, experience and having written so much over the years that it comes, sentences and ideas. You know something, nothing that I write now needs reorganizing in the sense that I can organize the whole thing in my head before putting it down. The language has to be corrected, edited.

RIKALA:

But that's for everybody.

PAL:

After all, English is not my mother tongue, anyway. But if I have written a piece or an essay or an article, 95 percent of it—I mean, I never have to take a paragraph from here and put it there and something else there or mix up ideas. No. No, that just somehow comes very automatically. But again, otherwise, really, if you saw my way of working, you'd probably say that I had never had any proper training in the sense that you people are trained here, with your zillions of cards and files and, oh God, and bibliography and—nothing, nothing.

RIKALA:

Right. Yeah.

PAL:

Nothing of that sort. You won't find anything of that sort anywhere in this house or at the [Los Angeles County] Museum [of Art].

RIKALA:

[laughter] That's wonderful. That's wonderful. So the ghost of Coomaraswamy—

PAL:

I think played a part, played a part in pushing me to become a scholar. And I realized, I think, soon after joining the Boston museum that I cannot fool around anymore, so to say. I cannot be a playboy, a social butterfly, and make a successful career even in the museum, because I would have to write. And to write books means I need quiet, and I need to think for myself, and I need to read books. Even if I don't take notes, I do read. And voraciously, by the way. I do read a lot. So that, as a matter of fact, was also, I think, a factor in my wanting to get married. Because don't forget, when I came to Boston I was already thirty-two, which is quite old for a man to remain unmarried. Particularly an Indian man, and particularly an Indian man of a well-to-do family who is the oldest son. Normally his marriage is arranged by the time he is twenty-five. But I still hadn't—I wasn't earning, anyway, number one. Number two, I was determined never to get married, because I felt the world was overpopulated as it is, and if you marry, then you want children, and so you'll be contributing to the population explosion, which I still believe is the biggest problem we face in this world. I think there's nothing, nothing, no atom bomb, nothing else is more serious than this, what's happening with the population. And ultimately the earth won't be able to bear the burden, the strain, the weight, you know.

RIKALA:

That's true.

PAL:

But in a sense, I suppose, partly the fact that I wanted to lead the life, become a scholar, and partly the loneliness of life as a bachelor in America. At the same time, the pressures you have, because you do meet girls, you do go out,

if you are a heterosexual, and you date. Then you date, not with dumb blondes, so to say, but with intelligent women who—and generally women want to get married, so ultimately you face that problem. I had many problems in 1967 mentally, because I took the job thinking it to be a temporary job. I was determined that I would go back to India in maybe three, four years. I did not come to America to live here permanently. I can tell you that for a fact. In 1967 I was quite determined that I would go back to India maybe in four, five years. So I said, if I go back to India, I should get an Indian bride. Because if I married an American girl, you know, I mean, chances are that she wouldn't be able to adjust.

RIKALA:

Greater conflict, yeah.

PAL:

Yeah. Cultural conflict. And my family, from what I have told you, is very ordinary that way, a rather conservative family. I mean, our living style in India was totally Indian, and I think very few American girls would have felt comfortable in that joint family sort of situation, living Indian style, not being able to talk to my mother [Srimati Bidyut Kana Pal], who doesn't speak English, and all this. So, I mean, it would have been a great cultural shock. So there was no question of my, at that time, anyway, marrying and settling down in America. Well, you see, I was wrong. I'm still here. So I could have, after all, married an American girl. But you are not prescient always. You can't foretell.

RIKALA:

No.

PAL:

And Mrs. Coomaraswamy always used to tell me that always, no matter what you plan, you don't have to believe in God, but you must believe that you can't control everything about you, that there is, if not someone, some entity, or call it destiny or whatever you like—it may be an abstract force—that seems to mold your life. And I think it's true. I think to an extent it's true. No matter what they say about your eating habits, they don't necessarily cause

heart attacks or diabetes or this and that. You know, now, look at it. I mean, diabetes is in my genes, I'm told. You see, that's genetic. Heart attack is also genetic. Now, I can't control my birth.

RIKALA:

No, of course not.

PAL:

You see, I couldn't choose my parents. But then, on the other hand, I don't believe God also chose my parents and sent me to have diabetes or a heart attack or this and that. But on the other hand, as I said, at that time I felt a hundred percent confident that I was going back to India in four or five years.

RIKALA:

That's that.

PAL:

But I didn't, you know?

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

But I must tell you another very interesting episode. See, I must say that, of course, I hated the weather in Boston.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

I think Boston—

RIKALA:

It's miserable.

PAL:

July, August is awful.

RIKALA:

It's hot.

PAL:

I mean, it's as humid as Calcutta. And then the winters are sheer murder.

RIKALA:

Frigid, yeah. It's extremes.

PAL:

I mean, I did not like the Boston weather, that's one. Number two, I found, after three years in England, and moving to the Boston area, I sort of found them caricatures of English society and Englishmen. From the accent to the way they live and everything, I mean, it was You know, patently, that area is more English than any other area in America.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

And I didn't like that, somehow. I felt that this wasn't really quite America. To give you an example, in 1967, when I joined the Boston museum, there still was a dining room for men curators only. I'm not joking.

RIKALA:

My goodness.

PAL:

Now that, even coming from Cambridge, was sort of anathema to me. It was like having—I had come from my college, which was a men's college, into this world which was out of touch with reality.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

And, as a matter of fact, I think at the time when I joined the Boston museum, I think there was one black guard. Not a blackguard, but a black guard, okay? And I don't think there was a single Jew on the staff anywhere, okay? There may have been one or two, but I don't think so. Certainly not among the curatorial staff. And, as I said, here there were several women, female curators. One of them was one of the most distinguished curators in the museum, Eleanor Sayre. She was the curator of prints and drawings and one of the world's great authorities on Degas. And she couldn't come and have lunch with me! All right? And to show you how ridiculous the situation was, once Agatha Christie came to the museum with her husband, who is a great archaeologist, Professor [Max Edgar] Mallowan, a Near Eastern archaeologist, you see. Mallowan was taken to the men's dining room to have lunch, and Agatha Christie had to go to the general staff dining room to eat with the other women. All right?

RIKALA:

That's quite extraordinary.

PAL:

So I found that really very uncomfortable and unsatisfactory. And I said one day to Perry Rathbone, the director, I said, "You know, Perry, I think we should change this." And he said, "Oh, I'm all for it." And he said, "But we should take a vote of all the male staff curators here, and if the majority says yes, we'll do it." Now, I think Perry could have just said, "Let's do it," and we would have done it. And I said, "All right." I felt very confident that there would be enough votes. So I circulated a ballot. Well, I lost. Yeah. And you know, the strange part of it, everyone over fifty voted to allow women in, and everyone under fifty, except me, said no.

RIKALA:

That's really incredible.

PAL:

Particularly the twenty-five-year-old and twenty-five to thirty-year-old curators. There were three of them, I think, who said no.

RIKALA:

What a patriarchal institution. They said no.

PAL:

So fortunately then they remodeled the building and added others, and that dining room was finally—that's how it was gotten rid of. There's no staff dining room now. And that happened, I think, in the seventies at some point.

RIKALA:

That's quite an incredible story.

PAL:

Yeah. And I think it should go on record, because I don't think it's even in the history of the Boston museum.

RIKALA:

Not a bit of history they would want to—

PAL:

That as late as—when I left in 1970, that dining room was still forbidden to women.

RIKALA:

That's terrible.

PAL:

I know. And it's not even a member-paying club, where I can at least understand women or—or women having a club not allowing men, if they want to. That's a dues-paying something. But this is where you are being paid. I mean, it's a salaried institution. So overall, I found Boston society rather artificial and too much of a carryover of the British tradition and a little phoney. I didn't like it. So in a sense I was glad to move to Los Angeles in 1970, partly because I felt that this is much more what one thinks America to be. An egalitarian—a much more free, carefree society without all these hang-ups.

RIKALA:

Well, let's pick up with that next time, because that's an interesting notion, because that's probably what Los Angeles really wanted to be at that time, a very different kind of representation of America.

1.8. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (October 24, 1989)

RIKALA:

You had told me about your circumstances of coming to the Boston museum [Museum of Fine Arts],

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

What I don't know yet much about is what your role as keeper of the [Indian] art collection is.

PAL:

Well, as I think I did mention earlier, at the time when I came to the States, in 1967, Boston I think was still the most preeminent institution for Indian art in America, even without the [Nasli M. and Alice] Heeramaneck collection, which they acquired in 1966. And that is really due to the fact that I think sometime around, oh, I don't know, 1917 or somewhere around there—I'm not sure of the date, I may be off by a couple of years—the Boston museum acquired [Ananda K.] Coomaraswamy as the first keeper of the Indian collections.

RIKALA:

Did he come from London?

PAL:

He came, I suppose, from London.

RIKALA:

Or was he in India?

PAL:

No, he came from London, although prior to that—and this has an interesting bearing on the formation of the Boston collection. What happened, Coomaraswamy, as I said, got his D.Sc.—now, D.Sc., mind you, not a Ph.D.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

That's a higher degree than Ph.D. His doctor of science degree in geology at the age of twenty-one—and that would be, I think, oh, sometime towards the end of the last century—and was sent off to Sri Lanka, which was then known as Ceylon, as the. director general of the geological survey of Sri Lanka. And, you know, he was born to a Tamil father and an English mother; he was born in Sri Lanka but had been taken away to England by his mother when he was I think a couple of years old. So his first real acquaintance with his heritage was when he came to Sri Lanka at the age of twenty-one, and it was a cultural shock for him. I mean, he realized that he had been brought up as sort of a caricature of an Englishman by his English mother. His father, in fact, was the first Asian to be knighted.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's interesting.

PAL:

Yes. Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy was the first Asian to be called to the bar in London and also was the first Asian to be knighted. And his mother was English, so he must have been brought up as an English gentleman. So when he came to Sri Lanka and he saw all the art and culture around him, he was hooked, hook, line, and sinker. And that's when he began studying, writing, reading, and talking about Indian art and Indian civilization and Indian history. And in due course he formed a collection of Indian art.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

And I think just about the time the First World War started, he approached the then British government in India—now, the British Indian government—to establish a museum in Benares, which is where he wanted to live, and make him the first curator or director of the museum. And he would give his entire collection to the nation. Well, the government turned him down, so there was no one else. No private person, I suppose, in those days would have come up. There was no real consciousness at that time of Indian art even among the Indians. And of course, the irony is that about twenty years thereafter a museum was established in Benares by someone else. Anyway, he left the country and returned to England with his collection. I don't know whether it was offered to the Boston museum, or I think it was offered in London to Dr. Denman Ross, who was a trustee of the museum, Boston museum, and probably its most generous donor ever, in my opinion. And Denman Ross bought the entire collection for the Boston museum and, in a sense, acquired Coomaraswamy with it, and made him the curator of—

RIKALA:

The keeper.

PAL:

—or keeper of the Indian collection. Hence, the collection is known as the Ross/Coomaraswamy collection.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

And it was a very complete collection in terms of sculpture, stone, bronzes, and paintings. It had many holes, and it still does have many holes, but as I said, at that time it was the greatest collection of Indian art in any museum in America, and remains so, certainly until Coomaraswamy died in 1947. And he never left Boston. He lived in Needham, I think, outside of Boston. And he was a legend in his lifetime, an institution. I can vouch for that because even when I joined Boston in 1967, twenty years after his death, I heard stories galore about him. I remember, for instance, to give you an example, I was at a dinner once with Sidney [J.] Freedberg, who was a professor at Harvard [University]

when I was there and is now chief curator—he may have just retired. I think he's retired as chief curator at the National Gallery [of Art]. He told me that the reason why he ever got into art history was that in his first week in Harvard as a freshman, he was wandering around and he saw a very crowded lecture room, and he asked someone, "What's happening here?" And someone said, "Well, the great Indian scholar, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy of the Boston museum, is giving a lecture." So he said, "Well, I decided to go in." And he went in, and he heard Coomaraswamy, and he decided that that's what he wanted to do.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's wonderful.

PAL:

Now, that's told to me by someone who is a very eminent Western art historian. He didn't even go into Indian art history, but Coomaraswamy's lecture converted him. So he [Coomaraswamy] must have been an extraordinary man. I think I did give you one or two anecdotes about him the last time we were talking about him.

RIKALA:

I don't recall. I think you were telling me more about—

PAL:

Oh, yeah, I think about his knowledge of languages and all that.

RIKALA:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's right. Where he was speaking Greek to—

PAL:

So he was like a giant, like a colossus. And not just Indian art history, which was only one part of his interest. He was a great scholar, really a Renaissance type of scholar. His contributions in many, many different fields, such as Vedic studies, for instance, philosophy, history of religion, etc., etc., are of fundamental importance for students of Indian civilization. And he was an inveterate smoker, I'm told, and probably smoked two or three or more packs a day.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

But, as I said, he never drank. I don't know anyone else in our field who was a more prolific writer than Coomaraswamy. I mean, he wrote prodigiously and prolifically.

RIKALA:

Are his manuscripts at Boston?

PAL:

Now, I don't know where his manuscripts are.

RIKALA:

Or his papers?

PAL:

No. I wonder where his papers—there are substantial papers, and where are they? [tape recorder off]

RIKALA:

What was your role, then, as the keeper? Were you involved in collection development or—?

PAL:

Oh, yes. I mean, that's the role of the curator.

RIKALA:

That was the prime—

PAL:

That's one of the primary functions of the curator. But I'm afraid I didn't have the kind of opportunity—first of all, don't forget, when I joined the Boston museum, they had already bought the Heeramanek Indian collection. So I knew that there would be very little chance of my being able to get more

money to buy more Indian art. And frankly, there was no necessity. I mean, with the acquisition of the Heeramaneck collection, as I said, the museum would have had a lead that I think would have been unable—I mean, I don't think any other institution could have surpassed what Boston would have had, had it kept the Heeramaneck collection. So I saw my role primarily, I suppose, at that point, as a scholar. And don't forget, I had never worked in a museum before, and I had no idea what it involved. So I was not in the acquisition game, so to say. I was not geared to become an aggressive acquirer, which I did in LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] after I moved to Los Angeles. But when I first went to Boston, I mean, first of all, my task was to get to know the collection there, which was vast. That took me some time, to sort of do an inventory, because I not only looked after the Indian and Southeast Asian, but also the Islamic material in the department. And I knew nothing about Islamic art. I had never looked at an Islamic object. So I had to do some reading to familiarize myself with the collections. And, as I said, it was a great time—of course, in retrospect, it was a great time to buy, when Indian and Islamic art, you couldn't give the stuff away, almost. But most of the departmental money had already been pledged to buying the Heeramaneck collection. So there was very little money. So I think altogether in my three years in the Boston Museum, I may have added about, oh, only half a dozen pieces to the collection. On top of that, as I mentioned to you, I was under a curator of the department.

RIKALA:

No, you didn't—

PAL:

Yes, Jan Fontein was the curator.

RIKALA:

Oh, yeah.

PAL:

See, in Boston, there was no separate department of Indian art.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

In fact, there are only two independent departments of Indian art in this country, of all museums. One is Philadelphia [Museum of Art], where Stella Kramrisch is the curator, and the other is the one in Los Angeles. Otherwise, all departments of Indian art are technically—they are not departments, they are just sections of an overall Asian art department, or Far Eastern art, as it is known in some places. And almost always it seems to be the tradition to appoint a Chinese or a Japanese scholar as the head of the department. As a result, I think, to some extent, Indian art naturally doesn't always get the attention of the curator. And this happened certainly in my case, because Fontein's own interests were in Chinese and Japanese and Korean—he was particularly, at that time, determined to build up the Korean collection in the Boston museum, which was small. And there was very little interest in Korean art anywhere else, so that whatever money there was left over after paying the Heeramanecks, or whatever money he raised, most of it went to buying Korean art or Chinese or Japanese art. So on that score I did not have much to acquire. So I spent most of my time writing. I began writing almost immediately as a result, because I had all this time. And I found that I enjoyed writing. You see, that's when I really, seriously began to write about art. I had written a few articles before that and had also finished a book which was in press in India. But I really had to sort of fill my time in the museum since there was nothing to do in the galleries. The galleries had been freshly installed just before I joined. The Heeramaneck collection was coming in every year, groups of things, so I did cataloging. I took an inventory of the collection, and I did an exhibition within a year of my joining. Less than a year. I think I joined the museum in May of '67, and by the end of '67 I think I had organized an exhibition called *Ragamala Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts*, along with a catalog. So that was rather satisfying. I was surprised how quickly I learned how to put together an exhibition. It was done entirely from the museum's collections of a particular type of paintings, Indian paintings, that depict, you might say, the essence of musical melodies. This is a mode of art I believe to be only invented in India. I don't think any other culture has this type of art. I mean, classical Indian music is based on certain melodies, on certain fixed notes, usually four or five notes of the—no more than five of the octave. This melody is then taken up by the musician. Say, when Ravi Shankar plays the sitar, he takes it, the *raga*, or the mode, and develops it, improvises on it very

much like a jazz artist does. That's the closest parallel I can cite, where you can go off in all sorts of directions, but you come back to the melody.

RIKALA:

Right, and it's—

PAL:

Ultimately. So that's—

RIKALA:

And it's based on the knowledge of that original.

PAL:

Yeah. Now, these melodies have names and certain musical modes, and there are little lyrics also that describe them, their characteristics. Say, if it's a morning *raga*, or if it's about love or separation or whatever. And the artists would take these poems, verses, and then, just as the musician would set them to music, the artist would set these verses into a painting.

RIKALA:

That's very nice.

PAL:

So they're called *ragamala* paintings. *Raga* is the musical mode, and *mala*, meaning garland. So I did an exhibition of *ragamala* paintings from the Boston museum's collection, which was so rich that I could do it. And so that was very interesting. Then, in 1964, when I had—remember, I think I did say in one of the previous sessions that in 1964 Gordon Washburn of Asia House [Gallery] had invited me to do a show of Tibetan art.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

So I started working on that, too, because that was now scheduled for 1969. So I had two years to do that show. But having done the *ragamala* show, I also did a second exhibition. So in less than three years that I was in Boston, I did

two exhibitions in Boston and one for Asia House. The other exhibition was, again, culled entirely from the museum's collection, and it was done in a series called *The Hidden Treasures*. See, the Boston museum is so rich, so rich, that it can generate exhibitions from its storages. The series was known as *Hidden Treasures*, and as one of those series, I did a show of their Tibetan and Sino-Tibetan material. So that also was published with a catalog. And that opened in Boston also in '69.

RIKALA:

Very ambitious.

PAL:

Yeah, it was. I don't know how I did it, because, as a matter of fact, the *Art of Tibet* opened I think in January '69, if I'm not mistaken—yeah, sometime in '69—and so did the *Lamaist Art*, the other one in Boston. Let's see. Apart from that, I taught a course, I think, in '68—

RIKALA:

At Harvard?

PAL:

At Harvard, yeah. So that's what I did. And I got married in '68.

RIKALA:

Will you tell us a little bit about that? Will you tell us about meeting your wife [Chitralkha Bose Pal] and getting married and what her interests are and what her background is?

PAL:

All right. Let's see. I did not meet her at all. The marriage was arranged. The wedding was arranged I think sometime in January, or around Christmas of '67, so I'd been in Boston for about seven months or eight months. Yeah, by December '67, I began to realize that I had a serious problem in living as a bachelor in Boston. One was the problem of becoming friends with women and then not being willing to commit myself, which I think I mentioned once before.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Because I still had ideas of going back to India. Second was that I found it difficult to cook and clean and housekeep and study and write and all that. So I said, "I need help," so to say. So these are the two reasons. I think one is to avoid a commitment to an American or a Western woman and thereby commit myself to living in this country, and the other was—I'll tell you something that did have a very important bearing in my instance, in my case, in deciding against marrying a Western girl. I mean, not only that it would make it difficult for me to go back to India, but I really love Indian food. And the thought of having to eat salads and hamburgers twice a day, which is what I would have gotten with an American wife—you know, not being able to, get one Indian meal a day was sort of quite frightening somehow. I mean, I couldn't quite see that, living all my life on American food.

RIKALA:

Of course.

PAL:

So that also forced me to seek an Indian wife. So in December I wrote to my brother, younger brother [Samaraditya Pal], saying that I would be coming home briefly in April, for about a week, and that if they could find a bride for me who was suitable, I would get married. And if the marriage could be arranged that week while I was there—I had very specific dates, because I was really going on another trip, a business trip to Europe and Asia, and I decided to go home for a week. So the auspicious day, wedding day, would have to fall within that week. I said, "If all this happens, fine." Well, very quickly I got a letter from I think my sister [Arundhati Pal], who was then going to the university in Calcutta, my second sister, who wrote and said, "Well, I know a girl in our class who's studying education, M.A. in education. In fact, she will be appearing for her final exams in April. She's wonderful, and I've known her now two years in the university, and I think she's ideal for you. She's pretty and she knows English well." That was, of course, one of the—

RIKALA:

Conditions.

PAL:

—conditions, that she has to be able to mix in Western society. So she [my sister] wrote all that, and she sent a picture and a little CV, sort of—you know, her height and weight, and she can drive and she can sing and she can dance, and all these sort of particulars, and a little picture taken, in fact, at a very famous photographer's in Calcutta called Bourne and Shepherd, who are famous for taking pictures of young girls and making them look attractive, because these pictures are the ones that are sent to the prospective grooms, you see. Now, unfortunately, they botched up with her picture, I must say. [laughter] Because when I got the photograph I said, "This is—this won't do. She just doesn't look a smart woman." [laughter] I said, "She looks a very village type, sort of." You know, a rural, bucolic type." And I need an urban type." So I wrote her [my sister] back home, and I said, "Well, everything sounds fine except that I must say I don't like the picture."

RIKALA:

[laughter] This is wonderful.

PAL:

So my youngest brother, who is a barrister now and a very successful barrister in Calcutta—he had just begun practice I think in Calcutta then—he wrote me a very terse letter saying that "I am very surprised that, as an art historian, you are judging a work of art from a photograph only." [laughter] "I can guarantee you that she's very attractive. And if you are not interested, then let me know. I have decided I'll get married to her," sort of, you see.

RIKALA:

Oh, so the competition.

PAL:

So I quickly, I think, cabled and said, "All right, go ahead." You know, I had enough sort of faith in his judgment. So I said, "Fine." And that's it. Next, of course, invitations were printed off and sent and everything, and I was very

surprised with myself that after having lived so long by myself, and also in the West, three years in Cambridge, then already a year in Boston, and being brought up, in a sense, in a Western school and environment and all this, that at the age of thirty-two I would just cave in and agree to a wedding system which, by your standards, is primitive, you know. And without seeing the party, without having any communication—

RIKALA:

Sounds pretty frightening.

PAL:

Well, there you are. You see, you're frightened. And I'm surprised now that I wasn't frightened, even. I mean, it was like I was in a daze. I didn't even—or whatever it is, you know—maybe it's the—because I really didn't even consider it to be that serious. I mean, I took it for granted. Well, that's how you get married. Everyone gets married in India. My sisters have gotten married. So I went home. I did meet her once before the wedding, simply because I had to get her to fill out a form to apply for a U.S. visa. Since I was there only one week and the wedding was—you know, we would be leaving almost the day after the wedding, or a couple of days after the wedding, and I wanted to bring her with me. I applied, and I cannot—it's amazing—just to show you how things were different—this was in 1968, April, and the U.S. consulate general in Calcutta gave her a visa to come here in less than a week.

RIKALA:

That's quite incredible.

PAL:

And an immigrant's visa, not just a visitor's visa.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

In less than a week the whole thing was done.

RIKALA:

That's terrific.

PAL:

I know. I just can't—now, of course, it's unthinkable. Anyway, so that's how we got married. And as I said, I did see her once. Twice, actually—no, once before the wedding. And then—you won't believe it—the day after the wedding—the Bengali or Hindu wedding is a three-day ceremony. The first day is at the bride's house, and then where the groom stays overnight. The next day they move to the groom's house. And then the third day, the ceremony and a party take place in the groom's house. Now, she had her exams during the wedding.

RIKALA:

Oh, my God. Talk about stress!

PAL:

So the next day she had to go for her exam to the university, and I had to go and pick her up. So I remember, when I went to pick her up, the entire class came out, because they all knew that she had gotten married the night before, the day before, so they all came out to see the groom, you know.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

So these hundred twenty-one-year-old girls—

RIKALA:

Peering.

PAL:

—sort of staring and very—

RIKALA:

Checking you out.

PAL:

Yeah, checking me out, which was very interesting. And I think we left two days after that. I think I wasn't quite aware then, but now I think, in retrospect, I realize how traumatic it must have been for her to—

RIKALA:

That's an incredible series of events.

PAL:

Here's someone who had never left her home going off—

RIKALA:

To finish her degree, to get married, pack up and move to a country she'd never seen.

PAL:

Pack up and move, that's right, never seen, with a total stranger.

RIKALA:

With a complete stranger.

PAL:

Complete stranger! But she's survived and doesn't seem any worse for it.

RIKALA:

Oh, she survived just fine! [laughter]

PAL:

So she came. We used to live very close to the museum—in fact, across Fenway Park, which is exactly a five-minute walk from our apartment. And I decided to alleviate her loneliness, that I would come home for lunch, at least for the first couple of months, which I did. So that gave her something to do after I left.

RIKALA:

To look forward to.

PAL:

To prepare the lunch. Then the curator of Japanese prints, a woman, was a very good friend of mine, so she invited her to come and volunteer in her department two or three days a week.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's nice.

PAL:

To help her mount Japanese prints. So she had three afternoons, at least three afternoons set, and also that immediately gave her an access to many other people in the museum. So she started making friends, which, you know, for Indian women here, it's rather difficult, from what I hear, from other people's experience.

RIKALA:

I can imagine.

PAL:

If they don't go and work, then they are housewives, and they don't get to meet Americans at all. And I didn't know any Indians in Boston at all. Anyway, it was just as well. And then she even decided to become a docent. So she started taking training for docent courses. As long as we were there, she was a docent in the Boston museum. And then, of course, she had a baby [Shalmali Pal] in 1969, July. In '69, July, she had a baby, so that then kept her busy all the time until we moved here in January, [laughter] So I think it could have been worse. You know, her solitude or loneliness could have been worse, but I don't think it was as bad because she very quickly got involved in many activities there.

RIKALA:

Could you describe a little bit, just to sidetrack back for a minute, the events that surround a marriage, a Hindu marriage? A little bit more. Are there elaborate meals involved, or—?

PAL:

Oh, yeah, yeah. It's a three-day affair. It's very elaborate. I mean—

RIKALA:

And the clothing?

PAL:

Oh, yeah, there's—in fact, it's—there are lots of—all of it, it has religious ceremonies. It's not a secular ceremony at all. And it begins really quite a few days or weeks before the wedding with engagement ceremonies and all that. Then, on the day of the marriage, the groom uses turmeric paste, for instance, in the morning as soap for his bath. And that turmeric paste, some of it, has to be sent to the bride's house with, oh, tons of offerings. It's called—I don't even know what the English equivalent would be. But servants, a dozen or two servants, depending on how rich you are, would take this turmeric paste, along with saris and clothes and sweetmeats and fish and vegetables and all this, as a sort of an offering to the bride's house. And then she will have to bathe with this [the turmeric] also. It's believed turmeric is a cleansing agent, and it's supposed to be good for, for instance, skin disease. So it's sort of a purification sort of ceremony. So that's only one bit. And, you know, there are priests and worship and all. Then, of course, the groom's people will go to the bride's house, oh, sometime five or six o'clock in the evening with a huge entourage. Perhaps thirty or forty close friends of the groom and relatives and all, or maybe at least fifty people or more will go. So then, the wedding ceremony, depending on what the priests say is the auspicious hour—it may be eight o'clock to ten o'clock, or it may be from ten to twelve. Who knows? I mean, one doesn't know. And also, when you arrive, when the groom arrives, the bride's father receives you, and then you go and sit on a throne like a king. We drive, but in some places in India the groom still rides a horse to the wedding, like a prince, complete with a crown and all that, tiara. Really, it's a very—you are a prince for a day, in a sense. Both parties have to fast the whole day. You can't eat anything until the wedding is over. Of course, from the evening, people are coming to the wedding, and there's music playing and all that. The wedding feast goes on the whole evening, and I think in—I don't know how many. I think her house must have invited at least five hundred guests.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

And that's a small wedding, very small wedding, yeah. So they all had dinner, and it's a sit-down dinner, so I suppose each batch—about a hundred and fifty would eat, so it would take three batches. So you're talking about, oh, at least a four-hour dinner, and it would be at least a ten-, twelve-course dinner. You know, a dinner doesn't mean—so when that's over, they've all eaten, all these guests leave, and, of course, they leave presents and all that. And the ceremony is over, which is a long ceremony with the priest and the father of the bride and bride and the groom. No one else on that evening. And the father gives the bride to the groom. And there's a ceremony with a fire, lit fire, as witness. The groom and the bride have to walk together around the fire seven times, which, by the way, is also done I think in a Jewish wedding, going around seven times, the bride and groom together. Not around fire there, but they do go around seven times. And that's one of the—as I say, it's a long, drawn-out ceremony. Then, after the ceremony is over, you eat. You are allowed to eat. Then you will have your dinner. And then you have to spend the whole night—you can't spend it together. The bride stays separately, and the groom spends most of the night being teased by the bride's cousins and friends, all women. And they will yak, come and talk to you and tell you that you must be nice to her and what a nice girl she is and this and that. Then you gamble. They ask you to gamble, so you are to have money. And you lose. Anyway, all this, then, the idea is not to let you sleep.

RIKALA:

That's terrible.

PAL:

And the night goes away. Okay, so that's that. Then there are all sorts of religious ceremonies during the next day in the bride's house, and mostly women's rites. The second day, sort of women's rites are performed, and the mother of the bride and her friends and sisters and aunts and all these—all sorts of rites you have to go through. Then you leave with the bride. And that, of course, is a terrible moment, terribly painful moment, traumatic moment for the groom, because everyone's crying, you know. The bride's parents are crying, and you feel like a robber, that you're abducting this woman.

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RIKALA:

So you've taken the bride.

PAL:

So you come back to your house, and then, again, the second night, you sleep in separate rooms, because that night is considered to be a very inauspicious night if the groom and bride stay together. Much misfortune can befall them, including death. That's the belief. So they stay separately. Then the next day is the—again, the party is given in the groom's house, so another five hundred to a thousand people are invited for the dinner. Technically, the bride is supposed to cook lunch that day for everyone in the house, which may be at least a hundred people, with relatives and all, but that's not done any longer, because—although I don't know when it was done at all. Because at least these brides are twenty-one or twenty-three or twenty-five years old, and they may know something of how to cook, but in my mother's or grandmother's days, brides were eight, nine, ten, eleven. So I don't understand this whole business of making the bride cook, [laughter] Anyway, what happens is, while the rice is cooked, maybe they come and stir the pot a bit, and that's their contribution. Although my mother [Srimati Bidyut Kana Pal] when she got married, believe me, she was seventeen, and I gather she really had to cook. She did cook.

RIKALA:

That's amazing.

PAL:

She always told us that she had to cook this huge meal. Anyway, there are also some other religious ceremonies on that day, the third, day, and then in the evening there's a big, big dinner party. And then, finally, the bride and groom are put together in a bedroom which is beautifully decorated with flowers. And the bed is decorated with flowers, too.

RIKALA:

Oh, how nice.

PAL:

Yeah. And then that's when they can sleep together for the first time in three days, and, you know, talk to one another, and get to—

RIKALA:

Become acquainted.

PAL:

—get acquainted, really. I mean, I think it will be a very, very rare, rare occasion if the marriage is consummated at all that day. I think 99 percent of the cases, no, because simply they don't know one another at all. They start—

RIKALA:

And just the stress of the event.

PAL:

Just the stress, yeah. Yeah.

RIKALA:

My goodness.

PAL:

Yeah. And I remember, in fact, we couldn't even—we didn't even have a bed, because somehow they couldn't fix our bed in time. So it was a new bed, and something was wrong with it, so we slept on the mattress on the ground. We were both too tired, and I think we went to sleep.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's quite extraordinary. So do you think your daughters will have anything comparable in their lives?

PAL:

Frankly, I don't know. So far, they absolutely refuse the system and they say, "No. No way are we going to get married." But, you know, Shalmali, my older daughter, is now twenty. Maybe when she's twenty-five and hasn't found a man, she may think otherwise. I don't know.

RIKALA:

Time will tell.

PAL:

But right now she won't hear of it. Who knows? Maybe they won't. I mean, if they don't find anyone, they may not want to get married or something. I mean, it's just very difficult to say anything about—you know, and we are—

RIKALA:

Of course.

PAL:

And they are in a difficult position, culturally, here, you know.

RIKALA:

That's right.

PAL:

When all is said and done, I think they are, even though they are born and brought up here, they are not—I mean, they are another people. They are not whites, they are not Jewish, they are not blacks. So it's not going to be easy for them to find a mate. I don't know where they'll go, what they're going to do.

RIKALA:

That is interesting.

PAL:

And that does worry me. There's no question about it. It does. I think about it. I wish they would agree to an arranged marriage, which they see can't be that bad if their mother and I are living together and we are still together. Many of our friends who chose their own partners have already divorced. So they should see the virtue of the system. But I don't know. We do think about, it. There's no question.

RIKALA:

Of course. Of course, as parents. Well, let's move on to Nasli [M.] Heeramaneck. You mentioned that you met him in 1964. What were those circumstances?

PAL:

Well, I arrived in New York, and I think he was told by someone, maybe at the Asia Society—don't forget, he was an important lender to the Nepal exhibition [*Art of Nepal*] that Stella Kramrisch had organized. And yes, I think that's what happened. I think at the Asia House he heard about me and that I knew Nepalese art and I could read some of these old manuscripts. So he got in touch with me and said he was a collector, a dealer and collector, and had lots of Nepalese art in his house, and would I like to come and see. And I said, "Fine." So I went to this brownstone at 23 East Eighty-third Street, I still remember. And also, he was Indian. That helped. I mean, needless to say, I was a bit homesick when I arrived in New York in 1964. I was so homesick, I'll tell you, because I didn't know anyone, after all. I didn't have any friends at all. I used to go and eat some of my meals by myself when I was not invited. So I used to go into one of these—at that time there were lots of these cafeteria type of places, you know—which have gone now, now that I think of it—where you could go in and have a wonderful meal of steak and potatoes and vegetables and all for something like \$1.90 or, you know, for a ridiculously small price. I remember being very impressed with America and how cheap living was here. You know what, strangely, made me feel very at home was that wherever I went at that time, these cafeterias or anywhere else, they were playing Beatles music.

RIKALA:

English music.

PAL:

Not England, Beatles! Oh, [sings] "It's been a hard day's night." I remember distinctly every time I heard that, I was jubilant. It was as if I had found a long lost friend.

RIKALA:

That's nice.

PAL:

It's incredible how I—because I was much more at home in Cambridge, England, and Beatles were just—you know, I think that was their first year. And the *Ed Sullivan Show* in America, '64. I'm sure it was '64. They started coming up in '63. And every time I heard a Beatles song, I felt as if I'd found a long lost friend. And I remember then saying to myself, "This is ridiculous. I'm an Indian. And what am I doing feeling so at home hearing Beatles songs?" Anyway, so I met Heeramanek, and naturally I liked him. He was a Parsi, and we ate Indian food at his place. He was an interesting cook. Not a great cook, but like all Indian men, he had learned how to cook. His wife [Alice Heeramanek], of course, was American, and she was already a semi-invalid at that time.

RIKALA:

Really?

PAL:

I think, yeah, I think she had had polio sometime in her life. She was in bed mostly, most of the day, and she was difficult. She was cantankerous and gave him a very hard time. But I got to know him quite well. I must have seen him, I think, that first trip. I think I was about a week in New York before I started going around the country, and then I was probably another week in New York when I came back, so I must have seen him quite a few times. You see, he must have been already planning his show at the Boston museum. Because that was held in 1966. So, I suppose—and he was a very close friend of Perry Rathbone's, who was then the director of the Boston museum. He [Nasli] was a very elegant man and knew Coomaraswamy well.

RIKALA:

Oh, I see.

PAL:

Spoke very highly, considered Coomaraswamy his guru.

RIKALA:

Really? That's interesting.

PAL:

And Nasli came out of India, I think, [in the] early thirties. He first, when he was a very young man—well, he must have been about—or even earlier. I think he left home, Bombay, I think, maybe in the late twenties.

RIKALA:

What I have gathered from [Kenneth] Donahue's introduction to the Islamic catalog [*Islamic Art: The Nasli M. Heeramaneck Collection*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1974] about Heeramaneck is that his father was a dealer in Chinese ceramics and that his father sent him to Delhi when he was seventeen years old to manage a shop there.

PAL:

Yeah. Yeah, right.

RIKALA:

And then he sent him to London to study at the V and A [Victoria and Albert Museum] and then at the British Museum, and then at age twenty-two he was sent to Paris to open a gallery.

PAL:

That's right. Twenty-two, as early as—

RIKALA:

And then by age twenty-five he moved to New York City.

PAL:

Yeah. Okay, so he moved in 1925 rather than early thirties.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Yeah, he's got to, because he—

RIKALA:

He's born 1902?

PAL:

I'll tell you. He was born in 1902 and he died in '71.

RIKALA:

'Seventy-one.

PAL:

So that's right. So it must have been about 1927 that he must have moved to—

RIKALA:

Moved to New York.

PAL:

—New York, so earlier than I thought.

RIKALA:

Which is quite an exciting time in terms of the interest in art, I'm thinking.

PAL:

I now wonder on what basis he came and how he got admission. You know, it was very difficult in those days. And I don't think he got his citizenship till the immigration law was changed in the forties or fifties, something like that, after the forties. You know, it was very tough then. I know that he used to go around, he told me, with a suitcase from place to place, from museum to museum, trying to sell art. And he used to go to Boston and meet Coomaraswamy. And he met his wife, who used to go to Yale [University], and they got married. You know, in fact, I think the only reason they stayed married was partly because Nasli was an Indian and I think believed in the permanence of a marriage, because when I got to know him in the last seven years of his life, I mean, she was impossible. And I would have never, never stayed with her. I'd have just—but she was ill, so I suppose he felt it was his duty to look after her. He was very good to her. And she was always giving him hell. "Why did you buy this? Why did you do this and this and that?" And "Everyone's cheating you," and blah, blah. All that. To be honest with you, I

think he was much, much smarter than she ever would be, and yet she behaved as if she was the brain and was very cantankerous. I mean, she was difficult to take, I must say. And her illness didn't—maybe she was a much nicer woman before she became ill and semi-paralyzed. But when I knew her—I mean, she was intellectually sharp, and she had a broad knowledge of art and had a good eye, no question. But as a person, she was very difficult. She must have been very difficult to live with. Anyway, they had no children. And he was quite a lively, jovial, and easygoing fellow. I must say I enjoyed his company always. Always. Until towards the end we had—after I joined the museum here [LACMA], he, I think, tried to force some objects on the museum and on me, and I resented that. That sort of caused some problems. I think the last six months of his life he wouldn't talk to me.

RIKALA:

Was he ill?

PAL:

No, he wasn't ill. But he had a premonition that he was going to die. I'll tell you, the last two years, certainly, quite often he would say that he didn't think he would live long, and that he won't—that seventy—he had a thing about the figure seventy, that he would die by the time he reached seventy, you know. But as far as I know, he did not die of any—he had no illness as such, no. I think he died ultimately of a heart attack. I'm not sure.

RIKALA:

I don't know.

PAL:

I don't know. He had only one eye.

RIKALA:

Oh I

PAL:

Yeah, he lost an eye as a child playing cricket in Bombay. So he was one-eyed all his life.

RIKALA:

What was his collection philosophy? Or collecting philosophy, I should say.

PAL:

No, no, he wasn't a—don't forget, he was not a collector, he was a dealer.

RIKALA:

A dealer.

PAL:

But what he did was, say, if he bought ten, acquired ten objects, he sold nine and kept one, but, of course, a very good one. You know, the better object he squirreled away, and that was not for sale. It was in the house. And he annoyed a lot of people. I gather he annoyed—he was very difficult in some ways. In dealing, he was a difficult person. He thought he knew everything, and he tried to force his views on people, and he wouldn't sell what—you know, when a dealer does that, it's very annoying to the colle. ct. or. or the museum curator who goes into the gallery and says, "Well, I'd like to buy that." And then you say, "Well, sorry, that's not for sale." Well, that's awful. And his house was his shop. So these things were not stashed away. I mean, I think if a dealer has a shop in town and a house in the country and keeps everything he wants in the country and doesn't invite—he should never invite collectors and dealers and curators. So I know for a fact that Sherman [E.] Lee of the Cleveland Museum [of Art] stopped buying from Nasli Heeramaneck for a long time, because Nasli wouldn't sell many of the things he wanted. Sherman Lee was, as you know, an Asian scholar, and, in fact, I think he—I don't know what he did his Ph.D. in, but he's very good in all Asian fields, and as director of the Cleveland Museum, from almost nothing he has made it into—it was his purchasing that made the Cleveland Museum into one of the leading museums of Indian art in the country. As a matter of fact, by 1970, when I moved to Los Angeles, I think Cleveland had overtaken Boston in many respects for Indian art.

RIKALA:

That's interesting.

PAL:

But, I mean, the overall Asian collection in Boston is one of the greatest in the world, there's no question about it. Chinese, Japanese, and all together, it's just stupendous. So that was a failing on Nasli's part. But then, of course, you might say that if he didn't do that, then you wouldn't have this collection in Los Angeles, and I wouldn't be here.

RIKALA:

Exactly. Exactly. So initially it was meant to go to the Boston museum.

PAL:

That's right. Boston reneged on the deal, you might say.

RIKALA:

But after the deal was already in process, though.

PAL:

Oh, yes, after the deal was already in place.

RIKALA:

And then Donahue picked it up.

PAL:

Then Donahue picked it up. I think George Kuwayama—who was then the curator of Far Eastern art here—and Donahue picked it up. Donahue, as you know, was the director of the museum. So we're talking of 1966. Donahue had just become—no, no, we're talking of 1969, that's right. Donahue had become the director in '66, I believe. I still don't quite—I mean, I think they saw this as a great opportunity to augment at least one section of the museum by leaps and bounds, sort of with one fell blow, you know. I think this must have been the idea, because it's quite rare for a museum to buy a collection. They may be given a collection, but this was a \$2.5 million package, you know, which is not inconsiderable. In 1969, for Indian art, that was a lot of money, a lot of money. In fact, some people thought it was much too much. But then, \$2.5 million was paid over ten years, you see, so that not all of it—but I think \$1 million was paid within the first year, and then \$1.5 million spread out over ten years thereafter. Something like that, yeah. So I would say that four people may have sort have gotten together: Donahue; George Kuwayama, the curator of

Far Eastern art; Dick [Richard E.] Sherwood, who was a trustee and who had been to India and sort of was fond of India and Indian culture, so he helped, I think, pushed; and Leroy Davidson, who was then professor of Indian art at UCLA. I think he, too, was enthusiastic about the idea, naturally. I would say that all four probably contributed towards the collection coming here. And I gather, rightly, Time magazine at the time considered the acquisition to be the greatest that any museum had made in the post-World War II world.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's good.

PAL:

Yeah, which I think is true. I still think that. I don't know of any other deal, either by this museum or any other museum, that is really as great a deal as this particular transaction.

RIKALA:

Can you account for not only the foresight but the general interest that these people may have had in Indian art? This is something that's very difficult for me, because—you've mentioned it, also. What was the consciousness of Indian art at the time, even, as you say, in India, but in the U.S.? There's something very—

PAL:

Very little. Except that I think, again, strangely enough—don't forget, the Vietnam [War] was on. I'll tell you, I think one thing was that Japanese art had not become as popular or as—I don't know what it is, but Japan did not loom as large, let's say, on the American horizon then as it does now. Then secondly, I think again the Beatles had something to do with it. You see, the sixties was a great age for India and things Indian here, partly because of the Beatles and that Maharishi [Mahesh] Yogi, remember, that they took up with. They went to India, and George Harrison and sitar and Ravi Shankar and the counterculture and the drugs and Timothy Leary and everything came together at that time. I mean, India and—one big reason was that China was contraband. You see, you couldn't import any Chinese objects into this country.

RIKALA:

I didn't know that.

PAL:

No trade with enemies. Just like right now still, in America, you can't import a single Cambodian object. Do you know that?

RIKALA:

No, I didn't.

PAL:

Yeah, that's still trading with the enemy. But, of course, that's being gotten around by everyone, because what they're doing is they're simply bringing it out of Thailand and declaring at customs, saying it's—

RIKALA:

That it's a Thai—

PAL:

It's a Thai object. And who the hell is going to check whether they come out of Cambodia or Thailand or what? But anyway, so the unavailability of Chinese art, I think, helped Indian art. While it was not as popular, and it will never be popular, I feel, that way, a lot of major institutions—like Cleveland—were very vigorously buying Indian art, and Sherman Lee was considered one of the great directors. Also, Kansas City [William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art] had a collection and was buying Indian art. Larry [Laurence] Sickman, the director, was an admirer of Indian art. Then Dick [Richard E.] Fuller, the director of the Seattle Art Museum, also was an admirer of Indian art. The [Avery] Brundage Collection had already come to San Francisco [Asian Art Museum]. So I think all this must have influenced Ken Donahue.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

You see? I mean, after all, he met these people, he went to these museums, he saw—and he must have—and then, in 1966, the Heeramanek collection had been shown at LACMA, you see, 1967. You see, it was one of the venues. So they knew the collection. And frankly, I mean, when it was set up, three hundred objects made a very impressive, or whatever, exhibition. So if you can't buy Chinese art and there didn't seem to be that much Japanese art around, this was, I think, a very logical sort of decision, that the Heeramaneks offered a sort of good term payment without interest.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's extraordinary.

PAL:

Yeah, there was no interest charged for the ten-year payment. I think they were looking for some way to sort of project the museum, shoot it, so to say, into an A-class artistic environment. And what else could you do? Even in 1969, if you had given \$2.5 million dollars, you couldn't buy more than one or two good European paintings even then. Right? I mean, Rembrandts were—

RIKALA:

Nonexistent, probably, at that point.

PAL:

—were \$1 to \$2 million, and there weren't that many to have. So this was, I think, a very astute decision.

RIKALA:

Can you tell me a little bit about these people? Dick Sherwood, trustee. Can you—?

PAL:

Well, Dick Sherwood is a trustee of the museum, and he's a lawyer by profession, a partner in O'Melveny and Myers, which is, you know, one of the leading law firms in California, nationally known. His interest in India, I think, went back to his marriage. Apparently he courted this young lady, who of course is his wife now, [Dorothy Romonek] Sherwood. And when he proposed to her, she said to him that, "I will marry you only if you promise to take me to

India for our honeymoon." Now, why she said this, I've never found out—one day I will ask her—because she was from Los Angeles. But she was in Wellesley [College] and he was in Harvard [University], and that's how they met. So he said she was very beautiful, and he was a budding lawyer, you know, and he was a Harvard-trained lawyer and probably had a bright future. So they got married. He promised her, and they got married, and then they booked themselves in a—they went to London, I think, and from London I think they booked themselves on a boat called *S.S. Chusan*. I've heard this so many times that I know even the name of the boat. This was, I think, in 1954 or somewhere around there, in the fifties. And in that boat, a very eminent—later an art historian, but at that time I think he was still a member of the Indian civil service—man called Bill [William] Archer was going back from India to England, I think with his wife, Mildred [Archer]. The Sherwoods met the Archers on the boat and struck up a friendship. So I think that also influenced—and later on they kept up their contacts with Bill Archer, who retired from the Indian civil service and came back to England and became the keeper of the Indian collections in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

RIKALA:

I see. That's why the name is familiar.

PAL:

And he has written many books. Okay? So Dick Sherwood naturally became interested in Indian art, so to say, and when he became a trustee of this museum and this opportunity came, he pushed for it. And I know he brought Bill Archer as a consultant to give an opinion on the collection. You know, the board of trustees—and I was the other person brought from Boston to give an opinion whether they should buy this collection. So each of us submitted our written reports, and they bought the collection. But they paid Bill Archer far, far more than they paid me, I found out later.

RIKALA:

[laughter] How very fair. So how did you leave Boston, then?

PAL:

Well, what happened—so they bought the collection. Then, I remember, '69, January, I met—or was it April? Yeah, April, maybe, I met Donahue at the Asia House, New York. And he said that they had bought, the collection and they were looking for a curator, and would I come for the job. I think the conversation was almost in an elevator there or something, or it was very short, you know. I said, "Well, I really don't know and I'll have to think about it." So he said, "Well, I'll write to you." And I said, "Do that." Oh, no, no. He didn't say, "I'll write to you." That's right. He said, "Think about it." And I dismissed it. You know, I didn't take it further. But by the summer of 1969, my relations with Fontein had deteriorated. And I realized that—well, in fact, I knew—my days in Boston were sealed from the day the contract was nullified by Boston and the collection was given back to Heeramaneck. I said, "Well, then, there's no point in my really staying here," because, first of all, this stuff was the stuff I was going to catalog and study. The Boston collection, after all, he [Coomaraswamy] had extensively cataloged in the twenties. And, I mean, one could republish all of that. I think Boston's collection is worth a catalog, certainly, a multi-volume catalog. But it had no challenge for me, number one. Number two, we had personality problems, Fontein and I, and he really, I think, began to resent my presence by that time. Partly because I now realize I had moved a little too fast in producing too many shows and catalogs and articles. And I think this, which I didn't at the time realize, did affect him, because there was—people, I suppose, compared—we came at roughly the same time, and I had already outstripped him in writing at that time. And anyway, I mean, you know, there were lots of other personality quirks, and he was a short-tempered fellow who yelled at you in a very nasty way, so we were not getting along. I had no money to buy anything. He would not accept my recommendation for anything, and he really wanted to spend all the money himself, you see. So when he reneged on this, deal, that was the last straw. And I remember going to Perry Rathbone, and I said to Perry Rathbone, I said, "You know, you are making a grave error, because you've already bought two installments of the collection." And they also had a ten-year contract, by the way, with Heeramaneck.

RIKALA:

Yeah, I guess I remember reading about that.

PAL:

Yeah, they had a similar contract.

RIKALA:

So they just changed their mind, even though they had already initiated the process?

PAL:

Yeah. But there was a clause there that either party could break the contract.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

You know, optional. Give up on a year's option. So after, I think, buying the first year's, or maybe at the most they bought two years' option, Fontein, as I say, decided to drop the options. And Perry Rathbone and the board of trustees went along with it. I think that's the stupidest mistake that any museum has ever made, ever made in its life. I went and spoke with Rathbone, and do you know what? I mean, he's an ass to have told me this, and I don't mind saying it „and being on record, because I'm sure he now realizes he was an ass. He told me that "Well, it's much easier to get art, but finding a good curator is immensely difficult." Well, I felt like turning to him and saying, "Well, you are not only losing a collection, but you are going to lose a curator also, if that is your logic." But, of course, he was meaning Jan Fontein. All right. What happened, I think it was within five years after that that Jan Fontein manipulated to boot him out.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

And Jan Fontein became the director. You see? You know, he sort of, in a sense, cut the branch on which he was sitting and made a very—and I'm surprised that the trustees went along. I mean, they had no sense of decency or no sense of self-respect, that here they have given their word, they have signed a contract, and—you know. And overnight they lost their eminence. Now I would say the major collections of Indian art are us [LACMA], the

Metropolitan [Museum of Art], Cleveland, and Philadelphia will be when it gets the Stella Kramrisch collection, and then Boston. So Boston is fifth now, I would say, about.

RIKALA:

So it's dropped to fifth.

PAL:

Certainly right now fourth.

RIKALA:

That's interesting.

1.10. TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (October 24, 1989)

RIKALA:

You mentioned previously that Los Angeles was this egalitarian, carefree society. Or maybe together we summed up last week that that's what Los Angeles had hoped to be. So can you tell me a little bit, starting off with what Los Angeles was like when you came, just the impressions of the city at large? And then we'll talk a little bit more about LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art].

PAL:

Yeah. I think my impression was much better when I finally came in 1970 than it was in 1964.

RIKALA:

Initially, yeah.

PAL:

My first visit. Well, as I said, I didn't take [Kenneth] Donahue seriously the first time. Then I got a letter, again, sometime late summer of '69, I think, from George Kuwayama, asking me to come back and talk to them, which I did. I mean, I had come before that, a few months before that, when they were considering the collection. Remember, I had to come and advise them.

RIKALA:

As a consultant.

PAL:

As a consultant, and write a report. And then I came back at the end—by the end of the summer, I was sort of in a more receptive mood, and I came back and I—of course, don't forget, seeing the building helped a lot.

RIKALA:

They were brand-new buildings.

PAL:

Yeah, there was this building. So there was a museum, as opposed to 1964, when there was no museum anywhere.

RIKALA:

There was nothing.

PAL:

When I came back, they wined and dined me, naturally, and I met a few people, one being—I met Franklin [D.] Murphy for the first time, I think. And I discussed frankly with him the disadvantage of coming to Los Angeles, because I said, as far as I knew, the museum library hardly had any books on Indian art. Well, I remember he said that UCLA had a good library. I said, "But UCLA is ten miles away, and it's—you know, one can't—."

RIKALA:

Just nip out to the library.

PAL:

Yeah, nip out to the library. You'd spend a whole day almost. So he said that if I came he would give me \$25,000 from the Kress Foundation to build up the library. And if, after that, I still needed money, further money, then he would consider a second grant of \$25,000.

RIKALA:

That's terrific.

PAL:

So I said, "Well, they are not all Philistines here. Some people do understand." And I didn't know at the time that Franklin Murphy had been chancellor: of UCLA. For many years I had no idea. All I knew was that he was then the—I don't know. In '69, when I came here. I don't think he was even the president. Or he had just become president.

RIKALA:

Of the board?

PAL:

He had just been made the president of the board of trustees—yeah, that's right—in July '69, and I must have come in August or September to talk to them. So then I met Anna Bing Arnold, and I found her just charming and simply wonderful. I was told that she was, at that time, without question, the most generous donor, and that they could depend on her for at least a quarter of a million dollars a year. So when I met her—I think I went to her house. I was invited to her house to meet her, and she assured me also that she would support me and Indian art. So that was very encouraging. She was very nice, and I did meet—I met the Sherwoods also [Richard E. and Dorothy Romonek Sherwood], and I met Sidney [F.] Brody, I think. And I met Ed [Edward W.] Carter. And they seemed very sensible people. Sorry, I don't think it was Franklin Murphy—was Franklin Murphy the president, or Sidney Brody was the president? Sorry, Franklin Murphy became president later, I think. Anyway, so I didn't find them as unpleasant as I thought they might be. So there were two other issues, really. One was that I insisted on having a separate department of Indian art. I said I had had it [i.e., a department that was not separate] in Boston and I knew it just didn't work. And I said, "If you want me to develop the collection and build it up into something, then I think I must have freedom. It must be a separate department completely." And George Kuwayama was naturally reluctant because, after all, in a sense, he was the curator under whom the collection was sort of bought. I mean, he was the curator responsible for buying it, and here I was coming from outside and taking his main acquisition away. Because he had very little in Chinese and

Japanese art. As a matter of fact, I couldn't see the justification in 1969 of having even a curatorial department for Far Eastern art. I don't think the collection—without the [Nasli M.] Heeramanek collection, it did not merit a full-time curator or a department. So anyway, they agreed to that. And then there was the matter of the salary. What they offered me was a bit too low, I felt, to make the move, so they increased it somewhat. It wasn't a great amount. I mean, I will tell you frankly, I think it was—they offered me \$12,700 a year, and I settled for \$15,000. I asked and got \$15,000. Yeah, those salaries were low. I joined Boston [Museum of Fine Arts] in 1967, believe me, at a salary of \$10,500. It increased \$500 a year, so it went up to \$11,000. And I think I was earning \$11,500 when Los Angeles offered me \$12,700, which seemed considerably more, but—and I tell you, I lived quite comfortably. When I moved here, to give you an idea, I rented a two-bedroom apartment, third floor, very fine, right below the Mormon temple on Overland Avenue. Both bedrooms and the living room all had air conditioners, and that was for \$240 a month. Can you—? I mean, the same building, the same flat, now is—

RIKALA:

Oh, over \$1,000.

PAL:

I think around \$2,000, you see?

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

So, you see, \$15,000 wasn't an ungenerous amount then. And I remember distinctly when I was negotiating in 1966 with Perry Rathbone in the Boston Museum—I had no idea what people were paid and how much you needed to live in America. John Rosenfield, who is now the Rockefeller professor at Harvard [University], picked me up from the airport, and I remember asking John for his advice re[garding] what sort of salary I should ask for. He thought a bit, and he said, "I think about \$6,000, \$6,500 will be plenty." I said, "Fine." So I went in to talk with Perry Rathbone, and we talked of everything, and so he came to salary. He said, "Well, there's only one thing I can't tell you right

now. I can't exactly tell you what salary we can offer you, because we are, in fact, right in the middle of rethinking the entire curatorial salary structure, and I have a board meeting tomorrow. So can I call you up somewhere in a couple of days and tell you?" And by that time, of course, I was going to go on to New York, so I said, "Sure, you can—as a matter of fact, I was staying with Nasli Heeramaneck in New York, so I said, "You can call me at Nasli's and tell me." So he said, "Fine," he'd do that. And he called me two days later and he said, sort of a little bit apologetically, that the best they could do was to offer me \$10,500. And you could imagine! I felt like I was a prince! I thought, "My God, Rosenfield told me about \$6,500 should be a princely sum, and this is an imperial sum!" I mean, you know, \$10,000. I said, "Oh, fine, fine." And I accepted it. And as a matter of fact, I later on found out that just then the assistant curator's salary, which is the level at which I joined—although my title was keeper, my rank was that of an assistant curator—was in fact \$4,500. And that's what—yeah, Tom [Thomas] Maytham, who later on moved on to become director at Seattle [Art Museum], who was the assistant curator for European paintings in the Boston museum, was making \$4,500. And it was from my joining, from that day on, that the salary structure changed radically and was made a little more decent. So finally I left, and Donahue agreed to the salary, and then I got a letter offering the terms in writing. That took a little while to come. Once I got that letter I made the announcement that I was leaving for Los Angeles. And two things happened then that sort of jarred me and made me sort of nervous—or three things, really. One was that someone sent me a series of articles published in the "Calendar" section of the *Los Angeles Times* by Henry Seldis, who was then the chief art critic of the *Times*, a series of three, I think, scathing articles about the museum. Very, very uncomplimentary articles, okay? That's one. Second was that an ex-trustee called Phil [Phillip] Berg—or rather, let's say, I got a message in the Boston museum, I got a phone call from the entrance saying that "A Mr. Phil Berg is here from Los Angeles to see you." So I said, "All right." So I came out, and he introduced himself, and he said he had been a trustee of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. I said, "Fine," and "What can I do?" And he says to me, "I hear you are going to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art as curator in Indian art." I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, let me tell you, it's an awful place." Then he gave me a lecture on how bad the trustees were in the museum. And I said, "Good Lord, this is really frightening. Here are these articles, and now

this guy says—" I said, you know, "Maybe I made a big, big mistake, and I'm jumping from the frying pan into the fire." And then the third thing was that I had written to Sherman [E.] Lee that I was moving to Los Angeles, and he had written back a very short letter sort of saying, "Dear Pratap, I can't understand why you should leave Boston and move to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which I hear is a hornet's nest. In any event, I think you are taking a demotion." I thought, "Oh, this is it. I have really blown it. I've made the biggest blunder of my life." I said, "What can I do? Now I have accepted it, and I have handed in my resignation, which has been accepted, so—then, whatever—I mean, there's nothing else to do. I'll have to go now." But I became very nervous, I must say. So I arrived, and, of course, even before—and I think we stayed in a—oh, I didn't bring—that's right. I arrived alone. And my wife [Chitralkha Bose Pal] and my six-month-old—she was, yes, a six-month-old daughter [Shalmali Pal]. I came just after Christmas, that's right. And they went off to Denver, where I have an old friend, to stay with her until I found a house or an apartment. So I came, and immediately Anna Bing Arnold—first of all, I'll tell you, I was picked up at the airport by a museum car, and a black guy, art preparator, came to pick me up. He has died since. He was a very nice guy. And he carried a gun! [laughter]

RIKALA:

Oh, dear.

PAL:

And I remember I said, "What the hell is this?" Anyway, then, when I arrived, immediately almost I got a call from Anna Bing Arnold saying that someone will be coming to take me around the city to find me a place to live. Sure enough, I was staying at some hotel, and this young man called and came, and for the next two days he took me around. And I found this place, I think, by the second afternoon, so that was pretty quick.

RIKALA:

That's very fast.

PAL:

He worked for Coldwell Banker, and the Bings, being huge real estate and property owners, which was their main source of wealth, had some interest in Coldwell Banker. That's why this guy—he was a real estate agent. He worked for them. And he came and he took me around and—anyway, he turned out to be a Mormon. So I had no idea. And then maybe that's part of the reason why—

RIKALA:

You were in the area.

PAL:

—he found me an apartment right in the shadow of the Mormon temple. But it was the first time I had ever met a Mormon or even knew what a Mormon was. And he was very instructive, because in those two days I got a lecture about what Mormons are. Anyway, so I found this place the second day, which was fantastic. I felt very confident. But then they said, "You must go and buy a car." You know, I said—and that jolted me, because I didn't own a car in Boston, and I really couldn't—I didn't have enough money. I hadn't saved anything in Boston, almost. I came virtually without a bank account, even. And I said, "But I—." And they said, "There's no way. How will you come to work? There's no way to come to—" Which is true. From there, you know, I wouldn't know how to come to work. So George Kuwayama took me off and took me to Alhambra to a Toyota dealer. Now, I assume he took me to a Toyota dealer simply because he is Japanese, because I would have never thought of buying—I didn't know what car to buy, even. You know, I never even gave it any thought. I didn't discuss it with anyone, I didn't read any consumer reports or anything. So I went off and bought this Toyota immediately. And I tell you, it was unbelievable, because it was a brand-new Toyota; it was a four-door Toyota Corona. And the total price—you won't believe it—was \$2,200.

RIKALA:

Oh. [laughter] And that was when?

PAL:

That was 1970. That's not that far back, you know. But that's what—

RIKALA:

That's incredible.

PAL:

And that car is, I think, over \$12,000 now.

RIKALA:

Yeah? Of course.

PAL:

Yeah, around \$12,000 or so. So \$2,200. So I had to pay 10 percent down, which wasn't much, and got a loan. At least I came away with the car. I had a car without any loan. And then they gave me the papers. I remember we went to Security Pacific Bank and worked out the loan. But what happened, while driving back—George Kuwayama told me how to come back and left me. And as I was coming back, I think it was on [Interstate Highway] 10 [Santa Monica Freeway]—okay, I think it was the 10. I was coming back. Then, you know, when 10 comes near downtown, you have a sign saying—there's a Hollywood Freeway sign, 101, which says "Los Angeles," and 10 says "Santa Monica." And no one had told me that I would have to take the Santa Monica Freeway. So I saw the sign and said, "I have to go to Los Angeles." So I went—

RIKALA:

Off you went! [laughter]

PAL:

You know, and I went over these hills.

RIKALA:

In your new car.

PAL:

And I remember it, I said, "What?" I said, "Now, this is not the route I came by. I didn't go over any mountains." So I still don't know how I figured out and came back and got back onto the Santa Monica Freeway.

RIKALA:

That's great.

PAL:

But can you imagine? That was—

RIKALA:

That was your second day in Los Angeles, eh?

PAL:

Pretty traumatic, isn't it? I mean, yeah, that was my third day, I think.

RIKALA:

Third day.

PAL:

So I went, and I had a car. All of this, it was a different me. It was a totally different attitude, I mean, a dramatic change from my easygoing sort of life in Boston. Here I was, owner of a car. And then, of course, I brought the family home, and they came. And I think—you won't believe—so technically I started, I think, the fourth of January, or second of January. And I think a week after I joined, I was in the museum, and I got a call from Calcutta, from my brother, [Samaraditya Pal] saying that our father [Gopesh Chandra Pal] had died. And, I mean, my God, you know, that was—I said, "And what a time." So I had to go.

RIKALA:

Of course.

PAL:

I mean, there was no way that I—you know, I decided to go. But I couldn't leave my wife and a six-month-old daughter in a strange city. And she didn't have a license. You see, there was no need for her to get a license in Boston. So she didn't know how to drive. And, you know, you can't live in L.A. without driving. So I borrowed whatever it cost, the ticket, money from the museum against my salary, which was a considerable amount—I think over \$2,000—and we all three of us flew off to Calcutta. And, God, it took me well over a year to pay the amount back from my salary to the museum. But they were very understanding. And I didn't get on the county payroll until March,

anyway. Things were being processed. So there was no problem of leave and all that, in terms of going. But that made moving to L.A. difficult. It left a little bit of a bad taste for the first—I said, "My gosh, you think the move here—" I mean, here I had heard all this about the institution, people had discouraged me, and here I move, and you think a bit. I mean, maybe this is not a very auspicious beginning. Your father dies and this. But I settled down. And Donahue, I must say, was very supportive, as were the trustees in general. In fact, I got much more support then than I do now. The trustees, in my opinion, were much better at raising money for acquisitions in the seventies than they have been in the last five to ten years.

RIKALA:

That's interesting. That's something we'll have to get into in more detail as we go along.

PAL:

Discussing my job situation, I remember. telling Ken Donahue—there was a third condition—I should complete the thought.

RIKALA:

Oh, go back to it, can you?

PAL:

There was a third condition, and that was that I wanted very much to teach.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's right. So you had a lecturer position at UCLA.

PAL:

Yeah, and he said, "Well, there will be no difficulty at all, you know. There are many universities around." And here, in fact, there was one possibility, of course. Since Leroy Davidson was chairman of the art history department of UCLA, I thought, "Well, maybe I'll get something there." But Donahue had also arranged for me to meet with the dean [of fine arts] at USC [University of Southern California], who was then a man called Lee [R.] Cheskey [Jr.], an artist. And they had arranged for me to give a lecture there during that interview, when I came for it, the final discussion—not an interview, really.

Which I did. So Dean Cheskey said that maybe they could work something out and that I would hear from him, but I didn't hear from him. I came here and I joined the museum. And then Leroy Davidson did give me—I taught, I think, the spring quarter at UCLA, so that's March, April, May, a course, some course on Indian art. Then during the summer, I think, Lee Cheskey offered me an adjunct lectureship at USC for the following year, '70-71, the academic year. I accepted that, and that helped a lot, also, financially. I could pay my debts and all that, also. So I sort of got started teaching almost immediately.

RIKALA:

What were the differences between the two institutions, UCLA versus USC? Just impressions.

PAL:

Well, I mean, I taught only one quarter at UCLA, but, naturally, the students at UCLA were more serious students of Indian art, whereas no Indian art had been taught at USC at all, and I gave the first course. Sort of first. And besides, art history then at USC was a very, very minor field. There was no Ph.D. program, even. So they were mostly undergraduate students. But there were quite a few students, you know. I remember those classes were quite big at that time. So anyway, this dual career was launched at about the same time, so at least that part is relevant in terms of my moving here.

RIKALA:

One of my curiosities in learning about you and your career has to do with this balancing of the curatorial and the teaching and the writing. I mean, you've been extremely skilled in somehow making sense of all those three and contributing to all those three. How did they fit together to serve you well? Or were there conflicts?

PAL:

Well, I mean, to be honest with you, eight [o'clock] to five [o'clock] is a long day. You have a secretary, so you dictate your letters in the day, say in the morning. and then, true, you have a little bit of some meetings to go to, and you have some telephone calls a day. But then, you tell me, that doesn't take up eight hours of your time. Maximum, all that takes up is two or three hours,

or even four hours, you know. So then you should have at least—and I have never ever, in all my twenty years, had a day—I mean, it's been a rare day when I have not had at least four hours of time available to write or read or whatever, do my own work. And again, you know, if you can write relatively fast, you can write quite a bit. As a matter of fact, I'll tell you, I wrote a whole paper today in the museum. And I had visitors, and I had telephone calls, and today I wrote a whole paper at—I began after dictating the letters at about, oh, nine thirty, and at four thirty, when I left the museum, I had written the last line of a twelve-page article, handwriting, okay? So it can be done. So that's what I do. I mean, I try and find about four hours to do my own work, because I don't see what else—I cannot understand what my fellow curators do, how they spend their whole day. I am amazed. I think a lot of them do much too many phone calls. They chitchat a lot amongst themselves and go around visiting and socializing, social calls, I think. So that's how. Now, teaching, I taught one class a week, and that was after hours, usually after five o'clock. And it was such an elementary course that I taught in the beginning. I used to teach at USC the first couple of years, almost all—no, no, first year only. But then, by the second year, I gave up teaching with slides, there, and I started holding the classes in the museum.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's nice.

PAL:

So I didn't even have to pull out any slides, you see? And the students came, and I never did any study. I never prepared any notes, nothing. I just had the objects there, and the course always was, basically, introducing the collection. So I had no preparation to do for my class. And by that time I knew enough really to be able to teach undergraduate classes. So there you are. Those are the three activities. And I think I have done more shows than any other curator in this museum. Yeah, the number of shows I think is—

RIKALA:

And the catalogs—

PAL:

Yeah, well, that goes without saying, catalogs of the shows, of course. And written a lot of books that have nothing to do with the museum and an enormous number of articles. So I don't know that it's all that—I do some work, of course, on the weekends. First of all, I don't do much socializing. That, from day one, I decided. You know, I'm not going to go to five nights of partying. All right. But we do entertain quite a bit at home, also, and we do go out. It's not that we didn't go out. In those days I used to go out more than I do, and now I have an excuse. I can say, "Well, I've got to eat at regular hours; I've got,, dietary restrictions and all." But we did go out reasonably. And we did entertain, also. But I did work on the weekends. Usually, the whole morning I write, both Saturdays and Sundays. Then I don't do anything in the afternoon. And I try and do all my reading at night after dinner. So that's it. That's my day, basically.

RIKALA:

It's a well-organized day. You're right. I mean, it comes from being organized and clear thinking, as you say.

PAL:

Very methodical. Yeah, yeah.

RIKALA:

Which is a gift. It's a gift, and it's served you well.

1.11. TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side One (October 26, 1989)

RIKALA:

Well, I'd like to start tonight by asking you to describe some of the ambience in Los Angeles when you came here, say its cultural awareness or its cultural maturity, or lack of maturity, since it was a brand-new museum. That in regard to—having listened to the tapes—those three sort of warning messages that you got along the way before you came here, those articles that were very uncomplimentary, in some way you were set up to think one way, perhaps. And I'm wondering how you then saw Los Angeles.

PAL:

Well, I must say that—

RIKALA:

Both the city and the [Los Angeles County] Museum [of Art].

PAL:

I didn't find it as bleak as it was predicted to be. I mean, I don't think Los Angeles will ever be an exciting cultural center like New York or London. I don't think that is Los Angeles's game. But I must say, I was surprised to find the entire downtown performing arts complex [Music Center of Los Angeles County], with the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, with the Ahmanson Theater, the Mark Taper Forum, and with the variety of dance and music and opera that were offered by the city. Also the UCLA programs. Very early after moving here, we went to the Music Center, partly out of curiosity, of course, to see my fellow countryman, Zubin Mehta, conduct the [Los Angeles] Philharmonic [Orchestra]. He was the music director then and was certainly, I'll say, one of the favorites of Los Angelenos. I mean, he had already become an immensely popular figure, at least with the social circle of the people who patronized music. Because not only did I see him, but wherever I went, the first question people would ask me was, "Do you know Zubin Mehta?" So finally I did get to meet him, and I could answer truthfully, "Yes, I do know Zubin Mehta." So, as I said, it wasn't as much of a cultural desert as it was made out to be. But I think it's wrong to expect Los Angeles to be a New York or a London, because it is, after all, in the West, and it is in a state where, the weather being what it is, it is very conducive to an outdoor life. A lot of people moved here, in fact, to get away from the rat race, the social or the cultural, that you can get trapped into in a city like New York, where you are probably on the go all the time. You have to do everything and go out and see this and see that. But what I did not like and I still don't like about Los Angeles is the fact that one has to drive everywhere. There's such an acute absence of any kind of public transportation. That I find really awful. And I don't think it does anyone any good. I mean, not having to walk. And I think it, in a sense, is also probably the root of a crime spree also in our city. I mean, I heard today, for instance, that those freeway crimes [shootings] of a couple of summers ago were perhaps motivated by the monotony or frustration of the gridlock on our freeways. And now, there you are. I mean, there's a case in point. So the art scene, as far as the visual arts go, I found that the museum was quite different from the Boston museum [Museum of Fine Arts], which is what I have to compare with.

First of all, except for the Indian collection, which they had just bought—for which, at the time, there was no space to show it properly in the museum the collection was really very, very poor in the County Museum of Art, except for what was on view there from the Norton Simon collection. You see, 1970, when I came, the Norton Simon collection, let's say a good portion of it, was on permanent view in our museum. I think almost an entire floor was given to the Norton Simon collection. Of course, there was a lot of enthusiasm for the new museum, but again, I don't think the Los Angeles County Museum has much of a chance to be a really great museum. I don't think it will ever catch up with the Boston museum or the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] or the National Gallery [of Art], because, again, there isn't that kind of dedication and that kind of interest. I was surprised by, considering the huge population that it serves—and at that time it was the only museum in town, you might say—how the number of visitors to the museum was extremely low compared to the population of the greater Los Angeles area. It's really not in the tourist circuit. You see, every tourist who goes to Washington [D.C.] or New York or Boston probably visits the museum as part of the tourist cycle. But in Los Angeles, when people come here, they don't come here to go to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. They go to Disneyland, you see? That's the attraction in Los Angeles. That's where they'll keep going. And they go to—what's that?—Universal Studios. I mean, these are the real cultural attractions of Los Angeles.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

And not the Music Center, and not the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. And I think the name itself is a problem, you know.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

I mean, a lot of people don't understand why it should be called the County Museum of Art.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

You know, either some people mistake it for something to do with country, or probably think that it has pigs and cows or something. Who knows? And the name—

RIKALA:

Yeah, the name implies a very hometown kind of—

PAL:

Yeah, you see. Whereas you have something like in Boston—you have a Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, which is just called the Boston museum. Universally known. In New York, you say the Met, you know at once you mean the Metropolitan Museum of Art. There is no New York, you see, thrown in that name. If you did have "New York," it becomes—it gets too identified with the city. But at least people still know something about the city. But I think it's one of the unique county museums that I know, you see.

RIKALA:

That's a good point.

PAL:

Even the [Fine Arts Museums of] San Francisco do not have—although it is also county, or city, rather—it's not called city. I mean, you have the [M. H.] de Young [Memorial] Museum, you know.

RIKALA:

Exactly.

PAL:

So I think the name is a disadvantage that we have.

RIKALA:

That's a good point.

PAL:

I think then, you see, the problem is that Los Angeles—there is no center of Los Angeles, so that where is the museum? It's floating in the middle of nowhere almost. There's no focus point, I mean. It's not a downtown. In any case, Los Angeles downtown, now we have MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art] there, but I think MOCA is not going to be a tremendous success, because, again—so during business hours many people don't have time to go to museums, okay? And the idea that people are going to go to museums during their, lunch hour is, I think, one of the most ridiculous things I've ever heard. Besides, these museums are not free. You have to pay.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

So they'd much rather go and sit in the mall or in a park where they don't have to pay. So, you see, I don't know, by being downtown, during the day you wouldn't get any visitors, because everyone avoids downtown like the plague. And, I mean, can you imagine going to downtown during the weekday? Where would you park? I mean, it's gridlock anyway. And then, again, because the distances are vast, you can't expect someone from Santa Monica by public transportation to go to downtown to visit a museum. And weekends, again. I mean, how many times do we from the Westside go to downtown for anything? You tell me. Hardly. Whereas, you see, in New York, there's a tradition. There's Central Park, there's the Metropolitan, and people walk up and down Fifth Avenue all the way. There's Madison Avenue. And especially Saturday, Sunday, the Metropolitan is just jammed with people. It's just amazing to see how many people go there. And it's sort of within the main center in a sense, although it's not downtown, either. That whole area, I mean, if you think, you can walk to the Frick Collection, the Whitney [Museum of American Art], the Guggenheim [Museum], and the Met. They are all really within a five minutes' or maximum ten minutes', walk from each other. So people can do all four in a day if they want to drop in there. So there's that kind of thing, which, unfortunately, we don't have at all. So that I noticed very quickly the low attendance at the museum, especially during the week. And I'm afraid it's even worse now in terms of—and that, I think, partly, again—

where are they coming from? Most people I meet don't even know where the museum is located, because that area is not a focus of anything. There's nothing else around there, you see. I think, at least if it's—you see, like Westwood has become a center.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

And from that point of view, I think [Armand] Hammer is enormously smart in having acquired that land and building a museum [Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center] there, even though parking may be a problem. But he'll have the—and most of the crowd is on the Westside, the crowd that patronizes this kind of museum and cultural things like that. So that there's no problem in people going even for evening things, perhaps, at Westwood. But just think, in Los Angeles, I mean, you need three—I tell every visitor who comes from outside, I say, "Look, if you want to see every museum in Los Angeles, you need a minimum of three or four days, almost."

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Because it will take you one day to go to the [J. Paul] Getty [Museum] and come back. Which is another one.

RIKALA:

Right. Which you have to reserve in itself.

PAL:

You have to reserve in itself. Another day will be Pasadena and the Norton Simon [Museum of Art]. Then you go to—well, maybe you can take in MOCA, and then go on to Pasadena or something. Then the Los Angeles County Museum, it's yet a third day, almost, you need. Because you need more than an hour just to get from one—

RIKALA:

Yeah, travel time.

PAL:

But no matter where you live. If you stay in a downtown hotel, it will take you an hour to get to the Getty. If you stay on the Westside or Santa Monica, it will take you an hour to get to Pasadena—Norton Simon and the Huntington [Library Art Collections and Botanical Gardens].

RIKALA:

Oh, yeah.

PAL:

You see, occasionally I have had to take guests to the Norton Simon and the Huntington on the same day, and it's a hopeless task. It's really hopeless.

RIKALA:

It's too much.

PAL:

Just too much. It becomes too much. So I think when you talk of what I observed of the cultural scene, to be very honest with you, I mean, it's not very difficult. It's not easy to watch a cultural scene by being in Los Angeles, simply because it's not tightly knit. Everything is so widespread that in almost every community, I think, every sort of area has its—it's becoming like satellite cultural zones—right?—or centers, if you now look. I mean, there's the Westside, UCLA, and Westwood complex; and there's the downtown complex; and there's Pasadena; and, whatever, Hollywood is a totally, almost another alien world.

RIKALA:

[laughter] It certainly is.

PAL:

So it's very interesting that way, that we are not a homogenous city by any means. And I think that the vast sprawl of this area makes it difficult to have its own cultural identity, so to say. I don't know if I have answered what you really had in mind. But again, to go back to my first impression, I think what is

a problem here is that there is an intellectual shallowness. There is no question about it. But that, again, is the type of people who have moved here. And there is a tremendous—it's very difficult. It's not a mixing city. I find, for instance, how movie people have their own life, their own language, which—I have met several movie—one or two who have been collectors, and others, but their whole life is so centered around their movie making. Even if they are collectors, I think it's almost incidental. And the minute they get together, you can't break into their conversation. I think Los Angeles is a very fragmented society that way, in the sense that the doctors tend to stick together and talk their own lingo, again, probably—in fact, every party I've been to where there has been a group of doctors, most of them get together and talk about their medical stuff and that sort of thing. So there is no across the board, and conversations can become rather limited and boring at these parties. Fortunately, I've avoided getting into party circles, so I haven't—I don't go much. I never did. So I don't think I am a great observer of the Los Angeles social scene, either. I used to go quite often to the Music Center, but it's really difficult to know what's going on where. And that's the other thing, you know. I mean, it's so spread out, I suppose, and distances are so vast, and in a sense, even though we live in the city, we all live rather suburban lives, I think, on the whole in Los Angeles.

RIKALA:

Yeah, that's exactly it.

PAL:

Yeah, I mean, when I go to New York on these trips, one is always on the go. There's always something to do. But here, it's such a long drive home, and then you don't want to go out during weekends. I mean, can you imagine those who live in the [San Fernando] Valley? Or even now, getting from downtown to Santa Monica is such a hassle during any rush hour. I can't see anyone wanting to go out anywhere after returning home. And I've not been—I used to be a great movie fan earlier in my life, but somehow, after moving to Los Angeles, I find movies terribly expensive to go to. And especially when we had our child, you see, going to movies can become—I mean, you have to get a babysitter to look after the baby, and so—and then tickets, so you are talking of fifteen dollars to twenty dollars just for two people to go

and see a movie, and somehow that seemed a bit much to me when I moved here first. So I sort of lost the inclination to go and see movies. And to be honest with you, I don't know, I prefer movies of the pre-sixties era. I think I much prefer the fifties and forties, the movies that were made, than what's made now. So I don't really go too much to movies. But then, don't forget, being an Indian, I do have another dimension to my life in that I have to have some contact and relations and association with the Indian community. Also, there are two communities I belong to. There is the Indian nation, sort of you might say, the Indian community. And then, because I am Bengali, there is the Bengali community. You see, the Bengalis are tied by the language they speak, the Bengali language. So there are Bengali functions, you know. Although, I must say I have not been too active in the Indian community, but I do try and participate occasionally in some of their functions or whatever they do. Bengalis, for instance, every year they worship the goddess Durga in autumn with great fanfare. So I participate in that. They bring out a magazine twice a year, sort of, and I write in Bengali for that. I do have Bengali friends with whom I socialize and visit occasionally—dinners, etc. But there is no casual meeting here. I think the biggest contrast between the culture and society I was brought up in in India and the society here—anywhere, whether it's Boston or here—is that in India you constantly met people whether you liked it or not. There was no privacy in your life, just as in your home. You had no privacy. I mean, there were—it was an extended family and friends, you know. There were servants all the time, so there was no question of closing a door anywhere in any room, any time of the day. Similarly, for instance, it's very common in the evening for people to visit with each other in India. And you don't eat dinner till about, oh, nine o'clock, nine-thirty at night. So that between, say, six o'clock and nine o'clock, people are either dropping in or you are dropping in somewhere else or you are meeting on the streets or in the coffee shop. There's constant meeting. You never have an evening to yourself. The same is true also of weekends. You know, Sunday, people are visiting. And here that's unthinkable, unthinkable. And all the Indians have become somewhat like that, too, because here you visit people by making appointments. I mean, only when you call people to dinner or you go out to their house; otherwise you are alone. And you might be alone in the whole world unless the phone rings. I mean, there's no one on the streets outside, and no one's dropping by. You don't hear a knock. I mean, after all, you've

been coming several nights, right? So I think it's a fundamental difference. You become an island unto yourself, and your family becomes your main world, and there's virtually very little relation with your neighbors. You know, you are on hello terms, but you don't sort of socialize with your neighbors here. That's almost a no-no.

RIKALA:

Yeah, almost by definition.

PAL:

Yeah, by definition, you don't socialize with your neighbors. And, as I said, you may drop dead for three days for all anyone cares or will know, even. And that happens here often, you know. When single people who live by themselves, they drop dead—in fact, if you recall, I told you that apart from the cultural thing, why I wanted to marry an Indian girl and get married, I wanted to get married because it's a very lonely existence by yourself in America. I now think that we should have even had another child. I really think that. You know, we had two, and at the time it seemed that there might be a bit of a financial burden, which, true, I'm not sure whether I could have afforded the university education of a third child. My older daughter [Shalmali Pal] goes to UCLA, and even though she lives at home, it will still cost me quite a few thousand dollars. And she went to [University of California] Santa Barbara last year, I mean, last two years, and I think my total annual expenditure was \$12,000 with everything to put her through one year of college. I mean, that's ridiculous! Do you realize that that was my starting salary! That was what I was offered when I joined this museum in 1970. If you recall, I said they offered me \$12,700. That's what I'm now paying for one year's college expenses. So it makes absolutely no sense.

RIKALA:

No. And it's very difficult—you know, I'm sure you pay her tuition, you pay her living, and all these things.

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

And she probably still has to watch her pocket money week to week just to survive, because even though \$12,000 is a huge total, sum—

PAL:

Oh, yeah. Out of that, very little is her pocket money.

RIKALA:

Yeah, exactly.

PAL:

I don't know how much of it is her pocket money.

RIKALA:

It's a very difficult—and I was thinking about that, how quickly things have changed in twenty years.

PAL:

Yeah. So I said, "If they're going to live here, they need close relatives to look after them." Otherwise, if you have one child here, I mean, my God, I think it's like banishing the child, you know. I think if I was an only child—

RIKALA:

I'm an only child.

PAL:

Well, there you are. Do you realize you don't have a brother or a sister to fall back on for anything once your parents die? Who do you go to for counsel? You know, you need people.

RIKALA:

Yeah, exactly.

PAL:

Believe me, you do. So I sometimes think that—but the economic system doesn't allow you to, because to put three children—even if they go to state universities like this, even if it takes \$12,000 a year, that's \$48,000 for four years. That's what? That's \$150,000 for three children.

RIKALA:

That's an extraordinary amount of money.

PAL:

You know—. [laughter]

RIKALA:

I mean, and you're very fortunate to be in a position to be able to put your daughters through.

PAL:

Yeah. Yeah, but I don't know that I could have done it for three children. I don't know how I'm going to do it for the second one. It's going to be quite expensive by that time. Anyway, the loneliness of life here that way, I think, is quite—and I felt that very quickly in Boston, very quickly, which is one reason why I married. And the fact that I have a family, I feel at least I have some people around me. Because, as I said, friendship here is a very fragile thing. You can't form a deep attachment or friendship, I think, in America with Americans. And that's my feeling, because each of you leave home too early. You are not brought up in a joint family system or extended system. You leave, and you all become loners. You are all loners in society, and you live by yourselves most of the time, so that you not only shut others out, you don't allow others to come too close to you. If it's a male-female, it sort of can quickly become sexual connotations, and then problems arise. And if it's male, it's very rare to have male-male friends. I mean, it may lead to—unless you are homosexuals or something. I mean, I'm surprised by the number of people I meet that really don't have the kind of close friendships that we used to have in India and still have. I still stay in close touch with friends. So that's something that I find is a very strong cultural difference. It has affected the Indians here, too. I mean, the Indian friends I have, we are so formal with one another in terms of, as I said, getting together. There's no dropping in, there's no informal, spontaneous meetings, which is one of the real joys of the Indian social system, I think. Fine, you meet today, and if you don't meet tomorrow, it doesn't matter. You know, you don't have to call someone and say, "Well, come to dinner," and then people come. In India, all you give them—there's no drink even served, because in most houses there's no alcohol. So what you

serve is tea, a cup of tea. That's it. People will come in the evenings, and they'll have a cup of tea, and they'll chat for a couple of hours. Or, as I said, you'll go to someone else's house, your friend's house. And every evening it's like that, almost.

RIKALA:

That's very different.

PAL:

I don't think I ever—but one thing has been great for me, because it has given me all this time.

RIKALA:

Yeah, to work.

PAL:

Yes, you see. There you are. I have plenty of time to sit and work and read, which I think I could never do in India, never. I wouldn't have the chance. I remember when I lived in Benares for a year, that year was just a—oh, I mean, it was, I think—I'm sorry to go back, but it was a very revealing year of my life. Remember, I told you I went back to Calcutta, couldn't get a job, and finally landed this job in Benares. And Benares is like a midwestern town compared to a metropolitan area like L.A. or New York, you know. I mean, it's a very provincial sort of place. And everything about it is different from the way I was brought up. It's not a big city. It's a very much more orthodox city. It's the great bastion of Hindu religion. And it's much more of a vegetarian city. And I mean, everything that I wasn't, I had to face, bang. I was in Cambridge for three years, so you can imagine what a tremendous, sophisticated, culturally active life I led for three years, going to King's College to hear concerts, Bach's B-minor mass, and going off to see Sir [Laurence] Olivier in London, or Chekov's plays or Shakespeare and this and that. From there I come to this little village, almost, in the middle of midwest India, you might say. [laughter] You know, middle India. I stayed in an apartment. I took an apartment, and to give you an idea of—not wishing to stay alone, I shared the apartment with two other male research assistants in the American Academy [in Benares] where I worked. They were both my ex-students. So the three of us sort of

had a bachelor establishment. And we messed together, as it's said—the word is mess, M-E-S-S, and that's an Indian army term in English, when three or four bachelors get together—and we had a common servant, a cook, and all that. But here, can you imagine two men shacking up together? I mean, my God, there—I mean, there's only one way you do that. I mean, have you ever heard of two men friends, say, like that sharing an apartment? Women do it.

RIKALA:

Women do more.

PAL:

You know, much more—

RIKALA:

Due to economics, more.

PAL:

Well, it was partly economics and partly, also, I just—the thought of living alone there in Benares was just mind-boggling. But what I meant to say was that within a week—I mean, I shouldn't have bothered, because within a week the whole neighborhood, I thought, was constantly in our apartment.

[laughter]

RIKALA:

[laughter] That's great.

PAL:

And, I mean, the neighbors' children. These people, "Hello," you know, dropping in, chatting. My landlord's wife, the landlord was in Bombay shooting films or something, so she had nothing to do, so she used to come over and chat with us three men. So it was like that, you know. And I remember one could hardly read or write there because of this. So I suppose one doesn't think> but that's probably one reason why my Indian colleagues don't get the time to write. I can see why, because you're constantly with people, whereas here you are by yourself. You are your family.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

And even in the family I notice, you see, you've probably seen elsewhere, in other American homes, also, how each child has his own room, and they sort of go into the room. Now increasingly everyone has his own TV, even.

RIKALA:

Telephone.

PAL:

They have their telephone.

RIKALA:

Car. [laughter]

PAL:

So even if my daughters are with me, in a sense they are not with me; they are just physically in the house. But already each is in her own world, more or less. You see, that starts very early here.

RIKALA:

Yeah, that's true. It must foster a certain amount of shyness, too. Listening to you describe all this—

PAL:

Whereas we were all the time with people, with adults, and we were never told to leave the room ever, or sent to bed. And I told you we had to serve guests at home.

RIKALA:

A much more communicative life-style, too. There probably is a lot more fluency in expressiveness in daily life, because that, too, when you think about what's lacking in L.A. is this kind of—

PAL:

Oh, L.A. particularly. I mean, ugh!

RIKALA:

[laughter] Compared to England, too.

PAL:

I think probably in New York people are together and—

RIKALA:

Where people are at least waving their arms around and shouting at each other.

PAL:

Yeah, shouting at each other. But here you are indifferent. The indifference is enormous. You couldn't care less.

RIKALA:

It's cool. Everybody's cool.

PAL:

Yeah, and look how quiet. Look at my house! I mean, it's right in the middle of the city and you'd think we're sitting in the country somewhere. Not a car hooting, nothing. No car moves.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Yeah, it's a very different way of living.

RIKALA:

Well, at times you must be very homesick for the other, for the Indian lifestyle.

PAL:

No, funnily—as I said, yes, I do miss the informality of life and meeting people more often, but I have sort of—I have become used to living this way now, and I have my books, so it's not as bad. I don't think I miss India much, really. I

don't even miss India much. As opposed to, I think, my compatriots, I have never had any problem of social adjustment in any way, partly because of, probably, the fact that I have lived away from home from very early childhood, going to a boarding school and living with non-Bengalis and all sorts of people in the boarding school. Then same with college. I was away for three years in Delhi, away from home, and then in Cambridge, so that right from the start—and also, my job, in a sense, threw me into what I would call the upper-middle-class society of Los Angeles, including the great and the mighty and the wealthy.

RIKALA:

Yeah, but even starting at Cambridge, I mean, there you were, up—

PAL:

But Cambridge was more intellectual, you see, whereas here it's both social as well as financial.

RIKALA:

That's true. So it is a class—

PAL:

The main problem that I know, which I think is interesting to go on record, because I don't know how many people of ethnic origins or of Indian origins this program records, but I think there's a lot of sort of—I mean, a lot of Indians who come here, although they are one of the highest-paid groups, apparently, of—in fact, people of Indian origins are the highest-paid professional groups in this country, per capita. They are more than any other comparable group.

RIKALA:

That's interesting.

PAL:

Yeah. But they can't assimilate properly in the American society, and they have very few American friends. A lot of them are in commercial firms where there's a much greater rivalry, you see, and these ethnic differences bring out the worst type of competition and then racial feeling or hatred. I mean, I know

Indians who have no American friends, have hardly socialized with any American families, have not been invited to their homes for dinner or anything. It's rough on them. That's very rough, I think, to come to this country like this and be ostracized and have to live—I think I could see that happening in the times when you were importing the coolies from China or India, you know. I mean, you know the word coolie? Laborers, who were all uneducated. But these are engineers and doctors and highly qualified professional people. So a lot of Indians tend to mix with Indians, as far as I know. And I haven't had to do that. So I told you that I do—I mean, it's not that I avoid the Indian community, but it adds to my social and cultural life, the fact that—but I have been extremely fortunate and have come to know people from all walks of life.

1.12. TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side Two (October 26, 1989)

RIKALA:

Let's further discuss the museum's relationship with [Nasli M.] Heeramaneck and his collections, go back to that. Because the collections were purchased through the 1970s, I would like that part of LACMA's history to be better documented. So in '69 they began to acquire the collection that was Indian, Tibetan, and Nepalese art.

PAL:

Well, yes, that's the first in-depth collection in any area that the museum had acquired, which was the art of India, Nepal, and Tibet. I think the museum had less than or not much more than a dozen objects from this area before it acquired the Heeramaneck collection.

RIKALA:

And then it was 600 pieces, that first group?

PAL:

No, no. The first group was 235, I think.

RIKALA:

Oh, 235. I don't remember where I got—

PAL:

Yeah, I think about that, 235.

RIKALA:

Six hundred maybe is the next one.

PAL:

And as I said, it was a very, very giant step, really, for the fledgling museum, which, by the way, will celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary next year.

RIKALA:

Oh!

PAL:

Anyway, originally, the founding fathers of the museum, I don't know if they really had any particular plan in mind as to what they wanted this museum to be. And I don't know that they even do now, the board does now. Norton Simon was a very important factor, of course, because his collection filled an enormous area of the Ahmanson [Gallery] building, which was designed as the building for the permanent collection, so-called. But it had very little permanent collection. I mean, the contemporary art was utterly undistinguished even in 1970 when I came. As I said, at least one floor of the museum was filled with loans from Norton Simon. And Norton Simon was then a trustee. So the museum had not been buying much in European art, which is a great shame and a great pity. The biggest mistake they made was that they put all their eggs in one basket, and that basket, which is Norton Simon, proved of course to be a very—what?—to continue the metaphor, I suppose, a very—

RIKALA:

Fragile basket. [laughter]

PAL:

—fragile basket, or a basket with a big hole in it. And that was most unfortunate. Otherwise, they were opportunistic. I think I have never understood why—well, the fact is that the man who built the museum, really,

and its first director, Richard [F.] Brown, was fired I think within a year of the opening of the new museum. And Richard Brown, I think, saw the museum as a general museum, not to have any in-depth collection in any particular field, but to have sort of masterpieces. I think this was the main thrust of the museum. At least Richard Brown's philosophy was that. It was to be a strong museum for exhibitions. So, as you know, the original building complex consisted of three buildings, one a big theater. Although I must say, it's a bit surprising to see such a big theater in a museum being part of the original building scheme. Then the second building was for special exhibitions, which part of it is still for special exhibitions. And the Ahmanson building was for, as you know, the permanent collection. Now, from the beginning there was trouble. See, when they were raising money for the buildings, they were selling the buildings for a certain amount of money, the names of the buildings. So [Howard] Ahmanson came around, and they named the building of the permanent collection as the Ahmanson building, and that annoyed Norton Simon at the time. Ahmanson was a collector of sorts and unfortunately had collected utter rubbish all his life, most of which had to be disposed of. There were forgeries or second- or third-rate things, I mean. But he gave the largest amount of money, so this building was named after him. And this annoyed Norton Simon, who had pledged \$1 million cash to the museum in 1965, and he withdrew his pledge and ultimately gave a token quarter of a million, for which, at the time, they named the plaza the Norton Simon Plaza. So, you see, even from day one, the museum lost, in a sense, the empathy, you might say, of one of its main inspiring forces, which was Norton Simon. If you go to the museum, you'll see that this museum was conceived by Norton Simon and Rick Brown, the first director. But anyway, the collection was still there in 1970 when I came, and Norton Simon was still on the board. But that's about all there was in the museum. I don't think there was a single other—I mean, the Asian collection, outside of the Heeramaneck collection, was nothing. There was a good textile and costume collection and I believe a fairly good prints and drawings department. They had been quite good. Otherwise there was nothing distinguished of—even those collections, you know, were not as great as any of the eastern organizations, but at least respectable collections. And that's it. That was all. So it was even all the more surprising, I suppose, for everyone concerned that they suddenly sort of went bonkers and acquired the Heeramaneck collection and became a very—at

least in one area, but unfortunately it's not an area that many people are interested in. So the thrust of the museum, unfortunately—and here is where I think the museum is wrong, in a sense, you see—is very Eurocentric, and it has remained Eurocentric. It was in those days Eurocentric. If they had been bolder, like they were with the Indian collection, and bought wisely, or spent some money buying Chinese or Japanese or pre-Columbian or African and other arts, I think they could have had a very great—they could have built up a very decent general collection. But even in European they didn't buy anything, simply because they were expecting the Norton Simon collections to stay there. But there were some very strange purchases that they did make. For instance, they bought—I mean, the Egyptian stuff was a joke. They had some decent sculptures given by [William Randolph] Hearst—you see, the Hearst collection was one of the few collections that the museum had gotten. The Hearst collection contained quite a lot of classical material that's good and that's on view now. But when I moved here, the classical stuff was all, I think, on loan. Was the [J. Paul] Getty collection here then already?

RIKALA:

I think so.

PAL:

I think so. In the old—yeah, that's right. The Getty was already there in the Getty house, just the small house. And the classical stuff, some of it was on loan there. The rest of it was just in storage. I don't remember seeing much of the Egyptian around, or whatever there was. Now, these are a lot of areas they could have built strongly even then. But again, there was no real policy. I mean, this one purchase was entirely serendipitous, I think. You know, they just bought it. Otherwise, as I said, we hardly ever bought any Chinese or Japanese material. I think the biggest—the only thing we had was an assurance from the Ahmanson Foundation that they would support us in buying European pictures. And we still have that commitment. They do give us, you know, maybe as much as \$2 to \$3 or \$4 million a year. So that's our only endowment for acquisition. That's our only money for acquisition which—and this is—I'm talking in the last twenty years. They have built buildings. You see, this is, again, I think, typically Los Angeles, that people will come forward and give you money for a building to be named after them.

They want a museum, but they don't buy good art. And they still don't, I'm afraid. I mean, except for the Ahmanson Foundation money, which is earmarked entirely for European painting, I don't think the rest of all the other departments combined spend, even today, a million dollars. Which is peanuts, as you know. I mean, peanuts! [laughter] You couldn't get even contemporary art, except second-rate contemporary art, for that kind of money. And this was the case even then. I mean, there was very little money. The only funds we had for buying that were substantial were what Anna Bing Arnold, whom I mentioned before, gave for non-European art as well as for objects, particularly. She liked objects. She didn't care much for painting. And I think she also saw that—yes, but unfortunately now, for three years, Anna Bing, you know, is ill and has retired completely and this and that. So there's no Anna Bing Arnold, no new angel in our midst or in the museum, so our funding situation is precarious, in my opinion, for art. So I must say I have this basically against the trustees, even, of the museum, that they somehow seem incapable of raising money. They don't have the desire. They don't contribute enough themselves. We have had to depend a lot on what we can scrounge from others. And of course, I must tell you that the Los Angeles collectors have let us down. I think Los Angeles has possibly the most egocentric collectors of art, a bunch of egomaniacs, the worst bunch of egomaniacs that any city has ever had, I think. You see, you have no idea how people fight to get a foot into the Met to give them collections, or money, etc., to buy art. But no. I mean, every collector who has come in association with us we've lost. Every collector. Well, look at Norton Simon. When he left the museum, he went and he built his own museum in Pasadena. Of course, there are no other big collectors of old masters in Los Angeles. We are supposed to get Ed [Edward W.] Carter's collection of Dutch art, I think, after his widow [Hannah Locke Carter] dies, his wife dies, assuming that he will die before Mrs. Carter. Who knows what will happen by that time? Otherwise, the only other collector—there's no other old master collector in Los Angeles. That's it. I mean, Ed Carter is the only—you see, there are no collectors. So that way it's a very—I mean, even places like Detroit and Cleveland and Philadelphia and Kansas City and, of course, Chicago, all these places—even San Francisco has had more collectors, I think, of European art than Los Angeles. And yet it amazes me that the trustees and the management of Los Angeles County Museum—here we are, about as far removed from Europe as possible, physically, and towards

the end of the twentieth century, and we are still—the museum still considers buying European art its prime responsibility. And in an age when, I mean, prices have become astronomical. But even there, it's very curious. This city—I'm surprised. If we have an impressionists show, you won't be able to get tickets. But every other show of even European art is a flop by comparison. Hardly anyone will come.

RIKALA:

That's very odd.

PAL:

You know, we've had some great shows. But the attendance is very modest. Really, the people here are not interested in art—art per se. Although there are a lot of collectors now of contemporary art, of course, but even contemporary shows—I mean, except something like [David] Hockney, which has become the fad—the attendance, general attendance, even for shows—of course, non-Western art, it's even worse. I mean, hardly anyone comes to shows. Right now you've got an exquisite show of Persian and Iranian art called *Timur [the Princely Vision]*, the art of fifteenth-century Persia. And things have been brought from all over the world, places where people, Los Angelenos, will never be able to go and see. I mean, it's sad to see it virtually, during the weekdays, almost empty. At times I've gone in, several times, and not a soul to be seen. But you shove twenty impressionists pictures, even if they're third-rate impressionists—but if their names are there, a van Gogh or a Gauguin, I mean, you won't be able to print enough tickets fast enough to get them in. I have been to the National Gallery, for instance, and to the Met, and no matter what show they have, it's crowded. It's crowded. The National Gallery, any European show—I mean, I was recently there. They had a Frans Hals show. You know, I'm sure three, four hundred thousand people will go through it. If that show came here, I'd be surprised if fifty thousand people would go through it.

RIKALA:

Really?

PAL:

That's the difference. That's how bad—

RIKALA:

That's really extraordinary.

PAL:

And it hasn't improved in my—if anything, it has gotten worse, because more people used to come in in 1970, when I came here to the museum. I believe a million people a year used to go through the museum then, which was quite a lot. It was free, number one. You see, there was no—and I think just for special exhibitions there was a charge of a dollar, but the museum otherwise was free. Schoolchildren were brought, bused in. The schoolchildren dropped off significantly after Proposition] 13. Significantly. I mean, I think it is one-tenth of the children who come now, are brought in, because—

RIKALA:

That's a shame.

PAL:

Because they say—now, you see, it's very bad for the future of the museum and art scene in Los Angeles, in my opinion. Because unless they're brought in from that age, you never develop an interest in visiting the museum.

RIKALA:

Exactly.

PAL:

It's very hard in adult life.

RIKALA:

Exactly. Because you develop a fear of the institution.

PAL:

That's right, yeah. Well, there is that here, too. You see, it is—

RIKALA:

That's what I was wondering.

PAL:

And many, many people consider this the stronghold of the Beverly Hills types. I've even heard it being said that it's not just—Beverly Hills Jews are the patrons of the museum. And anyway, it is an enclave of the rich, upper class and rich, and so it keeps—I mean, there are huge segments of people of this, city who have never been to the museum once and will never go. And we make no effort to bring them in, also, unfortunately. I mean, now we are proud of the fact that we have ninety thousand members, but again, if these ninety thousand members came and their families came once a year to the museum, do you realize what the attendance would be? If they came to every special show, every show, we'd have at least three hundred thousand attendance. And there are only three special shows. And if this *Timur* has fifty thousand, now, that shows you that of even—

RIKALA:

Less than half.

PAL:

—the ninety, less than half the members have seen that show.

RIKALA:

That's interesting.

PAL:

And the thing is that there doesn't seem to be any concern. I mean, our membership and development, of course, ultimately, their thing is to show the bottom line, and they are always happy, as you know. I don't think they ultimately—there's no long-term thing about—and I'm very concerned about the fact that schoolchildren don't come now who used to come before. They used to be brought. To give you an example, my older daughter was admitted to UES, University Elementary School of UCLA, you see, which is supposed to be one of the best private schools in this country. And they are the children of the elite, really, of the society and intellectual this and that, okay? She was there throughout elementary school. That's—what—six years?

RIKALA:

Yeah, kindergarten through sixth grade.

PAL:

Yeah. Not once in those six years was a field trip taken to the museum, art museum.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's interesting. Well, so that's a sign of the times.

PAL:

That had nothing to do with the busing. It's not the L.A. [Los Angeles Unified] School [District] system, okay? I've not heard of any of the private schools here—I don't know how many of them make trips, take their classes. I can tell you another school: my same daughter went to Notre Dame [High School] here for another six years, and not once did they make a trip to the museum.

RIKALA:

That's interesting.

PAL:

My second daughter [Lopamudra Pal], who was in Overland [Avenue] Elementary School here, which is part of the public school system and one of the better elementary schools, I am told, where my wife volunteers and teaches the kids ceramics and helps in the library—I have gone and spoken to that school about the museum. As far as I know, never in her six years was there a single trip where any of the class was taken to the L.A. County Museum of Art.

RIKALA:

So that's interesting. When I was growing up—I'm ten years older than your oldest daughter and I lived south of San Francisco, about twenty miles south of San Francisco—we went three times a year to the museum.

PAL:

Ah, oh.

RIKALA:

Because I remember going to Golden Gate Park, because once would be to the [California Academy of Sciences' Steinhart] Aquarium, once would be to the [Avery] Brundage [Collection, Asian Art Museum], and then once would be to go to the Japanese Tea Garden. And it even became so predictable that, as kids, we already had our favorite route to go. But we went three times a year. So that's the difference of having grown up in the sixties, maybe, or growing up in the seventies.

PAL:

Yeah. And the Bay Area is, I think—

RIKALA:

There's maybe a different—but I went to just a very ordinary public school. But we were—

PAL:

No, there is no—and then, of course—but anyway—

RIKALA:

That's extraordinary.

PAL:

As I said, at least in the seventies, a lot of schoolchildren used to be bused into the museum-. Because every day we used to complain that the buses were parked along Ogden [Drive], along the museum's parking lot. We used to complain because we could not see traffic as we came out of our parking lot.

RIKALA:

Pulled out of the driveway.

PAL:

Pulled out of the driveway. Now, in the last ten years I haven't complained once.

RIKALA:

And you can find parking on Ogden.

PAL:

And you can find parking. Before you couldn't find parking because they were all taken up by school buses. Now, it's such a shortsighted thing, you know. I remember when Proposition 13 came. I mean, we'll come back to this, but, you know, for a short while, during Proposition 13 and for almost a year—no, for six months thereafter. Proposition 13 happened in June, yeah, and I was the acting director of the museum then. And when I heard about this, that schools couldn't afford busing, you know, in the school system, I strongly urged our board members, who are the civic and financial leaders of this city—I mean, on our board there's Franklin [D.] Murphy and Ed Carter and Armand Hammer. You name it, they're all there. And chairman of the Security Pacific Bank and you know, this and that, every one of them. I said, "The private sector should do something, should give money to the school system to bus these children." I even said—I think ARCO [Atlantic Richfield Company]'s chairman, [Robert O.] Anderson, after whom the new building is named, was also on our board. I said maybe ARCO would give gas to the schools to bring the buses. Because it's worth it. It's worth it. This is the building of the future. Because if they don't identify with this as their museum—because they're the ones who are going to grow up one day and be the bread earners, and they'll do nothing for the museum. They won't come to the museum, they won't give. And believe me, it's already twenty years, and that's what's happening.

RIKALA:

Oh, yeah, and as I mentioned, this kind of shyness towards institutions. I mean, people are so reticent.

PAL:

That's right. You have to take them, because it's any—if a kid has four dollars to spend, he's not going to say, "Well, I'm going to go to the museum and spend it." He's going to go and see a movie.

RIKALA:

He needs another three dollars to get into the movie. [laughter]

PAL:

Yeah, whatever, three dollars, or maybe—

RIKALA:

No, seven. I think it's seven.

PAL:

Now it's seven, but I'm saying, say, student rate and whatever it is, you know, they are not—so that's unfortunate. There, you might say, is a general lack of interest in culture in Los Angeles, cultural things. I think it's true, because I see in terms of, if my wife didn't volunteer virtually and—they pay her something like seventy-five dollars a week from the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] fund or something. I mean, imagine. It's an insult in terms of the time and energy and money she spends, because ceramics—she has to use material and all that. So she is virtually doing it voluntarily. Because the children are interested, and the school system says they can't afford an art teacher. Now, that's preposterous to me. I mean, the amount of money the Los Angeles system is getting both from the state and now from the lottery, and these schools can't afford—? You know, there's very—I don't know what the Getty is doing about it now with their billion dollars, which—you know, so much of it goes into parties. Which is true also of LACMA now, you know. We give lavish parties. A lot of people call us the Los Angeles country club. [laughter] It's astonishing what the priorities are, and I think it's very sad. I mean, it's very sad. Anyway, I don't know. We got sidetracked. We were talking about the early growth of the—yeah, about LACMA and the thing.

RIKALA:

Right, the Heeramanek. Part B of that question about the Heeramanek collection coming to LACMA is, were you aware, or had you heard, of any objections to the collection coming to LACMA? In that very short period of time when it became a big—

PAL:

No. No, I did not. I must tell you, I did not. I did hear a rumor. I mean, I had been told by people—and this may have been malicious—that the only person who objected to our buying the collection was Norton Simon. Did you hear that? Is that why you asked?

RIKALA:

Just curious.

PAL:

Why did you—? Where did you hear that?

RIKALA:

Well, that I got out of the [Kenneth] Donahue oral history.

PAL:

Ah, that's very interesting. Well. Oh, you have that advantage of having—now, I didn't—I should have gone and heard the Donahue oral history.

RIKALA:

Right. Intertextuality here, right. I mean, reading—

PAL:

Well, that would be interesting. Do you think it would be interesting for me to look at that?

RIKALA:

Yeah. I'll bring it next time.

PAL:

Would you? It would be interesting for me to read and see how how I differ. Well, I'll tell you, I confronted Norton Simon with this question, and he denied it outright. He said no, he never did. He had no objections to it at all. In fact, he thinks it's the best thing the museum has ever done. That's what he told me now. It's possible that he—don't forget, I think I confronted him with this question only two years ago, a year and a half ago, and he's seventy-five and not at all well, so he may have forgotten that at the time he objected. Although I don't know why—I mean, I'd like—did Donahue say why he objected?

RIKALA:

I don't think so.

PAL:

Okay.

RIKALA:

I'll bring you the volume.

PAL:

Yeah. Well, I mean, we'll go back to Simon later on, but otherwise I don't know of anyone—my experience of that board is that no one really objects to anything there. I mean, first of all, I think 90 percent of the board are members of the board just for the sake of being members. I don't think they have any interest, per se, deep interest anywhere in the museum, so that it would make no difference if the core people who run the board—and, say, at that time it was people like [Sidney F.] Brody and Carter and [Richard E.] Sherwood. If these people want a particular thing, well, it will simply be rubber-stamped by the rest of the board.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

That's how boards operate, I suppose. Most boards probably operate that way.

RIKALA:

Well, that's getting on to this second question, and that is, who are the key players on the board of trustees? Could you tell me a little bit about Brody? I don't know much about him.

PAL:

Well, Sid Brody was a stockbroker, a Beverly Hills stockbroker, and his wife, Frances [Lasker] Brody, is one of the two daughters of Mary Lasker of Chicago. Very wealthy, well-known family. So she is the wealthy one, as far as I know. Sid Brody was a very important social figure, certainly. He was spending weekends always, let's say, with Walter [H.] Annenberg in Palm Springs. When I moved here, I would say the core was Sid Brody, Franklin Murphy, Ed Carter.

These were the three that made all the decisions. And if they agreed to do something, then it was done, and that's it. I mean, I don't think anyone else on that board mattered. I think they remained the key figures for the next, oh—that's right. Ed Carter was president briefly, and then Sidney Brody became—yeah, '65, he became president. And then his term ended in '69. And Franklin Murphy became president in '69. I joined in '70. Sid Brody—no, Franklin Murphy—oh, '66 to '70 was Sid Brody, I think. No, it has to be an odd year. Sorry, sorry. Proposition 13 was '79, wasn't it?

RIKALA:

I think so. Either '78 or '79, yeah.

PAL:

Yeah, '79. Okay, so "Mia" [Camilla Chandler] Frost began in '79. So '75 was Richard Sherwood. 'Seventy-one was Franklin Murphy. So Sid Brody was the president when I came, yeah. Okay, that fits. That's all right. So then Franklin Murphy became president. Now, when Dick Sherwood took over in '75, I would still say that—yes, right through Mia Frost—yes, that is, until '73, Franklin Murphy remained right through it all the most influential figure. Because Sid Brody sort of had—when did he die? He died. Anyway, I think by the time—yeah, Sid Brody was still there. He and Carter were still very, very important figures. I think right through Mia Frost's tenure they remained rather important. Of all the presidents we've had, in my opinion, the only person who had international, or certainly national, recognition—and that way deserved to be president—was, in my opinion, Franklin Murphy. I think there we have been singularly unfortunate. I may have to seal all this, ultimately, for ten years at least, you know. I think we have been—you see, like, I'll give you an example. When I saw Norton Simon a year and a half ago, after many years—I'll tell you later about that—he asked me, "Who's your president now?" And I said, "Dan [Daniel N.] Belin." And he said, "Who?" I said, "Dan Belin." He said, "Who is he?" You see? Which is interesting in a sense. I'll tell you in a minute why. It reminds me of something else. Now, you'd think that Norton Simon would know who Dan Belin was.

RIKALA:

Who's who, yeah.

PAL:

Now, if Norton Simon, who's in the museum world, local museum world, doesn't know who Dan Belin is, then how is Joe—? You know, how are people going to know? And I think it's important for museums to have very powerful and recognizable personalities as the president of their board, because he has to have enormous social and political clout. He has to be able to call on the phone, and if he says, "Jack, I need a million dollars to buy this," well, the check has to come. Well, this does not happen on our board. I think the only person who probably had that kind of clout to some extent, among all the presidents that I have seen, was Franklin Murphy. In many ways—and I'm sure that this is in Franklin Murphy's oral history, because we heard that Franklin Murphy was made the president, in fact, on condition that—or he was given to understand, or he believed that—he would bring the Norton Simon collection home to roost. Of course, he didn't succeed. But anyway, so unfortunately, when I think of Douglas Dillon, say, the president of the Met, or the National Gallery has [Andrew] Mellon behind it, I mean—you know, names. Instant recognition all over. Or the Museum of Modern Art had Mrs. John D. Rockefeller. Now, when Mrs. Rockefeller picks up a phone and calls someone and says, "Joe, send me money," or "Do this or do that," they're going to do it. But, unfortunately, that's not the case here. So I think that's an unfortunate part. We just don't seem to have the kind of personality with the kind of social, financial clout, even in local society, leave alone nationally. That's an unfortunate aspect. But the shots have always been called by, as I said, a sort of a core group. And at that time, this was the group. Even when Sherwood became the president, and after that, Camilla Frost, who was—well, Ed Carter, you know who he is. He was the CEO [chief executive officer] of Carter Hawley Hale [Stores, Inc.], which was then the Broadway [department stores], so he was a mover and shaker in Los Angeles, at least in the Los Angeles financial world. Of course, you know, a lot of—don't forget, when the museum was founded in 1965 we were still part of the old political system. This is very important to bear in mind. These men had a lot of clout, also, with the [Los Angeles County Board of] Supervisors, who were political animals dependent on these people for their election finances.

RIKALA:

For votes, yeah.

PAL:

See? No, money—money.

RIKALA:

Money, too.

PAL:

So our board had a lot of—you know, but all that changed, partly because of [the] Watergate [scandal]. So by the time [Richard M.] Nixon resigned, which was '70—when was that? Yeah, '68 he became president, then '72—yeah, '74. Yeah, Watergate, you see. The whole electional thing had changed, so there was less—I mean, you couldn't buy a supervisor.

1.13. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side One (October 26, 1989)

RIKALA:

You said the political arena seemed to have changed in the seventies.

PAL:

Well, so that changed, I think, and that has affected the support we [the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)] get from the county [of Los Angeles]. I think part of why the money has diminished, county support, financial support, is because [Los Angeles County Board of] Supervisors don't need that kind of—first of all, you can't contribute money in that way anymore. Political contributions are limited, as you know. And I think the supervisory election system is not dependent entirely on a few financial wizards of downtown Los Angeles. So that has changed. Also, again, I think we don't have—this is why I was saying that it's very important to have men of clout, real clout, because supervisors also have to fear and respect you. Then they will do something for you. But if they see that, well, these people are just "Joe Blow," you know—I mean, like so—Mrs. Frost, for instance, when she became president, Camilla ["Mia" Chandler] Frost, or Dick [Richard E.] Sherwood—do these names, for instance, mean nothing to you?

RIKALA:

No.

PAL:

Now, there you are, you see. And yet, I'll bet you almost anyone in New York [City] would know names like [Robert] Lehman or [Charles and Jayne B.] Wrightsman or Douglas Dillon, who was secretary of the U.S. treasury and all that, and people like that, you see. As I said in the case of the National Gallery [of Art], I mean, people like [Andrew] Mellon have recognizable names, and if Mellon picks up the phone, even cabinet ministers in Washington [D.C.] probably will give him the time of day. So that's important. I think that has affected the museum's ability to draw the kind of political advantages that one can. Now, Dick Sherwood is a lawyer for O'Melveny and Myers, and even now that he's even a more senior lawyer, I mean, except—again, it's not a name that is bandied about in television and newspapers all over the place, and he was even younger in 1975 when he became the president of the board. He was much younger and much less well known then. He was succeeded by Mia Frost, who was, except to a certain social circle—no one knew her. I don't think I had ever met her, really, before she became the president of the board. I don't even recall—and I remember when I went in 1975—yeah, just about the time she became the president, I went to Fort Worth [Texas, Kimbell Art Museum] to give a lecture, and for the first time I met Rick [Richard F.] Brown, who was already a legend in the museum here. And Rick sort of very casually said, "And how is Camilla?" And then I realized he was referring to Mia Frost. You see, Mia Frost was a docent when Rick Brown was the director of the museum.

RIKALA:

Oh, my.

PAL:

So you can imagine, I mean, his whole tone was like, "Good Lord." It's like saying it's my little daughter who has grown up and become, someone, you know. It was that kind of attitude. I don't know exactly what he said, and he told me to give her my greetings. And I worked with her. She was president and I was the director, acting director, for almost a year. And she became president in '78 then, or June, July—no, no. No. Now, the other thing, I think, in terms of the power business, when I came in 1970, it occurred to me that [Kenneth] Donahue was already very, very weak. I mean, his position was very

weak. He was considered a poor administrator, and the trustees were running the place. That's a fact. I mean, there was a big vacuum there, and they moved in. This was well known. As a matter of fact, ever since firing Rick Brown, our board had a terrible reputation, which I think they haven't yet quite lived down. Although Rick Brown's style may have been—I don't know. I mean, I have heard, obviously, rather poor things about Rick Brown from some of the trustees, that he was also a bad administrator and someone—he never answered his letters, you know. But maybe he didn't—I don't know. But the staff adored him. I tell you, I don't think there was a single person—as a matter of fact, you know that when Rick Brown was fired and Donahue was made acting director, all the senior curators went to Donahue and asked him to resign, that he should, and they all should resign as a protest against Rick Brown's firing. You see, he was immensely popular with the staff. So also in Fort Worth the staff adored him.

RIKALA:

That's interesting.

PAL:

And he has built a more distinguished museum than LACMA in less time, you see. I mean, after all, look at the building he has designed there with Kahn, Louis Kahn, a marvelous museum building. And look at the building we got from [William L.] Pereira because of [Howard] Ahmanson interfering and demanding Pereira as the architect, because Pereira designed all Ahmanson bank buildings, you see. This, I think, was the connection.

RIKALA:

Well, I heard, too, that [Edward W.] Carter was a connection.

PAL:

Yeah, Carter also. Carter and Ahmanson, I think, both liked Pereira. Yeah, that's right. Pereira was also Carter's favorite.

RIKALA:

And because Pereira at the same time got the Irvine land, the Irvine Ranch, the new UC [University of California, Irvine] school.

PAL:

Oh, yes, and Carter was the [University of California] regent. Oh, yes. And this was the—

RIKALA:

And he was like a secret member or something? I think even I heard something about him being a S 6 C IT 61 member between the two—

PAL:

Oh, yes, yes. There have been lots of accusations in there, but that—why, you wouldn't know, but I have heard that. And [Norton] Simon definitely was going to take Carter to court as a fellow regent in the early seventies over the whole Irvine scandal. There was some scandal there, obviously. Because it was something about Carter, as a regent, knew where the new university was going to be built and then had apparently an interest in the company or something, and all this—

RIKALA:

And Simon was opposed to the land deal, I think, is what it was.

PAL:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Now, there's a saying in Bengali that if you are a ginger merchant, why are you concerned about the ship that's carting the ginger? Because ginger is shipped in small quantities, so how does it matter whether it's a big three thousand tonner? So it's like that. I'm a little fry in a museum, a curator. I mean, I have no idea. But what I can tell you is that, unfortunately, that hostility didn't help. I think the fact that Carter and Simon didn't like one another did not help and may have contributed to Simon's decision to move. I mean, I certainly know that [Armand] Hammer's coming into the scene, I think, was the last straw that broke the camel's back, and Simon knew, "I'd better go," because he couldn't stand Hammer.

RIKALA:

Really?

PAL:

And rightly so, I think, I mean he was right. I mean, at least Simon is a man of great taste. He's built one of the great private collections of all times that can stand comparison with any private collection, whether Lehman or [Hans Heinrich] Thyssen[-Bornemisza] or any of those collections. But Hammer's is a third-rate collection, you know, so I think Simon was right in that. But we'll talk of that later. To go back to the matter of the power brokers in the museum. So these were the men that I mentioned. And again, Mia Frost's sole—I mean, she was really—she began as a docent and a spectacular rise to—I don't know if in any other institution a docent has ever risen to be a president.

RIKALA:

Yeah, how can that happen? [laughter]

PAL:

Don't ask me, but that's what happened. [laughter] And it did happen, and she was the daughter of Dorothy [Buffum] Chandler.

RIKALA:

Oh, okay. Oh, that's the—. [laughter] There's the connection.

PAL:

That was the important connection, you see. But the point is that—Now, Dorothy Chandler would have been a great president, at least from the point of view of being a great fund-raiser. I mean, now, there is a name that everyone knew, sort of, and even Otis Chandler in that way. But, I mean, Mia is a darling lady. She's wonderful as a person and all that, but she was not really, I think, quite prepared. She also came into one of the worst times in the history of that museum. And then she had these so-called patriarchal men to deal with, you know: Carter and [Franklin D.] Murphy and Sherwood and [Sidney F.] Brody. She was the first and only woman president. But I think at least a lot of people knew her, and I think she had some clout, being the daughter of Dorothy Chandler. Of course, she's immensely rich herself. But after her I think it's been a disaster, in my opinion. I mean, both the persons who have become president should—I mean, in maybe another ten, twenty years, but—Julian Ganz [Jr.] was the next president, and I don't think that he

has—he's a collector of American art and has formed a fairly good collection, but that's not enough grounds to become president of an institution like that. I mean, nothing, no social standing, no financial standing, really, and no political standing. So what's the point? Four years, and then Dan [Daniel N.] Belin. Now, as you say—Norton Simon asked, "Who's Dan Belin?" You don't know who Dan Belin is. Well, Dan Belin is the lawyer to the Ahmanson Foundation.

RIKALA:

So they're well represented.

PAL:

Yeah. In fact, Julian Ganz—well, then "Rusty" [Earl A.] Powell [III] was hired.

RIKALA:

In 1980?

PAL:

Nineteen eighty. And thereafter, there is no power group of the board anymore. In my opinion, the board as a board—Los Angeles County Museum board of trustees—for the last eight, nine years, is a body that might as well not be there. It has never been a board that has in any way exerted itself. It's been more or less a moribund board, where the most—there are forty or forty-five members, of whom maybe twenty, thirty come to full board meetings. Otherwise, the monthly meetings are run by an executive committee, and in that committee the dominant factors always have been Carter, Brody, Murphy. And at least through the Donahue years, because Donahue had absolutely—I mean, Donahue was a lackey to the board, in my opinion. He didn't function as a proper director should. But I don't think the board wanted him, really, to function as a director, also. At that time, certainly, the board was—and what has happened since then, there is no such group. I mean, Franklin Murphy, and—I think they are all tired, and they've been in the institution a long time, so they have backed out. Brody died. Carter is extremely ill, I mean, has had bypass [surgery] and this and that, and he's been nonfunctional again for several years now. The first couple of years after Rusty Powell became director, I think he was still active, but since then

he hasn't been active. Franklin Murphy thereafter also became a board member of the [J. Paul] Getty [Museum], you see, right just about then. And then he became chairman—or he was already a board member of the National Gallery [of Art] and he became a chairman of the National Gallery. So he's on three museum boards, still. In my opinion, that's very peculiar. I mean, I don't see how that's not considered any conflict of interest of any kind, and yet if I for a fee advised three museums, I would probably be accused of doing something immoral. Anyway, that's neither here nor there. So he is hardly seen around anymore, compared to his presence which was very strong ten years ago. So whoever the president is—and Julian Ganz and Rusty Powell teamed up, became like a team, and I think ran the thing. And then Brody died. So these three went off. Sherwood and Mia Frost, again, they are individuals and are not part of any group. So they sort of faded out. I mean, Mia Frost had had her four years, and she's got other things to do, in life, and she's not all for that. I mean, she's active and all that, but, I mean, there's no power group anymore. Now, Belin and Rusty Powell, as far as I know, are not as friendly as Powell and Ganz. were. Okay, from what I can gather. But Powell's big supporter is—what's his name? Oh, God. I'll have to come back to it. See, I should have had a trustee list, if you had told me we were going to talk about it, because I can't—now, you see, up to 1970, well, apart from the fact—even without my one year as being acting director, I did know most trustees quite well by name. Now I don't even know what half the trustees look like, leave alone knowing their names. I think there is no cohesion in that board anymore. Really, as I say, I don't think as a board it matters anymore. Virtually, Rusty and whoever he is friendly with and Belin—

RIKALA:

Let's go back for a minute and talk a little bit more about Donahue. Perhaps you could say one or two things just to sum up what his accomplishments were in addition—you know, obviously, the [Nasli M.] Heeramanek collection and that shift, but you're saying that he was already fairly weak in terms of the board.

PAL:

Oh, that's it. Donahue's only achievement is getting the Heeramanek collection. I can't think of a single thing that he did, really. I mean, he didn't in

any way heal the wound left by Rick Brown's departure. As I said, Donahue had absolutely no guts to stand up to any of the trustees. He was, to some trustees—you know, Ed Carter and all—like their personal curator, you know. That's how they used to—he had no respect from the staff, no general respect. But the trustees also were—what happened, they had gotten such a bad reputation, having fired Rick Brown, that they didn't have the guts to fire Donahue again within such a short time. But that's what they should have done. You know, they should take their job seriously if they felt he was weak and this and that. But they didn't, I suppose, want to face the public music again, and they went about in a very devious way to get rid of him. But more on that later. But otherwise, what did he do? I have to tell you honestly that, acquisition-wise, the museum didn't grow in any—you might say that we totally alienated Simon. Donahue was a big factor, I think, in bringing Hammer into the museum, which I think was a great mistake, because, as has been proved, QED, Hammer used the museum to his benefit for whatever years he wanted and then—

RIKALA:

Moved on.

PAL:

Moved on. So if now Hammer's coming in would—if we had at least gotten whatever this Hammer collection is into the museum, then I think Donahue could have taken some of the credit for it. But, unfortunately, nothing was done in contemporary art in the Donahue years. The European pictures that we bought are not bad. I mean, that was his field. We didn't even have a curator of European art, you know. He was the de facto curator.

RIKALA:

Oh, he did that, too.

PAL:

But they're not very distinguished pictures. I mean, they're all right. So even in his field, he didn't—in American art, he couldn't care less, and didn't. American art is still—in fact, I sometimes wonder why we even have an American art department. The decorative arts was all packed and stored away

in his years when I came. Sure, there was no decorative arts department. There was a curator, but they couldn't fire him, so he stayed on. But there was no active decorative arts department. So there you are. I mean, and nothing happened in China, Japan, Korea. But he did—oh, no, I apologize.

RIKALA:

There were a few—

PAL:

There were two other Heeramaneck collections, but which—

RIKALA:

The Islamic collection.

PAL:

Yeah, but both of which—I think even he admits in the Islamic catalog, if you read the preface, that—I don't think the museum would have gotten those two collections if I hadn't, been involved in getting both.

RIKALA:

Exactly. And then the donor, Joan—

PAL:

Joan Palevsky was Dick Sherwood's contribution to the museum.

RIKALA:

I see. Well, I remember that.

PAL:

He brought her, you see, because I think he is a personal friend of Joan's, and also—you know, I'm not surprised. That's something else. What happened, I think, when we—well, I think we should talk about the Islamic collection when we talk about collections and all that. But I would say that, yes, the basic three collections that Donahue, under his directorship, acquired were all three Heeramaneck collections: the Indian first, and then the Islamic, and then finally the ancient collection. But I'd like to keep those for another session, the

stories of why I went into expanding, although they are so far removed from my field. I think all that should make a—

RIKALA:

A complete story.

PAL:

And how all of it came about, I think, is very interesting in terms of how the collections are formed. But you might say that Donahue—after all, I think one of the smart moves he made was to acquire me, also. [laughter]

RIKALA:

Exactly. I guess that's what I was—

PAL:

If I may say so.

RIKALA:

No, that's what I was hoping.

PAL:

That's an achievement. I mean, you should have said it, really, but you see.

RIKALA:

I just ask the questions.

PAL:

Let's see. What else? You see, some curators he was very, very unkind to. I mean, like Ebria Feinblatt, who was the very eminent curator of prints and drawings, and with some support from Donahue at that time, those years, in the decade of the seventies, she could have built that department into one of the greatest in the country. But Donahue gave her no support because she was also one of the curators who I think had demanded his resignation, sort of, when Rick Brown was fired. George Kuwayama was another one who never received any support—I mean, very little support from Donahue. I think he had also gone up and—and three left. You know, three curators immediately

left, and Donahue said, "No, I'm not going to resign," and probably told them, "so you guys had better—." So Henry [T.] Hopkins left.

RIKALA:

Oh, I see.

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

And that's when he went to San Francisco [Museum of Modern Art], then?

PAL:

No, no, no.

RIKALA:

No?

PAL:

That was much later. He went off somewhere on the East Coast, I think.

RIKALA:

In between.

PAL:

Yeah, Henry Hopkins and Jim [James] Elliott. I mean, Jim Elliott went to [University Art Museum, University of California] Berkeley.

RIKALA:

I think so.

PAL:

And Henry Hopkins went to the East Coast and then, I think, came back to San Francisco. And William Osmun was the third fellow, who stayed on and was there when I came, but he had no function in the museum. He couldn't fire him, and Bill wouldn't go until—because we had really civil servant status and "You just can't fire us just because I go and say you should resign." So Bill

stayed on for several years but in a very ignominious way. And Donahue really treated him very badly, very badly, also. I mean, he misjudged their—after all, you know, he should have taken advantage of—the fact that they "were loyal to Rick Brown didn't mean that they were disloyal to him, per se, but they were just very hurt by the way Rick Brown was dismissed. I think he could have used it in a positive way to—and frankly, I don't think Donahue ever deserved to be director, but I have a very strong opinion about most directors. I don't know that most directors who become directors deserve to be, directors or have the qualifications. I think they become almost by default. Although I have to tell you, I think one of the worst jobs that anyone can ever get is that of the director of an American art museum. Awful-job. Awful job. I can discuss that with you sometime, if you like, but—

RIKALA:

Well, no, continue. Why?

PAL:

I think, you know—

RIKALA:

What's your opinion on that?

PAL:

Well, I think you expect the dead job definition. You should be a genius, okay, but very few geniuses are going to come and get kicked around by trustees and by donors and by collectors and by staff and put on—today you are a fund-raiser. Tomorrow you have to be a diplomat. The third day you have to be everything.

RIKALA:

To all people.

PAL:

To all people. It's just impossible. Much more difficult than a university president, I think.

RIKALA:

Yeah, because a university can act as an insular—you know it can always turn inside itself and say, "Well, we're an institution that—."

PAL:

Well, I don't know, but I mean, it's not such a—A museum director has much more public visibility, also, than a university—don't forget how many times today—in fact, I don't even know who's the chancellor of UCLA. [Charles E.] Young. Young, yeah. But how many times do you see Young's name in the papers? But Rusty Powell is almost every other day, sort of, you know. See?

RIKALA:

That's true. That's true.

PAL:

Isn't that something?. But Donahue was never in the paper, so Rusty Powell has—

RIKALA:

He has a high profile.

PAL:

A high profile. And that's been his directorial style. That is the strength of his position. Not because of other qualities that we expect in a director. [laughter]

RIKALA:

You mean that genius word that came up earlier? [laughter]

PAL:

Certainly not genius, believe me. I mean, no. I don't think even he thinks he's a genius. I mean, I wouldn't say that. So it's a very, very difficult and thankless job, I think. And I think Donahue's treatment showed it. I mean, despite all his obsequious loyalty to a board, it was amazing what that board did to him. The way he was sort of removed was a—and I think that soured me completely, so even—I saw a glimpse of that kind of behavior they did with me. So I quickly decided, even though I was offered the job permanently, I said no. I turned it down. But I'll give all that later on.

RIKALA:

Tell me about the story surrounding the promise of the Armand Hammer collection, since we're talking about the—

PAL:

Well, I don't know. I mean, Armand Hammer was brought into the board at the worst time. He had a show of his collection in '71 or so, somewhere in there, '71, I think, in Washington [D.C.], and it was panned. It was panned badly. I mean, a disaster. He wanted respectability, so this museum went and made him a trustee. And what had happened was that the present [Frances and Armand] Hammer Building of the museum, which was known as Litton Hall, because the money had been pledged by Litton [Industries]—no, no. Not the present Litton company. It was another one, a banker, a bank. And, I mean, he couldn't come up with his money, pledge. His business failed, and Litton corporation, Litton Industries or whatever—so they decided to sell the building to Armand Hammer for \$3 million. He paid, I think, \$1 million in cash and \$1 million in kind. He gave some paintings. He never gave the third million, which I found out only by accident when I was an acting director. Anyway, he was made a board member, and he—Donahue said that he pledged—and I think he retained John Walker, who had retired as the director of the National Gallery, as his consultant to buy pictures with John Walker's help. So he said he'll get rid of all the rubbish he has and really improve the collection and all this. So the romance began with Armand Hammer, and we'd do a show in another two or three years, and so he bought some other paintings and some better paintings. So we did an Armand Hammer show. And then, of course, Armand Hammer virtually—what happened is that he decided after doing the first show here at LACMA that he wanted this show to travel all the time, to all over the world, you see. Whenever he made a deal with a country, he lent them his exhibition. So this is the crassest use of art for commercial purposes that I've ever seen in my life. That way Armand Hammer made history, I mean, in terms of the way he used his collection for almost fifteen years. And it didn't matter whether our conservation agreed or not and whether it was safe for them. He was a one-man law unto himself. Whatever he said went—he did, you see. And, of course, what happened is that the minute they decided to make Armand Hammer the trustee, that was it. Norton Simon was out. I mean, as it is, Norton Simon had been unhappy at the

museum, and I really think that they—if they were willing to eat crow for Armand Hammer, then they should have done much more for Norton Simon, because it was a better collection. Okay, my point is that—and I'm quoting Sid Brody now at a board meeting. He said, "I know we are prostitutes, but, hell, at least let us ask the proper price or get the proper price. Let's not give ourselves away cheaply." And I think that's what the board has done consistently, and that's why they have so little to show for it. Why is it that we have not a single local collector or collection associated with the museum? Look at contemporary art. Not one collection. They went and built this building, the [Robert O.] Anderson Building. They have hocked themselves. They have raised \$45 million in bonds to build this building, the Anderson Building—this huge monster which is sitting there and I think has been a disastrous influence in the museum in many ways—ostensibly because they were going to get all these private contemporary collections, okay? Including two of them sitting on our board, Fred [Frederick] Weisman and Nathan Smooke. When?

RIKALA:

Yeah, it will be interesting.

PAL:

Nothing.

RIKALA:

Weisman shows his stuff privately, doesn't he?

PAL:

Sure, he goes and shows here something, there something, somethings all over. I don't know what he's going to do. But anyway, we were told that, yes, the Hammer collection, sure, this and that, and all that. I had my doubts always, because I said, "This man [Hammer] doesn't like art. He wants to use art, first of all, while he is alive, for his own business interests, commercial purposes. And he is exactly the sort of man who will probably want to use it for his own mausoleum, you see." Because, particularly when he bought some—Well, you see, several times—I mean, I'll show you what I thought Armand Hammer's—. [tape recorder off] He hardly ever came to the board

meetings. Once I remember he came. It's that picture he bought from [J. William] Middendorf [II], the *Juno*, Rembrandt's *Juno*. He bought that. Now, he didn't really buy it, but his gallery bought it, you see. Now, this is where I think the day he bought [M.] Knoedler gallery—you see, Simon bought out the estate of [Joseph] Duveen. He didn't buy Duveen's and run it as a dealer. But Armand Hammer was a dealer, in a sense. He had made money, don't forget, by bringing Russian art out of Russia and all that. And his brother was a dealer, okay?

RIKALA:

Victor [Hammer].

PAL:

Victor was a dealer. So the museum should have stayed at arm's length from Armand Hammer, right? I mean, it's amazing how they expect us who are paid a pittance to be purer than Caesar's wife, and then these guys are all doing hanky-panky all the time. Look at it. Then Armand Hammer becomes the owner of Knoedler. He bought the Knoedler gallery in New York. And then Knoedler buys this picture from Middendorf, and then Armand Hammer carries it under his arm straight into the board meeting and offers it to the museum on behalf of Knoedler. [laughter] And then they kept him as a trustee. I mean, they didn't even throw him out there and then, bag and baggage.

RIKALA:

Yeah, that's quite extraordinary.

PAL:

That's it. That's the kind of—now, I said, this man has no scruples, no scruples at all. He'll do anything to get what he wants. I'll give you another example. I had a very funny experience. While he [Hammer] was angling to be a trustee, or he had just been appointed to the board and the museum, Donahue was trying to sell us the idea of his show, and all the negotiation was going on. I was offered a group of bronzes which were very spectacular for a quarter of a million dollars or \$240,000. And although Armand Hammer never bought any Indian art, Donahue decided to ask him for the money, saying that, "This is a

good time, since he wants something from us." So why not? We'll ask him. So Ken Donahue and Rex [Rexford] Stead, who was then the deputy director, and I went to Armand Hammer's house in Holmby Park in the morning, I remember, Saturday morning, to talk to him. And he was quite gracious and offered us coffee and lovely dates. Wonderful dates. I'll never forget them. They were delicious. He said a friend of his owns a date farm and so had sent him—you know, they were very good dates. So we had dates and coffee. And he agreed to buy the bronzes. The bronzes were with [J. J.] Klejman in New York, a dealer. And he said either he will send Victor to take a look at them, okay—

1.14. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side Two (October 26, 1989)

PAL:

He sent Victor. Victor would have to go to New York and see them. So I said, "Well, fine." I mean, I couldn't understand why Victor. Victor doesn't know a damned thing about Indian art. Anyway, so Victor went and saw them. Then the bronzes came out here, and he said he'd buy them. All right? And we agreed to do a monograph. So then three months later I went to India. Oh, he [Hammer] paid \$100,000, and he said he would give the rest of the money on like January, next January 1. Now, I thought he gave the money to the museum, okay? Because we—yeah, that's right. Or maybe he paid directly to—oh, I think, no, he didn't give the money—he must have given the check directly to Klejman. So I went to India to do research on the bronzes. And that's when I came back, and by that time I figured out that the bronzes were not genuine. So I called Klejman up, and in less than twenty-four hours he put the check for \$100,000 in the mail. You see? Then Donahue and I told Armand Hammer, and he came to the museum. And he was, again, being a businessman; he got his money back in less than three months. You see, he was very shrewd. And I mean, of course, I was nervous as hell. I thought, you know, "My God, what a blunder I've made, and I'll probably be fired." But Donahue was also very, very understanding about it, and, I'll not forget, he said, "Oh, don't worry. No harm done. I mean, you'll never be a good curator unless you make, mistakes." Armand Hammer took the check and said to me, "Well, I need the money now, so I'll take the check back, but maybe in the future I'll do something." So he took the check back. I gave him the check, and

he took it back. And then sometime later Klejman told me how he had to pay \$40,000 commission to Victor.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

Now, this is what Klejman told me, believe me, and that he never got that money back. Even though he had returned the full amount, Victor never gave him the money back. And, of course, he didn't get the money back from India, from the guy from whom he had bought the bronzes. He had paid \$100,000, and \$40,000 to Victor, so \$140,000.

RIKALA:

That's a big loss.

PAL:

Now, that's why Hammer had sent Victor to Klejman. Not to see the bronze—

RIKALA:

Just to make money.

PAL:

—but to make money, see, so that at least \$40,000 came back, went to his brother. Not bad.

RIKALA:

Yeah. Yeah, well, he sounds like something else, all right.

PAL:

Oh, yes. Yeah.

1.15. TAPE NUMBER: IX, Side One (October 30, 1989)

RIKALA:

To proceed from last week, I am not aware of what the circumstances were which led to [Richard F.] Brown being fired from the [Los Angeles County]

Museum [of Art (LACMA)]. I know that was before you were there, but I wonder if you can just recount briefly what you learned about that. What were the circumstances?

PAL:

You know, that's something almost like the *Rashomon* story. You know the Japanese film *Rashomon*? Well, it's a film where there's one particular incident, and seven people describe that incident, or their perceptions of that incident, and so you have seven different versions, [laughter] And then how do you figure out which is the truth? I think Rick Brown's firing is something similar. But I'm sure it had something to do with [Howard] Ahmanson, who was—he certainly had contributed a lot of money to the museum and was a very influential trustee. And I think there were—there was disagreement over displaying the Ahmanson material in the Ahmanson Gallery. Although I have been told also by other trustees that Rick Brown was not very efficient in terms of administration and did not respond to letters and things like that. But to be very honest, I don't see that he was that inept administratively. After all, he's the one who did conceive and supervise the building of the museum. And also, it was under his administration that the museum moved, with vast collections, all the way from the Natural History Museum [of Los Angeles County] downtown to the new buildings. So I'm not sure that that holds water. I think that the clash of personalities, or disagreement between Rick Brown and Ahmanson, Howard Ahmanson, must have been the major contributory factor to his being fired. But it was really before my time, so anything I say would be hearsay, anyway, so I think it's better for me to emphasize things that I know more closely.

RIKALA:

Of course.

PAL:

Which is that, as I, I think, did discuss briefly the other day, I'm not entirely sure whether the museum, either the board or [Kenneth] Donahue, who replaced Rick Brown, really had a philosophy in terms of collecting or building up the museum. They were certainly very, very dependent on—I think they were over-dependent on Norton Simon, and the possibility of the Norton

Simon collection coming to the museum, which I think made them neglect building up the European painting collection at a time when they could have bought great masterpieces for very little money. What I had heard is that whenever a great European painting was offered to the museum, they immediately turned to Norton Simon and let him consider it, and probably eight out of ten times Norton Simon probably bought the painting.

RIKALA:

Bought it for himself.

PAL:

Yeah, but he was adding to his collection. They should have bought the other two [out of ten] at least. I think if they had steadily bought at that time—and the Ahmanson Foundation really in the beginning, after—after Howard Ahmanson died, I think it was some time before the Ahmanson Foundation came forward and let us know that they would like to build up the Ahmanson European painting collection. I think by that time Ahmanson's own collection had been fairly discredited. He had bought a lot of bad pictures and a lot of fakes and all that. So the Ahmanson Foundation wanted to make amends and naturally thought of building up the collection and acquiring masterpieces so that this stigma would be eliminated. At least, that's the only part, I think, where there was a set policy determined by the Ahmanson Foundation money that, yes, we will buy one or two major pictures a year. Unfortunately, the amount isn't enough now for even one quarter of a major picture, probably.

RIKALA:

That's too bad.

PAL:

But at that time, in the early seventies, the amount was quite substantial, and you could pick up a Hals for \$1 million or a Rembrandt for \$2 or \$2.5, or prices around there. So one could. And we would get, as I said, one or two paintings a year through them. Otherwise, you see, we had no acquisition fund. We were dependent entirely upon the generosity of one or two individuals to buy objects on a regular basis and on funds raised by the various councils of the museum. Some departments had councils. We really didn't even pursue an

active policy with—for instance, we were told that, well, we shouldn't get into classical, because the [J. Paul] Getty [Museum] collected classical, which was fine. But then Getty collects European also, so why are we messing around with European art? Right? Okay, but that, somehow—you see, that's what I'm saying. These were all sort of half-chewed policies, as far as I can see. They didn't think, sit down and think. Well, Getty doesn't—I mean, we didn't go in vigorously for pre-Columbian art either at the time. Certainly we did nothing with African art. We still haven't done anything with African art. We didn't do anything, almost, that I know of, in terms of Far Eastern art, also: Chinese and Japanese and Korean. I shouldn't really use the word Far Eastern. I think Far Eastern is a word that should be, sort of—it's high time it should be dropped from the vocabulary. I mean, it makes no sense to sit in Los Angeles—

RIKALA:

No, it doesn't.

PAL:

And refer to China, Japan, and Korea as the Far East.

RIKALA:

No, it's very confusing.

PAL:

In fact, it's west from here, if you really think about it. Anyway, so this is again a legacy of a Europeanism that still persists. Anyway, we bought the Indian [Nasli M. Heeramaneck] collection, the museum bought the Indian collection in 1969, which was I think sort of almost an accident, it seems to me. I mean, I sometimes still wonder what the conjunctions of the stars were. We've talked of the personalities, but even how the whole thing really came about remains somewhat of a mystery to me. But they did buy it. We had the chance of acquiring the [David] Packard collection of Japanese art—that is, the museum had around that time also—and nothing was done. Absolutely nothing was done. Ultimately, some ten or twelve years later—and we didn't acquire it. I mean, I think things didn't work out in terms of Mr. Packard and the museum and trustees and what he wanted and what they wanted. Ten or twelve years later, the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] picked up the Packard collection for

\$11 million. And I think the Packard collection was offered to us for a couple of million in the late sixties. So it's not as if we went out of our way to get large collections. I mean, the only large collection they have acquired in one stroke was the Heeramaneck Indian collection. So then, Hammer came on the scene, I think sometime in '72 or '73. Otherwise, the only other collection that I know we talked about, or Donahue recommended that we take, was the Phil [Phillip] Berg collection. And that was, again, a very, very convoluted, complicated affair into which we should never have gone, in my opinion. It was a most undistinguished collection. It may have made sense if the Phil Berg collection had come to us, say, the first year the museum opened, when it didn't have much Indian art. It's a hodgepodge collection. I mean, there is a catalog—you can go and see it—called *Man Came This Way*. But Phil Berg was a very, very difficult man. He was, I think, an agent for Clark Gable and some of these real big, big Hollywood names and had made his fortune, which turned out to be not such a big fortune, anyway. He used to buy really second-class objects from all cultures. But rarely were they—I mean, I would say of the entire whatever, two hundred or three hundred objects, maybe 10 percent really were first-rate objects. He came to us, and I remember Ken Donahue presenting it to us, and we said that we really didn't think this collection made much sense for the museum to take. Certainly, the Indian material was of no consequence by then, because we already had bought the Heeramaneck collection. But Donahue sort of said, "Well, first of all, the collection will be left to us in his will. Upon his death we'll get the collection." Or both. Upon the death of both he and his wife. And that there will be something like \$750,000 given to us which will be put into an endowment, sort of, for purchases. Well, we sort of thought—at that time, \$750,000, in the early seventies, wasn't inconsiderable, although it never occurred to us that by the time he died that money might be worth very little. It was finally accepted. There was an exhibition of his collection, and there was this catalog, okay, which Phil Berg wrote. Now, Phil Berg was the man who, if you recall, I said came to me in Boston and said awful things about the trustees here. Now, I learned that he was elected to the board before I came—in 1968 or something, or '69, maybe—and that he had at his first board meeting that he attended sort of thumped the table and said something and made some points, and there was disagreement. And he even, I gather, ended up his speech or accusations against the trustees by saying, "So if you don't do this,

then I am resigning." And apparently the president of the board, who was then presiding over the meeting, Sidney [F.] Brody, immediately said, "Mr. Berg, your resignation is accepted." And Berg turned red and left the meeting, and that was it.

RIKALA:

Very short tenure.

PAL:

Yes, he had a very short tenure. Anyway, so there had been past incidents with this man, and [because of] the fact that he had a very mediocre collection, I don't think the museum should have gotten involved with him at all. I mean, it just makes no sense to me. Well, they did. Then I'll tell you what happened. When I was acting director of the museum, Phil Berg demanded from the museum, I think—yeah, he said he would leave his house to the museum, and he wanted \$750,000 cash from the museum. And I remember the deputy director then, who was Mort [Morton J.] Golden—I mean, we thought this was outrageous. And I again told the board, you know, "Cut him off. Let him take his collection." What had happened is that in the meantime—you see how these things change. One should never go by people's promises and things. His wife had died, okay? His wife had died, and 50 percent of the collection automatically became ours as part of her will. But since he was alive, he still owned the other 50 percent. Now, it seemed that he really didn't have any cash. Oh, then he courted and got married to a young lady called Joan Hartman. And Phil Berg was already, I think, about eighty or something, and Joan Hartman, I think, was in her thirties or something. They got married. And Phil Berg needed money to leave to her, you see, to make some settlement on her, I suppose. And he sort of held his 50 percent of the collection over us and said that he would also throw in his house, which would be worth—and they also thought, "Well, it's a house in Bel Air, and, oh, blah, blah, it's a \$3 million house, and he wants \$750,000, and this is a great investment. Why not give it to him?" In the meantime—you won't believe this—but while all this was going on here, one day we got a call saying that Mr.—I don't know who called to—well, he had, Phil Berg had called Ed [Edward W.] Carter and I don't know who else, maybe Franklin [D.] Murphy and Dick [Richard E.] Sherwood, or their office, something, and he had

threatened them. And then we got a call in the museum saying that Phil Berg was going to kill them, that he had left his house with a gun.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

Yes! And I distinctly remember Mort Golden calling the [Los Angeles County] Sheriff's Department, and we had the whole place guarded and all this for a day or two until he was finally found. I don't know where he had gone, but he had gone out with his gun, anyway. To go back to an incident with Phil Berg that I will never forget, I think 1972 was the year when we were doing this show of his at the museum, *Man Came This Way*. And he virtually, along with our deputy director, Rexford Stead, was in charge of the installation. In other words, Phil Berg would come every day and supervise the installation, etc., something that Donahue should have never allowed.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

I mean, you know. But that sort of thing happened constantly and I'm afraid still happens. And that's how they treated Armand Hammer, also, and they got into problems. So I think one day he [Berg] came at ten o'clock, and there were no preparators working on his show or something, and he got very mad. We were having a director's meeting. The director and all the curators, we were seated in the boardroom having a meeting, and suddenly this door flew open, and in walked Phil Berg. He was absolutely beet red in the face, and he was burning up with rage. He came up to Donahue and said, "You son of a bitch! I'm twenty years older than you, but I'm going to thrash you!" And he started rolling his sleeves, you see. And Donahue stood up and said, "Mr. Berg, control yourself. Come into my office and we'll discuss it." And Phil Berg went on and on and using abusive language and this and that. No, this was '71, I think. Not even '72, you know. I had just been here about a year or so, a little over a year. I remember another friend of mine, Charlie [Charles W.] Millard [III], had come from Cambridge [Massachusetts], Harvard [University], and

also had joined the museum a few months after I did as the curator of European art. Well, it was a very strange appointment, because he was not curator of all of European art, but he was, for some very odd reason, appointed curator of nineteenth-century European art, and we had nothing in nineteenth-century European art. We didn't even have a collector in the offing, I mean, except Norton Simon. But those pictures were not ours. There you are, you see. There's another sort of instance of serendipitous activity, because there were no—we were not told why this man—so anyway, he was there. And both of us, I mean, at least we came sort of from the more genteel world of Boston, and this kind of frontier activity was totally unexpected and uncivil. We were so shocked. I remember both of us went off to our offices. Well, the meeting was pandemonium, and it was abandoned. Donahue went out, followed by Phil Berg, and then they went into his office and, I suppose, had it out there. Anyway, I don't think they came to blows, but you could hear their arguments for quite some time. We went to our respective offices and both of us wrote letters expressing our shock and dismay at this display by a collector, whatever the cause. You see now, you don't want to have anything to do with men like that.

RIKALA:

No, of course not.

PAL:

I mean, I would understand if he had a collection worthy of acquiring. Then, fine. I mean, I could stomach that from a Norton Simon. But from Phil Berg? Hell, you know? To hell with him. So, to continue then, in 1979, when Phil Berg threatened to shoot people and all that, this board went along with that proposal, and they gave him the cash. They gave him the cash from our surplus fund, reserve fund, which was the most idiotic thing. I mean, it was really throwing good money after bad money, because that collection is so poor—which now we have, by the way. He has died, so the collection is ours. And we all can't wait to deaccession 90 percent of it, 90 percent of not the whole collection, of the genuine part of the collection, [laughter] You know, a good deal has proved to be wrong. And the house—I know they sat for months and months, years. They couldn't sell the house. They have sold the house finally, but we don't know what's happened to the—I think the money

went into the new building campaign. So either Donahue was lying when he persuaded us to agree to accept the collection and said that this money would be for acquisition—and I must say that "Rusty" [Earl A.] Powell [III] also didn't insist on the money going in for acquisition. So the money is lost. Money has been gobbled up in the building. And I don't think a gallery even is named after Phil Berg. And here we are, sitting with this basically third-rate collection. The whole thing makes absolutely no sense, either from a public or a private point of view.

RIKALA:

No, it's just a loss.

PAL:

And I'm sure if a Franklin Murphy or an Ed Carter, if they were buying or making acquisitions for their businesses, if they acted like this they would be thrown out on their ears. But this was all done. I have never been able to understand the logic of accepting or having anything to do with Phil Berg. So there you are. So we got a collection that's worth nothing. Otherwise, as far as I know, in those years we didn't really have many prospects until then the next collector that arrived on our horizon again came with areas of art in which the museum knew nothing. No one in the museum—oh, I must tell you that when I came to the museum there was a department of decorative arts with Bill [William] Jones, a guy called Bill Jones as the curator. But there were no decorative arts on display at all. The entire decorative arts had been either locked up, partially in storages in the museum, and the rest sent off to a warehouse where some things ultimately disintegrated and were damaged and all that.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's—

PAL:

Because, you know, it's not a—we still don't have the—we do have a warehouse, but it's still substandard. It's not air-conditioned or properly looked after. It's like a junkyard.

RIKALA:

Oh, you just don't want to know! You know, it's—

PAL:

Well, I think people—I mean, I think—

RIKALA:

Oh, I know. But, I mean, when you think about this—

PAL:

Yeah, but it is like that, I'm afraid, you see. Anyway, so this decorative arts department didn't exist, and there was not a single object on view, and here was a curator getting his salary for a department. And the reason, I was told, was because Norton Simon didn't like decorative arts. So therefore they had taken it all off view, and all the galleries were given to Norton Simon's paintings, and that's it! And now, just think! Just think! The trustees agreed to that policy. The director agreed to that policy, and they pursued that. And I think for the next—well, after I came here, I would say a good Oh, I don't know, until Norton Simon left the museum altogether, and even then, maybe two, three years after that, decorative arts was sort of rehabilitated. Maybe in '77 or around there. I'm not sure which date. And one reason—oh, and so here we don't have a decorative arts department or anyone, and then suddenly comes this man, Arthur Gilbert, and offers us his European silver collection and his Italian micro-mosaic collection. Now, I have to tell you honestly that most professional staff in the museum really didn't want to have anything to do with either of the collections or take them. Partly, I think, because of ignorance. I don't think anyone under—even Bill Jones, who's supposed to know what decorative arts was all about, was not enthusiastic about either collection. Although I did hear from others outside that the Gilbert silver collection is an excellent collection, quality silver. But it's an acquired taste. It's very gaudy. It's not everyone's cup of tea. And that his collection of micro-mosaics, Italian micro-mosaics, is unique outside of Italy. You know, maybe V and A [Victoria and Albert Museum] has some, but certainly no other American museum has a single piece of mosaic, you might say. [laughter] But everyone hated the mosaics. Certainly the professional staff couldn't stand it. First of all, it's all eighteenth-, nineteenth-century stuff. So it's not kosher in the sense that it's not European painting or something. So

there was a lot of discussion, I remember. And the thing is that Donahue himself didn't much care for it either, also. So the director wasn't—you know, I think this was a proposal that was—I think Gilbert had approached Franklin Murphy, and Franklin Murphy, I think, had decided this would be good for the museum, and I think it came down from the top that way. Anyway, Gilbert was elected to the board, and we got the Gilbert silver and mosaic collection. Both came. And now, since both those types of art had to be part of the decorative arts department, technically, the decorative arts department was revived.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

Otherwise I think the decorative arts department would have remained moribund, at least as long as Donahue was there. Because I don't think Donahue even cared much for decorative arts himself and furniture and all this. He did not care for American art at all. I know that. We have a department of American art, but that's called—you know, it's very strange, that's what I'm saying, that the structure of the museum shows again that there has been no rational thinking on the part of anyone, even when the new museum was being set. Now, you tell me, when you think of American art, you think of all forms of American art. So you'd think that the department of American art would be comprehensive in its coverage, but no. All the department of American art looks after is American painting.

RIKALA:

So nothing having to do with—

PAL:

But they don't call it American painting.

RIKALA:

So it has nothing to do with furnishings or handmade objects?

PAL:

No, nothing! That's part of the decorative arts department. So, you see, we have the European painting department, strangely—now, of course, it's called

European painting and sculpture. Now, look at it. In the early seventies we had a European painting department with hardly any painting to talk of or show off. We had then, curiously, Charlie Millard, as I said, curator of nineteenth-century European painting. Then, of course, you have a contemporary and modern art department. And then you have American art, but which really looks after only American painting. Then you have the decorative arts, where European and American decorative arts were lumped together, you see. You know, the whole thing, as you can see, there's no really logic behind all these—there's no organizational logic. I still think that the museum's American art collection, American painting collection, is really not distinguished enough to have a separate department. I think, if at all, they should have just an American art department and take all the American decorative arts and furniture and painting. Then at least there would be enough art to justify a department and have, perhaps, specialists. Similarly, have a department of European art in which have one organization in a pyramidal—have a senior curator, and then have two or three curators under him. Which is what basically we have, say, in our department. We have all Indian art under one roof, so to say. But anyway, that's another point.

RIKALA:

What you've brought up is an interesting dilemma that seems to have started at the time of the foundation of the museum. And you've mentioned it in terms of the fact that there isn't a bolder acquisition program in African arts or pre-Columbian. There's a sense of sloppy thinking between what constitutes a folk art or non-Western art versus European high art. And because of that what I call now sloppy thinking, it seems as though the museum policies, then, have—

PAL:

Have been sloppy. Yes, sloppy.

RIKALA:

Yeah, and lacking.

PAL:

And I think the growth of the museum has been sloppy that way, because there has been—you know, it's really sloppy thinking behind it. I mean, there's no—

RIKALA:

It's an unfortunate problem, because if the museum is attempting to be a comprehensive museum, then they're cutting themselves off at precisely the points where they could be comprehensive. Somehow it's like they're defining so narrowly that they couldn't possibly be—

PAL:

Well, they may want to be a comprehensive museum, but they'll never be one. It's too late. Too late. They've let things go.

RIKALA:

Or originally.

PAL:

And they shouldn't have even—even in the late sixties you couldn't really begin by wanting to be a comprehensive museum. They should have really said, well, we'll build on strengths, we'll concentrate on certain areas and build them up, and then maybe have—that's the meaning of the word "direction." But there was no direction because there was no one to give direction. The trustees did not know any better. And Donahue, as director, didn't give any direction.

RIKALA:

Well, under what circumstances did Donahue leave, then? You mentioned that his life was made miserable at some point.

PAL:

Well, I think by the mid-seventies the trustees realized that Donahue, again, was not a strong administrator. So they brought in, in fact, a strong deputy director from the county, an efficient man, Mort Golden, who came, I think, in '72. Yeah, in '72. But they didn't know what to do. Certainly they didn't want to fire Donahue, because, having fired Rick Brown, they had had—I mean. Rick Brown's firing was taken very badly by the entire museum world. Our trustees

had zero sympathy, zero sympathy. No one anywhere in this country, in the entire museum world—all the empathy was for Rick Brown. So I think they realized that and they didn't want to—they were known as monster trustees, and they didn't want to aggravate the situation further by then turning around and firing someone that they themselves had chosen. Again, it's amazing to me that they could. I mean, everything shows that Rick Brown was a man of much better caliber than Donahue in terms of art and building up collections in many ways, and a smarter man and well liked and respected all—so why they chose—you know, Donahue was a nice man. I'm not saying that he was—

RIKALA:

Oh, of course not.

PAL:

But he was ineffectual. He had no personality. He was not a leader. And he was very reticent, and obsequious almost. Certainly obsequious with the trustees. He was awed by power and had very little personality. And here are these men, they are all chairmen and CEOs [chief executive officers] of huge firms, you know, big, big megabucks, and all this. You would think they would be able to see or select the right person for the right job. But anyway, they didn't. There he was. Most trustees who were key trustees were agreed that Donahue had to go. The point was, they wanted to make it easy for him—after all, he had served them loyally since '66—so what they did—but also, I gather that they had to convince Ed Carter that Donahue must go, because Donahue was Ed Carter's pet. And the simple reason was that Donahue acted as a private curator for Ed Carter. Now, Ed Carter collected Dutch paintings, seventeenth-century Dutch mostly, and Donahue was like a guide to him, gave him free advice, you know. So Ed Carter had to be convinced that Donahue had to go. So they did a very, very strange thing, which I think was really almost unethical and nauseating. What they did was they hired a colleague of Donahue's who had just retired, a man called Wittmann, who had retired as the director of the Toledo Museum of Art—what's his first name?—Otto Wittmann, who, as I said, was a little older than Donahue and a colleague of Donahue. They knew each other well. They hired him as a special consultant to the board and paid him more than what they were paying Donahue—just think—and also made him a board member.

RIKALA:

That's really disgraceful.

PAL:

Yeah, so therefore, I mean, it was just—I think Donahue at that time was getting something around \$42,000, and this man came in, who used to come occasionally to the museum. He used to come for a week or two weeks and then go back to Toledo, and they were paying him \$60,000.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's terrible. What an embarrassment for Donahue.

PAL:

Yeah, but, you see, Donahue's the type of man who, in a sense, was trusting, and he was—he was not smart, politically astute. Now, I knew what the game was, but he didn't know anything. He didn't suspect anything. He didn't even know what they were paying this fellow. [laughter] I remember going and telling him one day. I decided I must tell him. So I went and I said, "Do you know what's happening around here?" And he said, "What?" And so I told him what I interpreted my scenario to be. And you know, he was so naive, he didn't believe me. He just didn't believe me. He thought I was—he said, "Oh, no, Otto wouldn't do that." I said, "Well, you tell me. Why would Otto accept such an offer and come here?" Besides, I still wonder whether they could even legally have Otto as a member of the board of trustees and pay him. I mean, that's something that I've never looked up in the statutes, but somehow it seems from common sense, I mean, this is a public body and these are all unpaid trustees, so how can you have a paid trustee, so to say?

RIKALA:

Yeah.

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RIKALA:

How long was Wittmann with—?

PAL:

So Otto Wittmann was this consultant, and I suppose he was brought in, basically, as I said, to sell the idea that Donahue had outlived his usefulness and that he should go. And I think Otto Wittmann spent the next couple of years or whatever—I don't know, three years, maybe—convincing Carter and whoever else needed convincing that Donahue had to go. And for that they paid him that kind of money. He was supposed to be an expert in European painting. As far as I know, I don't think he helped us get a single major European painting. I can tell you that if he did anything, he made us lose one of the greatest Chinese sculptures that ever came this way. In the last twenty years I've never seen such an important Chinese sculpture. And I think, from what I have heard, that Wittmann killed it, in fact, at the board meeting, which was a great, great tragedy, in my opinion. So I don't know what Wittmann did to deserve the tremendous amount of money he got out of this museum.

RIKALA:

What was the Chinese sculpture called?

PAL:

Well, it was a Chinese sculpture of about the fifth century, a wonderful white marble stele that, in fact, was found in Los Angeles. It was in some old lady's backyard, for years and years.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

She died, and the estate sold it, and a dealer here of Chinese, Japanese art bought it for a song and gave us a very, very good price on it. And, as I said, we turned it down. And then he sold it to [Giuseppe] Eshkenazi in London, who then promptly turned round and sold it to the British Railway Fund for an astronomical sum. I mean, we could have bought the sculpture for, say, around \$200,000. And British Railway Fund within six months bought it for over \$600,000.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

It would be well over \$1 million now if it were available. So that was a missed opportunity. Anyway, so then what happened is that about a month or so before Proposition—no, not a month. Yeah, I think—or a couple of months. Maybe March or April before Proposition 13, Donahue was at a meeting, had gone off somewhere, to Minneapolis or somewhere. He wasn't available. And the trustees, or at least a core group of trustees, called a special meeting and wanted to meet to prepare for contingency plans in case Proposition 13 passed. It seemed certain that Proposition 13 would pass, and the fear was that [Los Angeles] County would immediately cut off all funds to the museum, you see. In which case, until the board went out to get money, the museum would have to be run by a skeleton crew. So they called this meeting and wanted to discuss that. Donahue wasn't around, nor the deputy director, so I think Franklin Murphy or someone said, "Well, we'd like to have some professional staff input." So I was called to the meeting, and that was my first sort of experience, really, with sitting at a board meeting. Oh, it was a small board meeting, anyway. That's when I sort of realized that Donahue's days were numbered, I mean, I sort of felt. So the next month—oh, they asked me if I was willing to be chief curator and sit at the board meetings, and I tentatively agreed. So I started going to the board meetings. And it became increasingly apparent that—because at the board meetings—I mean, after all, Donahue was still there, and there was also Rex Stead, the deputy director, both of whom were technically above me. But most of them would turn to me for opinions on this and that. Rexford Stead just sat there. I realized that he had no standing at all. In fact, I think that must have been so, oh, since the beginning of my term, which we just did not realize. So again, for some ten, twelve years, the museum had had a staff member, had paid someone that did very little for the museum. Anyway, then, in August, Donahue had a heart attack, mild heart attack, in the museum—in fact, in the office. I was there, I think, when he was having a heart attack, because we were sitting in the office when he said he felt a pain in the left shoulder. Because I knew that that was a symptom of a heart attack—I had been told—I said, "I think you should go and see a doctor." Well, he didn't go. He should have gone right then. He didn't. But that evening he did, and he did have a mild heart attack. And that was it, you see. Naturally he would be away for at least three months recuperating and all that. So I became acting director. And they sort of told him not to come

back. So that's how he was eased out, finally. But to go back to the way the collections were built, which I think we should dwell on a bit more, I mean, there was nothing I could do for other departments. I mean, Chinese and Japanese were not my fields. And in terms of my area of interest, I decided that it would be good to try and get the Heeramaneck collection of Islamic art from Persia, Turkey, and all, which was a natural corollary once we had a good Indian collection.

RIKALA:

That was quite a large collection.

PAL:

That's a very large collection, and again, very comprehensive: textiles and everything, pottery, paintings, calligraphy, architectural segments, drawings. Really, it's a very comprehensive collection, and the collection was being offered to us for \$600,000. So we brought the collection out, and it was all spread out. I remember it was November when we brought the collection out in a storeroom. I went to New York to negotiate with her [Alice Heeramaneck] and talk to her, and I said, "Look, yeah, but I think we should sweeten the pie." She had a collection of very fine—maybe thirty or forty—Nazca pottery. And I said, "Why don't you throw those in?" She also had a collection of thirty-five or forty or maybe fifty Chinese pottery, including some large Tang [dynasty] pieces, a very fine Tang horse, which is one of the best pieces in our Chinese collection. So I said, "You should throw that group in also." And she agreed. I also wanted her library, her particularly Indian library, because her Indian collections had all gone by then. I said, "I would like to have this library." And she agreed to that, too. So I came back, and I said to the board that "This is the package. I mean, just this Islamic collection for \$600,000, I think, is a very good buy, but on top of that we are getting a library, we are getting thirty-five Nazca pottery and this Chinese ceramic collection, and so it really becomes probably around a million-dollar deal," and all that. And they said fine and this and that. They approved, but they did very little about the money. So we waited and waited. And this was before the oil crisis, you know, that oil crisis. It's after the oil crisis the Islamic art prices shot up.

RIKALA:

Really?

PAL:

Yeah, yeah.

RIKALA:

Makes sense.

PAL:

Yeah. And Richard Sherwood had become the president. Or no—yeah, Richard Sherwood had become the president. Franklin Murphy was the chairman then. Yeah, Franklin Murphy's term as president was just over. That's right, '74. Anyway, then Richard Sherwood spoke to this woman called Joan Palevsky. That's the first time I heard her name, sort of, in that connection, Max Palevsky's first wife. They were already separated. Max and Joan. I mean, they were divorced. So one day I got a call, and it was Joan Palevsky on the phone. Oh, no, the phone call came in Donahue's office, and I was in Donahue's office. And he had an intercom, and he put us on the intercom and we had a three-way chat about the collection. She had not yet come to see it. She asked whether it was really worthwhile and all these questions on the phone. So we discussed it and whether this was the best buy for the money and this and that, and she said, "All right. I'll buy it." Just like that. And, I mean, you should have seen Donahue's and my faces. We were just thrilled. I mean, this was just incredible. She said, "When do you want the money?" We said, "Well, whenever you want to come and give it." She said, "All right. I'll come in." You know, in a day or two or whatever, we made an appointment. We were absolutely thrilled. And Sherwood then had gone to India, I think. So I think we sent a cable to him in Delhi or somewhere saying, "Palevsky, the new Islamic angel."

RIKALA:

Oh, how nice.

PAL:

See. So she came in two or three days later in the morning, I remember, with a satchel, and it wasn't filled with money.

RIKALA:

Twenties? [laughter]

PAL:

No, but it was filled with Xerox [Corporation] stock. She handed over the stock and said, "I think this will take care of it." You see, she had become one of the major stockholders in Xerox. Well, her husband, really, see, her husband had a computer company, some sort of company. Data something. I forget what the name was. [Data Systems, Inc.] It had become very big, and Xerox had bought him out, bought the company for, oh, I hear \$200 million. Now, you're talking of 1972 or 1973, which was a lot of money.

RIKALA:

That's a lot of money.

PAL:

A lot of it was in Xerox stock, you see. Then they had gotten divorced, so naturally Joan got her share, and that's why the Xerox stock came in. And Dick Sherwood apparently was Joan's lawyer, sort of, for the divorce settlement and had done a good job fighting for whatever, or helped her, anyway, whether he was the lawyer or he had helped in an advisory capacity. I don't quite know, but that was one of the connections. And she had always, I think, promised him that she will, when the right time comes, do something for him. So this is what she did; she bought the collection. We had an exhibition [*Islamic Art: The Nasli M. Heeramanek Collection*] the next fall, I think, of the collection. I remember I invited Katharina Otto-Dorn, who was then professor of Islamic art at UCLA, to write part of the catalog. She wrote the section on ceramics. And Ed [Edwin] Binney [III], who was a private collector and a good friend of mine, whom I first met in 1964 and was probably the greatest collector of Islamic and Indian paintings in this country, he helped me. He came and spoke, in fact, to the board about the collection and how important it was for the museum to buy it. As a matter of fact, I remember at the board meeting, after giving his speech, he sort of—he told them that he was himself a member of the board of trustees of Portland Art Museum, so he told them that he believed that the only function of the board was to raise money for buying art, which I thought was great. And he ended up his speech, I

remember, by saying that, "Well, this collection is worth \$600,000." And he had nothing to do with us. I mean, there was no particular reason for him to give us anything. And he said, "If you raise the \$590,000, I'll give you the last \$10,000."

RIKALA:

Oh, that's nice.

PAL:

Yeah. So at least he was putting his money where his mouth is. So when Joan did give the full \$600,000, Ed did give me \$10,000, and we bought other things with it. Anyway, that's how the Islamic collection came in. And I'll tell you, not a moment too soon, really, because, as I said, the oil embargo and crisis and all, and the price of oil shot up, and the Iranians and Arabs came into a windfall, as you know. I mean, money started falling like manna from heaven, and they started buying Islamic art. That's when the market for Islamic art just shot up like—I mean, I can't tell you. I mean, it was just fifty-fold, maybe, all of a sudden. I mean, the Heeramaneck collection of Islamic art, if we had not bought it for \$600,000, I think if she [Alice Heeramaneck] had waited another year, if she could have afforded to wait another year, I think she could have easily sold it for double and more probably in a couple of years. And then it stayed very strong for about, oh, well, until the fall of the shah [of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi]. The Islamic art prices sort of leveled off or came down somewhat in certain areas. Also, Islamic art isn't plentiful, you know. Right now you couldn't form a collection like that, even if you had the money. So anyway, we got that collection, and then, I don't know, two, three, four years later maybe—I'd have to look up to determine exactly when. She called me up one day and said, "Look, I have sold the ancient Near Eastern"—which is mostly Persian, her ancient Near Eastern collection—"except for some cylindrical seals and some bits and pieces from Syria and Iraq." Really, the bulk of that collection is Iranian and Luristan material and all that. She called me and said, "I have sold the ancient collection to the shah banu, the queen of Iran [Queen Farah], for \$1 million. But she wants to take possession of the material in Tehran." In other words, she wants Mrs. Heeramaneck to send the material to Tehran, and once it reaches there, then she'll pay Mrs. Heeramaneck. Now, Mrs. Heeramaneck felt nervous and said, "If I send this

collection to Iran and then they seize it all, saying it's ancient Iranian stuff, anyway," then what can she do? She can't take the shah of Iran to court, or Iran. And I don't think she would get much sympathy. So she said to the shah banu, "No. You come and take the collection in possession in New York and pay me in New York. It's simple. Take it." Well, it didn't work. I mean, they were stalling, and she also didn't want to. send the collection. So she called me, and she said, "Look, if you guys buy the collection and call it the Heeramaneck Collection, Nasli Heeramaneck Collection, and if you then pay me soon, I'll let you have it for \$600,000." [laughter] So I again went to the board and I said, "Well, this collection, blah, blah, blah," and all that. And again the collection was brought out, and then, fortunately, the Ahmanson Foundation decided to buy it. So it's the only major non-European art they have bought.

RIKALA:

Oh!

PAL:

Yeah. They have given little bits of money here and there for other departments. Once they gave me some money, too. But this is the only major—and I think what happened, the timing was right. Again, it was like the end of the year. It wasn't Christmas. It was the end of their fiscal year or something, and they had money to give, and so rather than—so that was very nice, and that's how we have the Iranian material. Again, I think we are now extremely strong in the art of Iran also, apart from India: India, Nepal, Tibet, and Southeast Asia. So that's the third big collection the museum bought. And then, as far as I know, there was no other collection, except of course the Gilbert collections, as I said. Yeah, we got sidetracked with that. I don't think I finished talking about the Gilbert silver and mosaics for some reason. I don't know what came in. But as I said, there was considerable resistance among the curatorial staff about taking those collections. And Bill Jones didn't get along very well with the Gilberts. Well, the Gilberts are not the easiest persons to get along with. And Donahue didn't like them at all, I can tell you that. He never did get along with them. I remember Franklin Murphy had a—when we were discussing this—oh, I think the staff's thing and Donahue also felt that, "Well, we'll take the silver collection, but we're not really interested in the

mosaic." But Gilbert would not give one collection only. It had to be both or nothing. And I remember Franklin Murphy making a very impassioned speech in favor of accepting both collections, particularly the mosaic, which had become the stumbling block. He's always a very good speaker, and he can sell anything to anyone, almost. So he did. I remember, I was at the board meeting. Franklin Murphy was very persuasive. And the board accepted the gift, even, you might say, against the curatorial—you know. To be very honest with you, I agree with Franklin Murphy on that issue. I think there's no harm in our taking the mosaics. After all, it's not costing us anything, and it's very, fine work. Again, it's not everyone's cup of tea, but then Indian art isn't everyone's cup of tea, also. And certainly modern art isn't Gilbert's cup of tea, I can tell you. If Arthur Gilbert hates anything with a passion, then, it's contemporary art. And I agree, too. I can't stand most contemporary art. I mean, I find some of it, maybe, has some intellectual challenge, but emotionally I can't get involved with any contemporary art, really. I find it's too gimmicky, and everyone's trying to be something else and original and all this. Anyway, so it really did not make much sense for us to be critical of the mosaics and sort of be snobbish about it. But then there have been, as I said, when I first came here, a lot of people—I mean, not only Donahue, but I know another very good friend of mine, a man called Christian Humann, a great collector of Indian and Asian art, but who knew European art very well, also, he, for instance, didn't see any merit at all in American art. He thought it was all derivative of Europe, that Americans had never—you know, nineteenth-century American art painting was for the birds. As you know, art is partly a matter of taste and fashions. I mean, fashions change. So anyway, now we have both the Gilbert silver and the mosaic collections.

RIKALA:

You mentioned also the [William Randolph] Hearst collection. Did that come at about the same time?

PAL:

No, the Hearst collection was given, I suspect, even, to the old museum.

RIKALA:

I see, okay.

PAL:

I'll have to look up the acquisition dates, but I'm sure it's before even 1965.

RIKALA:

Okay.

PAL:

So I know nothing about it. I think it was a legacy. I think he left some of this stuff. In his will they were left to LACMA.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's interesting.

PAL:

What his connection with LACMA was I've never known. I mean, I think at that time they were—well, where else could he give it in Los Angeles in the fifties, sixties?

RIKALA:

No, but he could have given it to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. So it's interesting that he chose L.A.

PAL:

Yes, that's true. I don't know the circumstances of all that.

RIKALA:

No, me neither.

PAL:

Why he gave anything to Los Angeles, LACMA—and the Hearst collection, of course, we've sold a lot of stuff from the Hearst—I think it was—it was the first major gift, I think, that we received in the old museum of art. I think it's got to be. The Hearst collection I think was one of the biggest, even though all of it wasn't great, and some of the classical stuff that we still own is better than what J. Paul Getty bought in his lifetime, certainly. I mean, at least I think Hearst bought better than J. Paul Getty did. At that time, you know, it's very

interesting, we used to have a much closer relationship with the Getty, also, which was—and the Getty curator of European art, old master painting, used to—actually, he was an adjunct curator also at our museum.

RIKALA:

And who was that?

PAL:

Yeah, yeah. Burt [Burton] Fredericksen. Now, this was very, very strange. That gives me an idea, because there was Burt Fredericksen at the same time being curator to two institutions in the same city. I mean, you'd think there'd be a conflict of interest, wouldn't you?

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

But there you are. For many years he was paid by us. He came to all the curatorial meetings, as if he was a—you know. So there you are. We had Donahue, whose field was European art, painting; we had Burt Predricksen, an adjunct curator of old masters, European paintings; and then we had Charlie Millard as curator of nineteenth-century European paintings. And we didn't have a painting collection at all. [laughter]

RIKALA:

It's a very over-staffed department.

PAL:

Isn't it? Yes, it's exactly, you see, again, this sort of—so for years he used to be, as I said, a curator, and at least a part-time curator for us. And now, of course, we have—then, when I was acting director, we started a dialogue with the Getty, and I had arranged for our curators once to go over there and have a joint meeting. And they once came over to the museum, and we had a very pleasant luncheon meeting. We sat around a table and sort of talked and discussed things. But that was the last three or four times that that happened, the year I was acting director. After that, the Getty also started becoming a huge organization, as you know, and we also started expanding very rapidly. I

mean, the museum has doubled since the days of Donahue—I mean doubled in every way. More than doubled, I think, budget-wise as well as personnel-wise. So it's a totally different organization than the one I joined, from that point of view. And the Getty now, I haven't a clue. I mean, it must be a mammoth organization. So it's been interesting watching all this. And the point is that I think it is still a bit too staff-heavy in many ways, I think both institutions. It should be more art-heavy than staff-heavy, in my opinion, both places. But that's not quite the case.

RIKALA:

So you were acting director 1979 to '80?

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

Do you have particular—?

PAL:

'Eighty, or—?

RIKALA:

Was it '79 to '80?

PAL:

Just '79, I think.

RIKALA:

Just '79?

PAL:

I think I gave up—yeah, yeah.

RIKALA:

So you were not interested in becoming—?

PAL:

December 31 was my—yeah. And Rusty Powell then came in March of '80, didn't he?

RIKALA:

So you had no interest in becoming a permanent director?

PAL:

Well, I did accept it at first, and then—no, no. I was—'Eighty, right?

RIKALA:

According to your—

PAL:

Yeah, yeah. 'Seventy-nine, '80. You see, I've forgotten.

RIKALA:

[laughter] This is the source.

PAL:

Oh, it is? From '79 to '80.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Well, then, that's right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I did stay for a little over a year. Yes, yes, you're right. Maybe, yeah, I did, I think. And Rusty, I think, came in '81, yeah. To be honest with you, I didn't like the way the board had, number one, behaved with Donahue. And secondly, they behaved with me also in, I think, a dishonorable way. So I had at one point agreed to be the director for three years but no more. I mean, at least that I would have the option to. But because of, I would say, the board behavior, I decided not to. And I felt they were not genuine in their desire, really, for reforms. They really didn't want a strong director. And we had a very strong disagreement over Armand Hammer. So I didn't accept the job. And, of course, in the long run I have proven to be right. [tape recorder off]

RIKALA:

So what happened with the board and you? I mean, you had a disagreement over Armand Hammer, but—

PAL:

Well, I think it was over Hammer, and we'll have to discuss that, I think.

RIKALA:

We'll give that more time.

PAL:

Yeah, with Hammer.

RIKALA:

Would you have resumed your curatorial position after three years? You were saying you initially set up a three-year period.

PAL:

Yes. You see, I was very uncertain in my mind as to whether I could give up my scholarly life. I was very, very nervous about being a director in terms of not getting enough time to do my research, my writing, which is what I really love to do. Because even the three, or by that time, let's say—no, you're right, yeah. By December of '79. I had been acting director really, say, from August, when Donahue went out. I was managing things full-time. I mean, I didn't do a piece of writing for six months. I just couldn't. It was a full-time job being director. There was also much more entertaining and being entertained. We had to go out more. Now, that also I resented, because I had two young children. And I had noticed among my other friends who were much too active socially—in fact, without naming names, a close friend of mine who was in this field and who used to, I think, have a very active social life, was a very popular person, they used to go out, I think, oh, five, six evenings a week, leaving their children always with babysitters. And I'm afraid at least one child has become a drug addict and another one is also not as normal a child as one—is a difficult person. I think part of that is children resent not having their parents and having to spend all their time with babysitters, different babysitters, who are—some of them are strangers. You know, it's one thing in Victorian England

where you had nannies and all who stayed with you. They became like your surrogate mothers. And besides, it was a huge household. Usually there were more servants. But in today's society it's quite different. So that was also a consideration that I felt. And I didn't really enjoy the social part of the job. I did not enjoy going out so many evenings a week. And, you know, I felt that probably the board ultimately would not let me run the place independently. I was quite convinced of that. And I couldn't allow myself to become another Donahue. No way. I mean, I'm not that type of person. So all these things were going on in my mind at the time. It was not an easy decision. But I'll tell you what I did. I did get Otto Wittmann out of the place. I mean, that was, I think, a great achievement. But he moved on to fresher pastures, and he immediately joined the Getty board, again as a paid trustee. And he still is, I think, a paid trustee at the Getty, if I'm not mistaken. I mean, that man has earned more in his retirement than he did in thirty years of his professional museum career.

RIKALA:

That's extraordinary.

PAL:

Yeah, I wish—I mean, I envy him. As you can see, am jealous, because I would love to. In fact, I think he joined the Getty even while he was with us. So he was getting two \$60,000 jobs probably. And I don't think his retirement salary—when he retired as director, I don't think he was making \$120,000. Very unlikely.

RIKALA:

Well, that's interesting.

1.17. TAPE NUMBER: X, Side One (November 6, 1989)

RIKALA:

Last time we finished with a promise to resume the discussion and recollections of Armand Hammer. So if we may, I'd like to start back there. Hammer became a member of the board [of trustees, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)] when? In the early seventies? In '72 or '73?

PAL:

Yeah, '71, maybe. I'm not exactly sure.

RIKALA:

Maybe. I'm not sure either.

PAL:

Somewhere around '70, '71.

RIKALA:

Yeah. And you became the chief curator around '78, '79?

PAL:

Well, that was the year of Proposition 13, so—

RIKALA:

We can check that. And then acting director in '79. Now, could you recall for us the kind of situations that lead up to Hammer leaving LACMA and changing his mind about his promised gifts?

PAL:

Well, let's say that when he did that last year, I wasn't at all surprised. I had expected this, I would say, certainly from the time I was acting director. What happened is that just after I became acting director, Mort [Morton J.] Golden, who was then the deputy director, came and complained to me that they were having a terrible time trying to control Hammer's curator. I don't know what her title was, but there was a woman called Olga Hammer who was in charge of Hammer's collections, and—

RIKALA:

Was she a relative?

PAL:

No. No, she was not a relative, that's for sure. She just happened to have the same name. And that Olga Hammer was really virtually ordering about the men, whatever they wanted in the museum. This had been sort of [Kenneth]

Donahue's policy of appeasement. They had to give in to Hammer at every point. So I called in Olga Hammer, and I told her that, "Look, from now on," I said, "you can't go directly to the various departments in the museum and order the registrar to do this and conservation to do that and the technical services to do this, because that only creates confusion. So if you want something done at the museum, you should either come to me or to the deputy director, tell one of us what is it that you and the [Armand] Hammer Foundation want, and we will see that it gets done." Well, this, of course, she didn't like, which was very natural, because she had been used to getting her way with everyone in the place. So I suppose she went and complained to Hammer. I think actually I personally had no real problems with Hammer of any kind, and no contacts also, because Hammer never came to the board meetings. It was rare. Maybe once a year he might have come to the board meeting. As a matter of fact, I remember the first board meeting we had after Proposition 13 was passed in the June election. I mean, I knew that this was going to be one of the most important meetings of the board, because if the [Los Angeles] County funding were to be decreased, then we would be in the soup. So I personally called Dr. Hammer, and I explained to him what the situation was. I said it would be greatly morally uplifting and we'd get much more confidence if he attended this board meeting. Because more people like that with money behind them who came to the meeting would give us a sense of purpose in terms of, yes, we are not being thrown to the winds. The staff would feel better. And he did come, and it was perfectly fine. But I think that the main thing was that this Olga Hammer went and told Dr. Hammer that this guy, Pal, is a dangerous fellow, and he is against what you want to do, and you may have a tough time in the future with this institution. And in the meantime, I was called, I think in December—and all this without my being in the least interested in the job. I was just playing the part of acting director because there was no one else there, and they had asked me to do it, and I was doing it. And they really twisted my arms. I mean, Dick [Richard E.] Sherwood was another person who for hours and hours told me how I must take up the directorship. They had looked at one or two people, but frankly, very few people were interested in the job. Mrs. [Camilla "Mia" Chandler] Frost pressed me very hard. I remember I met her mother [Dorothy Buffum Chandler] at the Santa Anita races, in fact. We went to pick up a check that they were giving to the museum. And Mrs. Chandler was there, and I met her,

and she sort of told me that I should, you know, look after her daughter, the new president of the board, sort of. Not exactly those words, but that sort of idea. That I should help her and work with her well and all that. Then I was called for a meeting. I was called one day at Franklin [D.] Murphy's house. And I went there, and there was Mrs. Frost, and there was Ed [Edward W.] Carter, and there was Franklin [D.] Murphy, and I think there was Dick Sherwood. They talked for, oh, I don't know, a couple of hours, and they said I must take the job permanently and blah, blah, and all that, and all this. So it becomes very difficult to say, "No, no, no" to these people. I argued and this and that, and I had my doubts about what I wanted to do. And I knew my scholarly interests would suffer. Anyway, as I said, finally I caved in. The whole month of November, I think, we went on with this sort of thing. Ed Carter would call me and all this, and I think just between Christmas and New Year's Eve I went to see Dick Sherwood again. Again, I had I don't know, a three-, four-hour meeting with him, and finally I agreed to take the job. Then everything was fine. It was discussed, so they told me, that they had discussed it at the executive committee meeting, and that it was their unanimous choice that I should take the job. Then they would then present it at the next full board meeting, which was, I think, March or something, and get it ratified. Then three, four weeks, January went by, and either at the end of January or early in February, I mean, all hell suddenly broke loose. I was almost peremptorily told by these same trustees—I mean, I was again called to Franklin Murphy's house, and there I was almost told that the deal was off. Well, they didn't really say the deal was off, but they said what happened. What happened is that Armand Hammer had come to Franklin Murphy, and I'll tell you the exact words—yes, Franklin Murphy and Ed Carter were there, and I think Mia Frost the second time, and I think Dick Sherwood wasn't there. That Hammer had fallen on his knees at Franklin Murphy's feet and had wept and said that I would be very much anti-European art if I became—and since his collection was promised to the museum, and he was—you know, that European art was his main concern, this and that, that he, I think, threatened to withdraw his collection if I became the director. That's when, you see, I realized that men like Dr. Murphy and Ed Carter are windbags in the sense that they have no strength of their own conviction, and that they sway the way the wind blows, and that they can't stand up to men who are ostensibly more powerful. I mean, they may appear to be powerful to everyone, but to me they are very

small men. Franklin Murphy, particularly, I think—I mean, I can't believe that he, after having run a university and all this, would tell me—well, he was very, very upset that this old man should be crying to him, you know, blah, blah, and tears rolling down his cheeks. Well, it's all bloody crocodile tears. You know that. And Ed Carter had, in my opinion, the stupidity to tell me that I should really consider the museum's future, that I should put the museum before my sort of personal ambition, as if I was in any way ambitious even to become the director. And this is the man who, in fact, six months before that, had all of a sudden—one day we met in the corridor—out of the blue taken me aside and said, "Ken Donahue is going to retire soon." And I then, of course, knew that Otto Wittmann had earned his money, because Carter was the man they were supposed to convince about Donahue, getting rid of Donahue. And here Carter said, "You know, I think that you would be a very good director." And this man now tells me that I should for the sake of the museum—' Since not only was Hammer's collection involved, but that Hammer in his will was leaving his residue, half of his estate, to the museum, and that he had seen Hammer's will. Believe me, I'll never forget. I mean, I stood there and I looked at this man, and I thought, "This man is the head of Carter Hawley Hale [Stores, Inc.]. How on earth did he get to the top?" I couldn't figure it out. I mean, this man lied and said that he had seen Hammer's will! Now, how would Carter or anyone except Hammer's lawyers and Hammer ever see Hammer's will? I mean, it's unlikely that even Hammer's wife [Frances Tolman Hammer] had seen his will, you know.

RIKALA:

Exactly.

PAL:

So I said to Carter, "How did you see his will?" And he said, "Oh, I know his lawyer, and his lawyer showed it to me." Now, this is—

RIKALA:

That's dumb.

PAL:

You know? It's impossible. And he sort of looked at Murphy, and they calculated, and they said, "Well, you know, even half of the estate must be worth at least \$50 million." Anyway, by this time I said, "My God, what was I doing?" I mean, how could I—? I was putting my neck in the noose, virtually, by—and luckily, you know, I had said to them that, "I will become director for three years. But I'll tell you something. I will not give up my curatorial job. I'll remain curator of Indian art." Because I wanted to come back to it.

RIKALA:

Sure.

PAL:

And also I knew that they could never fire me as the curator. You see, the director -can be fired by either the board or the board of supervisors anytime. He's not covered by civil service guarantee or security, whereas a curator is. So, you see, I had insisted on that. And I realized, I said, "Just as well." Because here are these guys, hardly four weeks ago they're all just gung ho, and suddenly Hammer comes crying to Franklin Murphy and they say, "Well, buddy, thank you very much, but no thank you." So I said, "No, thank you. I don't want to become the director." Then there was the March meeting; the full board meeting came up. And here, of course, by that time other trustees had heard I'd been appointed. Fred [Frederick] Weisman called me from Baltimore, and others, you know, they're calling me and congratulating me, and how happy they were. Some were even telling me what to do, you know, that I should fire "Joe Blow," and I should fire someone—oh, yes, yes. This went on even before I was officially appointed. You'd be surprised how many people called to instruct me to make changes in staff or in other matters. Well, I mean, Olga Hammer wasn't the only one who I think sort of dropped what I considered to be malicious untruths about me to Hammer, and how detrimental it will be to Hammer's interests if I became the director. Donahue himself, I think, contributed to that, as did another woman called Alia Hall, whose job was assistant to the director. But she is a Russian woman, and she was, in fact, I think, taken into the museum purely to be like a sort of a liaison with Hammer, and especially since half the time Hammer's exhibitions were in Russia or he was getting a show from Russia for us or something. So therefore, that's what she did, virtually. She was Donahue's assistant. And she felt very

threatened that she probably wouldn't be an assistant to me, or I wouldn't want her as an assistant. Although I think these are all their own basic fears rather than—and Donahue, of course, was very unhappy when he came back to the museum three months after, four months after his heart attack. I think all of them sort of plotted. And Alia Hall also was very friendly with Kathy [Kathleen] Ahmanson, so I think they also told Bill [William] Ahmanson that—all of a sudden, you see, all this was new. Now, they never said this before, but they kept on this theme that if I became director, it would be detrimental to European art, and since the Ahmansons collect European art—I mean, it was in a sense a kind of racism, but racism against an Asian specialist rather than the fact that I was Indian. And yet, when I think of two of the great directors of this century in America, they were both orientalists. You know, Sherman [E.] Lee of the Cleveland Museum [of Art] and Larry [Laurence] Sickman of Kansas City [William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art] were both orientalists. Anyway, so they had poisoned Hammer or sort of turned him against me. As I said, Hammer never even—we never even had a single conversation. And it's not that Olga Hammer didn't get or that Hammer was denied anything, but it was done in the proper way with the proper procedure, which is how things should be done. When there is a director, I think trustees and others from out—collectors should not go running around the museum giving direct instructions to Tom, Dick, and Harry—

RIKALA:

Of course not.

PAL:

—because they become very lost. They don't know how to react, what to do, whether to follow such a thing. So by channelizing all instructions through a director—I mean, it was true that Olga Hammer had gone out of control, you know, as Hammer had gone out of control. And Hammer remained out of control even after that, which is why, I think—you see, he was given everything. He was a spoiled child. He was given everything he wanted throughout, and, as you know, spoiled children do turn around this way. And that's exactly what he did, ultimately. So I knew then and there. I said, "This man will never, never give his collection. He will always make a demand of one thing or another." Another thing I thought was that it's amazing that Franklin

Murphy or an Ed Carter or these people were not realizing what a bad example they were setting to the other trustees, who would then also say, "Well, you know, you'd better do what I want." And I hear that complaint constantly from others, from Arthur Gilbert, for instance. "If something is being done for Hammer, why shouldn't it be done for me?" sort of thing. And this came up. Hammer himself raised this issue. One of the things when this whole thing fell through—if you remember, one of Hammer's demands was that the museum should hire a curator who should report to him.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

And he cited the example of another curator in the museum who everyone thought was, in fact, there to serve another collector and a member of the board.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

So, you see, in a sense Hammer did exactly what I had predicted. Anyway, so this board meeting came up, full board meeting, and I said, "I will agree to stay on only till the end of the year and absolutely not a day more." They should find someone in the meantime, and I'll do this as a favor to them, frankly. And I demanded to tell the board exactly—I knew they would cover up. And Hammer was at that meeting. I knew none of them would have the guts to tell the facts to the whole board, what really happened. So I said, "I must be given a chance to speak to the whole board." And then I got a message—oh, yeah—they had their closed meeting. Also, you see, the whole Phil [Phillip] Berg matter had soured me.

RIKALA:

Oh, sure.

PAL:

I mean, I had a very bad taste in my mouth, because I felt they did something very improper with the whole Phil Berg matter. The way they did it was very bad. You know, they called a meeting outside the board, outside the museum, in a hotel, excluding the staff, and made the decision. "This is not a board to work with," I just said to myself. And so I told that meeting, I spoke for I think forty minutes or forty-five minutes, and I told them exactly—right with Hammer sitting there I said to them that they were making a grave mistake, that by giving in to Dr. Hammer they were losing whatever cards they had up their sleeves, that they would never get anywhere. And I remember at the end of my speech, you might say, that Bill Ahmanson, who was also there, asked me if I wouldn't—oh, they constituted then a selection committee, search committee, for the director, and Hammer was on that committee, and Bill Ahmanson asked me if I wouldn't allow my name to be kept for this, because, true, I had been chosen by the executive committee. There had been no selection committee. But it was nothing improper or illegal or anything.

RIKALA:

No, of course not.

PAL:

But it's just that they hadn't really looked at any other candidates properly. But I said, "No." I said, "No, I've had enough, thank you. I don't want to be considered at all. I will end at the end of the year." So you can see from that that that's not the kind of man who is going to leave his collection to the museum. There is no way. So that's what happened. And from thereafter, in fact—well, I must tell you that I told this entire story to "Rusty" [Earl A.] Powell [III] before he came. Except, you know, he joined the job. I remember after the second interview or something, I took him for a drink. We went across to the Greenhouse, and we had a drink, and we spent a couple of hours. I told him the whole story. I said to Rusty Powell, I said, "Rusty, no one, not a single other collector or trustee or all other collectors and trustees together will be a headache for you as much as Armand Hammer." You see? And sure enough. But, you see, even then Rusty went ahead. In less than one year they signed another, this time what was supposed to be—you see, prior to that, it was all verbal commitment. But this time they drew up a sort of an agreement between Hammer and the museum that his collection will come, this and that.

But, you know, the funny part of it is that, where was that \$50 million estate? There's never been any mention. That was Carter's pipe dream. I mean, even if he had left his collection to us, and the way it was all set up, even, the collection wouldn't have been ours. It really belonged to the thing, and we couldn't say—then they went and signed a contract. I don't know the exact—I haven't read the contract, but from the little I have heard, there was no mention of any residual estate or anything, and that paintings really would belong to the [Armand Hammer] Foundation. The museum could not deaccession or get rid of any paintings without the permission of the trustees of the foundation, which, in effect, meant that the museum really didn't have any ownership of them. Now, this is the contract they signed, you know, and blah, blah. Oh, another thing I did find out by accident.: I came across a letter. You see, when they sold that building, the Litton Building, to Hammer, they had sold it for \$3 million. Hammer was to give \$1 million right there and then in cash, which he did, and he was to give another million in kind, which he did. He gave three paintings which were worth \$1 million, at least \$1 million. And the third million was to be given in a year or two. Well, he never gave it, because, number one, he claimed that the paintings he had given originally have gone up in value, you see? So in that case, by today's reckoning, they may be worth \$50 million. So he's given \$50 million? I mean, that's ridiculous, you see. And Donahue never followed it up. They never even brought the matter to the board. And I found that letter. I'm afraid, again, they did nothing about it. I showed the letter to Franklin Murphy and Sherwood and all, and as far as I know, the letter has disappeared from the files.

RIKALA:

Oh, dear.

PAL:

That letter doesn't exist.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness. That's quite amazing.

PAL:

Yeah, yeah.

RIKALA:

What a story. But Hammer has a history of making promises that he doesn't keep. I mean, wasn't he supposed to give paintings to the National Gallery [of Art] as well, and a print collection?

PAL:

No, no, no. No, that's the only promise he kept.

RIKALA:

Oh, he did keep that one.

PAL:

He did. He was supposed to give them some drawings.

RIKALA:

That's right.

PAL:

And he did give them the drawings. But let me give you an example of the other, why I thought Hammer really—and then what happened is that there was a guy called George Longstreet here who had formed a collection of Daumier prints—you know Daumier—which is now the Hammer Daumier collection. But that collection was formed by George Longstreet. George Longstreet came to the museum and came to Ebria Feinblatt, who was then the curator of prints and drawings, and offered this collection to the museum for a very reasonable price—I don't know, some three thousand or four thousand prints or whatever for a quarter of a million dollars. Even at that time it was a very good price. I remember recommending strongly to the board that we buy it outright. But again, you see, Donahue, who was at the board meetings—who sort of continued to stay on, and in fact stayed that whole year I was acting director, and used to attend board meetings, also, sort of as an observer type of thing, and ostensibly was supposed to be an adviser on European paintings to me—oh, one thing I did do, one of the conditions I had made with the board when they asked me to become director, I said they must immediately get rid of Wittmann, Otto Wittmann, and they had agreed to do that. And I did get rid of him. He left within six months, even while I was

acting director. Anyway, so Donahue went and told Hammer, got Hammer to buy it. So Hammer bought the collection, and now, you see, we have lost the collection. Now, we could have had that great Daumier collection for only a quarter of a million dollars, which we could have paid then. We had the money!

RIKALA:

So Donahue had a conflict of interests going.

PAL:

So, I mean, it was ridiculous. Ridiculous.

RIKALA:

He must have been angry.

PAL:

No, this blind faith and sort of continuously putting—and it's amazing that these people, who had been treated the way they were by [Norton] Simon and had allowed Simon to buy everything and then lost the collection—Simon walked out—didn't have the common sense to say, "Well, look, fine. We may get Hammer's collection, but the Daumier prints have been offered to us. Let's buy it outright. It's not an unreasonable sum of money. Let's buy it." Then at least we would have had the Daumier prints. They didn't. They let Hammer buy it, and now Hammer's walked off with that, too. Besides, you know, why should Hammer—? You know? It's true, he gave us money. When they signed that contract, they said, well, they'll build a bridge across the two, connecting the two buildings, the Ahmanson and the Hammer. And he paid for that, and he paid for the escalator, and all that. So in that sense, I must say that, in all fairness to Armand Hammer, he was not entirely a cheapskate in that he did use the museum but he usually paid all the expenses. For that no one can say that Hammer was chintzy. We lost the collection, true, and we lost face and we lost great opportunities to buy other things in the hope that the Hammer collection was coming to us. But unlike Simon, where we also actually lost cash in the sense that we put in a lot of money to install his collection, to insure it, and this and that, all that, for which we never got reimbursed from Simon, with Hammer, at least we didn't lose money, cash. I mean, on that

much one has to agree. I mean, there's no question about it. But if you are loyal to an institution—like if you are loyal to your wife and all that, you really don't fool around with other women, or vice versa, right? So what's this flirting with the National Gallery and giving them part of the drawing collection? Or he gave quite a lot of money once, the stock of his—in fact, I am really surprised that he really didn't buy himself a monument in Washington [D.C.] like [Joseph H.] Hirshhorn did or [Arthur M.] Sackler did, you know. I mean, they are three men of the same ilk. There's no question about it. These are all very, very egocentric, difficult men. But I'm really surprised that he didn't. One time I did hear that he was talking of buying up the Corcoran Gallery [of Art] and naming it the Hammer Museum and putting his collection there. And he may have tried, I don't know. He may have tried. I wouldn't put it past him. So really the National Gallery got something out of Hammer.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

And we have—what—three paintings?

RIKALA:

The interesting thing about your story about not becoming director is that it reveals this conflicted nature, also, between scholarship and directorship and how the museum over and over again can't decide to be a museum based on good acquisitions, all these kinds of things.

PAL:

Well, a director, by definition, in America today, an American museum director cannot be a scholar.

RIKALA:

And not ten years ago, either?

PAL:

Yeah. There was a time when it was possible to, and especially in a very well-heeled museum where the director didn't have to go—like Cleveland. I think Sherman Lee is one of the—I don't know. I think he's the only director I know

in America in the last thirty years who had maintained his scholarship even while he was the director. And I think the reason was that he never had to go out and look for much money. He had a lot of money. It's a very well-endowed museum. So he had the time. And he was not interested in blockbuster shows. He was not a publicity seeker. Unfortunately, 99 percent of the directors are. You see, they want to party. Even if it's not necessary to raise money, they still like it. They like to be a public figure, to be in the newspapers all the time. If you do all that, when are you going to do your studies? In fact, that's why—I mean, you know, Philippe de Montebello is zero scholar. You know, Rusty is not a scholar. And you take Ted [Edmund P.] Pillsbury, although he is now director of the Kimbell [Art Museum], which is a well-financed museum, you know, he's not. [J.] Carter Brown, zero scholarship. So that, perhaps, is not necessary anymore. Besides, I don't think they can, even if they have the inclination to. I don't see how Rusty or Phillip or Carter, these people, are going to do any—I mean, they have to be out five nights a week or entertain the other nights, and travel and meetings, and this and that. I mean, I saw that during my year.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

If you look at my bibliography, you'll probably see that that's the leanest year I've ever had. I distinctly remember that I was very frustrated because I couldn't write anything there. The whole day went in frivolities and inconsequential things. I remember once I had to adjudicate and sit at a hearing, a civil service hearing, because one employee complained that the other employee had spat on him. Yeah, you see. Now, that took up hours and hours, you see, that kind of thing. Then you have to go to downtown, and, you know, budget hearings. See, you have the county here, also, don't forget. And then you're constantly at the beck and call of trustees who call you fifty times a day when you are the director. I can tell you this: the day I stepped down and went back to my curatorship, do you know the same trustees who would call me fifteen times a day, some of them, to date, have never called me to say hello.

RIKALA:

[laughter] Haven't called since?

PAL:

No. So I said to myself, "My God, so it's not me the man. And here I'm still in the museum, but they don't want to hear my ideas, or they don't want to explore my brain." It's the fact of who sits in that office. It's the officeholder they're interested in. You might put a dummy there. As far as they're concerned, that's the dummy they will call. And they will order, and they will—you know. So you have that part. That also takes enormous time. So you couldn't do anything. Then I said, my God, I've seen a couple of friends whose children—I mean, one friend, his son became a total drug addict before he was fifteen. The girl became a peculiar person. Not a drug addict, but she hasn't grown up to be—and all that I know is because the parents had too active a social life. I think they went out seven nights a week. I said, "If I do that, I'll lose all contact with my family, and I don't want to." I was very afraid of that. I said no. I'm not a very patient man, you see. I probably wouldn't have lasted three years anyway, because I couldn't have taken—even if I had compromised somehow and remained, you know, I wouldn't have lasted. I know that for a fact, because, I mean, to some extent I can compromise in life, but I can't go on compromising at every step, and lying, and—you know. Maybe that's how the world runs. You know, maybe that's what you have to be to be on a board. As a matter of fact, I think that's it. Because I'll tell you what, it's very interesting. This may be a little digression, but, as a matter of fact, you might say that—of course, I had watched on this board meeting for a year and a half how boards worked and what happens. And it's a very closed thing. No member of the public can sit at any of these meetings. There's no representation of the membership at the board. There's no representation of the [Los Angeles County Board of] Supervisors on the board. It's a self-perpetuating board. And the minutes are so diluted and they're so useless that they don't at all reflect what goes on at that board meeting. Anyway, two years after that, I was asked by the Pacific Asia Museum to join its board. So I said, "I'm interested in the arts of Asia and all that." So I said, "Fine, whatever, I'll—." I said, "Look, obviously they're not electing me for my money, " but they, I assumed, were electing me for my ideas. And to my regret, within a year I resigned. Not to my regret, but I did resign within a year, because to my regret I realized that I was being elected as an ornament, not because I had

any ideas or that I knew Asian art. But what happened is that, after going to meetings every month, I realized it's a waste of my time even attending these meetings, because nothing substantive is discussed. The board is a sort of rubber-stamp organization. They have a director who does whatever he wants. They had no acquisition policy. No acquisitions are ever presented to the board. The director accepts whatever he wants. He does whatever shows he wants. He deaccessions whatever he wants. And really, nothing is—there would be a list at a board meeting that, you know, so-and-so has given seven objects, and you look around the room. "Where are the objects?" Well, no, they are not brought to the board meeting. So I said, "This is crazy." I said, "You know, you guys, you don't realize that ultimately the board of trustees is responsible."

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

You see, not the director. The director is a paid employee. That's why it's a trust. They are the trustees. I said, "You can't do that." And if you have a problem with the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] over the deaccessioning or value of something, the board is liable, not—so they said, "Oh, yes, yes. Yes, maybe you should frame an acquisition policy." So I took our and got other museums' acquisitions policies and this and that and made one up. But I realized then, by that time I realized that they really started saying, "This guy is a troublemaker." They don't want all that. I mean, there's a bunch of people there, again, who are—some of them are interested in art, and some may be very genuinely interested in the museum, but they don't have any direction, and basically they are there because it gives them a certain social status to be trustee of a museum. So a year later I said, "I'm not serving any purpose." And I don't believe in remaining on boards or anything just for the sake of it. I hate titles for the sake of titles. So I gave it up and left the museum and decided that I neither want to be a board member nor a director ever anywhere.

1.18. TAPE NUMBER: X, Side Two (November 6, 1989)

PAL:

That's right. The meeting was over, and then they went into a closed session, so I left and I came home. And about an hour or an hour and a half later, I got a call from Ed Carter saying—the first thing, he said, "Congratulations." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, you are the director of the museum as of today, subject to ratification by the full board on March 1, the March meeting." And then he said, "Were your ears burning for the last one hour?" I said, "No, why?" He said, "Well, they should have been, because Franklin Murphy talked nonstop for an hour on your virtues." [laughter] I mean, they sort of did an about-face about two weeks later or three weeks later, I think. Yeah, it was toward the end of January when they—it was a great shock. I think it's probably the biggest trauma I've ever gone through in my entire life. Really, I mean, the sense of betrayal was enormous. I just felt that they shouldn't have done what they had.

RIKALA:

No.

PAL:

They should have told Hammer, for the sake of the institution, that, "Look, we are a collective body, and. this is what we've decided. We've known someone for many years, fine, and we will stick with it right now. Let's watch for six months or a year, and if, in fact, he becomes a problem to you or to the museum or this and that, we will talk to him." Because I think, I mean, I am—and since I had no desire, anyway, to be the director, I think I would have been amenable to any suggestions done in the proper way.

RIKALA:

Oh, sure.

PAL:

You see? And by that time a lot of people knew that already the cat was out of the bag, so they didn't, even think of saving my face. Fortunately, no one knew except—I mean, what I'm telling you even now most people in the museum or elsewhere don't know. I did finally tell part of this story to the curators the day Rusty Powell called us in at about nine o'clock in the morning, very hurriedly, just as Hammer was calling a meeting in Westwood to announce his

withdrawal from our museum. That's when he called to say that Hammer had betrayed us so—then I said, "Well, I told you so."

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Then I told the curators who were just there, and I said, "By the way, I don't think any of you know what really happened, but this is why I am not the director and Rusty is the director." In fact, Rusty wouldn't have had the job if this hadn't happened. But I'm glad in retrospect in every way that I—as I said, I wouldn't have lasted, because I think I would have come to great sort of—and I liked Mia very much as a person, you know. I mean, I had no problems working with Mia Frost, so I'd have probably lasted as long as she was the president. Because, to be honest with you, it's been downhill absolutely. Her successor [Julian Ganz Jr.], I have never had much admiration or respect for him, and I don't see how I could have—you know, a director has to act very closely with the president of the board.

RIKALA:

Sure.

PAL:

I mean, there's no question about it. And I don't think I could have acted with her successor at all. Then, of course, the other thing I couldn't have done is, I think—again, the museum has moved, in my opinion, in directions that I don't think I would have approved. I just couldn't see myself building that building the way it has been built and where it is placed. I think I would have fought tooth and nail about accepting the Joe [Joseph D.] Price [collection] deal and that building [the Japanese Pavilion]. So I would have probably left. I mean, it would have been—as it is, this way, at least it was not an acrimonious departure.

RIKALA:

No.

PAL:

So that's why I could stay very comfortably as curator.

RIKALA:

Oh, sure.

PAL:

But now you see why all this cannot be really heard and read by everyone right now.

RIKALA:

Oh, of course not.

PAL:

I mean, this stuff has to stay—

RIKALA:

No, it's still too fresh.

PAL:

Yeah, it's too—they won't like it. I'm sure of this. I mean, although this is absolute truth, I can bet you if you went and played it before—you think Franklin Murphy or Ed Carter and company are going to like this? No, because it does not show them in a very good light.

RIKALA:

Well, let's go back in time a little bit and talk about Franklin Murphy. You mentioned some interviews back that Murphy felt that he could bring the Norton Simon collection home to roost. So what I'd like to do is talk a little bit about Murphy and Norton Simon and their relationship with the museum, because they—

PAL:

Well, that's what we were told in 1970, that sort of Murphy's mandate was to—sounds like a nice title for a book.

RIKALA:

"Murphy's Mandate." [laughter]

PAL:

Murphy's mandate was—

RIKALA:

And the one before that would be "LACMA and the Myth of European Art."
[laughter]

PAL:

Yeah. Well, it was, in fact, to deliver the Norton Simon collection, and he wasn't successful.

RIKALA:

Did he have a close relationship with Simon?

PAL:

Well, yes, he knew Simon well. Don't forget, Simon was a regent at the University of California. I mean, Franklin Murphy is highly thought of and highly respected and is a mover and shaker and, don't forget, is tremendously interested in arts. He may have made this blunder, as far as I'm concerned, so personally I may feel that in that instance he proved to be a much weaker man than I thought he should have been. But, I mean, he is, of course, a very influential man. In fact, I would say that, apart from Hammer, really Franklin Murphy is the most nationally known name on our board. So Franklin Murphy was an ideal president that way. Because you need a president of a board of a museum for it to be—to achieve anything is to be able to simply call and say, "Franklin Murphy called me to tell you this and that," and it will work. But unfortunately, none of his successors, or even his predecessors—I mean, you couldn't do that with—[Sidney F.] Brody was not a national name, nor was Carter. I mean, Brody was a name recognized in the L.A. area. And Carter, too. And Carter may have been better known in the business circle. But anyway, there's no question about Franklin Murphy being—and Franklin Murphy, after all, I think is really responsible for bringing Gilbert into the museum and the Gilbert collections. So Franklin Murphy was, and as far as I know—I mean, I don't know how close they were. After all, there has been no business relationship, mind you. Franklin Murphy was the chancellor, and I think Norton Simon, yes, was already a regent when Franklin Murphy was

chancellor at UCLA. And then Franklin Murphy, as you know, moved on to the Times-Mirror Corporation. So he didn't work for Norton Simon or anything, but, yes, they were friends. So I think Franklin Murphy—but I don't know that, again, Franklin Murphy or the museum played their cards right. I think Simon was already disillusioned with the museum. I don't think he had much respect for Ken Donahue as a director. Again, they sort of gave in to him all the time. They did whatever he wanted. As I told you, he wanted decorative arts to be thrown out, so they threw it out. I just don't think you get anywhere by continuously giving in to—and, as I say, they are like children, you know, these collectors. You give in too much and they become spoiled and they want more and more, you see. And then you've had it. You just can't control them. That's what I believe firmly. Now, I'll bet you that if these other elements and people like Olga Hammer and others hadn't been involved, if I could have had direct contact with Hammer, I think Hammer would have understood the administrative problems that these people were creating and would have respected that. I'd never ever spoken with Arthur Gilbert before I became acting director. But do you know that within three days of the day I began, he called me and invited me to dinner to their house? He took me to the Music Center [of Los Angeles County] to hear Zubin [Mehta] play. Now, I don't remember giving in to everything that Gilbert wanted in that one and a half years. And I don't remember Gilbert making unnecessary demands from me, either, you see? Because I think Gilbert knew from the beginning that he's not going to get everything from me, as I knew I'm not going to give in, also, to everything that he wanted. So, I mean, we got along famously. And I had heard all sorts of things. I mean, we were told how difficult this man is, and Donahue of course couldn't stand him, and Bill « [William] Jones, the curator, was constantly complaining about him. Now, I have to tell you honestly, in my one and a half years, I don't have a single complaint about Gilbert. You see, the only complaint I have about Gilbert is that, again, just like the rest of them, soon after I went back to being a curator he dropped me like a hot potato.

RIKALA:

That's terrible.

PAL:

So I said to myself that there is no friendship among these people, as such. You know, it has nothing to do—it's not Pratap Pal the man that he was being friendly with and nice to, it was Pratap Pal the director. So it could have been "Joe Blow" the director. Whoever was the director, Gilbert would have—although I must say that, more than any of the others, he has been more friendly. I mean, in the sense that I have been back to his house once or twice and he has called. He calls. All of a sudden I'll get a call. Maybe nothing for—in fact, in the last six months I haven't heard from him. But when I was ill, he used to call me almost every day in the hospital. But still, nothing like the—anyway, I do know he likes my writing a bit. He's read some of the things I've written. But, I mean, that way I can't—I have to tell you, Ed Carter was the classic. I think after Rusty joined the museum, what happened is that—you see, his name is Powell and mine is Pal, so there's a constant mix-up. Ed Carter would say to his secretary, "Get me Dr. Pal in the museum." So she used to get me when I was the acting director. So after Rusty came, for the first couple of months the secretary would still dial me, you see. I'd take the phone, and my secretary would say that it's Mr. Carter on the line. So I was taking the phone, and I would say, "Hello, Mr. Carter." And he would realize the mistake and he would say, "Oh, I'm sorry, there's been a mistake," and he would hang up the phone. He would never say, "Hello, how are you?" Nothing.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's terrible.

PAL:

Never once.

RIKALA:

That's terrible. These people have no manners.

PAL:

I mean, it was just incredible. The sensitivity was just zilch, zero. Anyway, I think that the same thing happened with—and I can tell you that for a fact—I think they again gave in to Simon on everything. And here I'm afraid Franklin Murphy didn't, in my opinion, come up with any bright ideas to treat or bring—he was throwing the same kind of bait, you might say, that the others

were, so that he wasn't successful I'm not surprised. I didn't know Simon at all. When I came, I was told that Simon had voted against the purchase of the Heeramaneck Indian collection at the board meeting. Now this, as I said to you once before, I did confront Simon with many, many years later, and he denied it completely. So I don't know who is lying and who's telling the truth. Frankly, there's no way I'll know. What does seem surprising is that he ultimately became such a big collector of Indian art.

RIKALA:

Exactly.

PAL:

I mean, so—you know. Anyway, he made no attempt to meet with me, either. A couple of things I remember. I don't know which election it was. '70? Yeah, 1970, I suppose. You know, he stood for the Senate.

RIKALA:

Oh, I didn't know that.

PAL:

Yeah, he stood for the Senate, U.S. Senate, on the Republican ticket, the primary at least. And, oh, we were given "Vote Norton Simon" bumper stickers.

RIKALA:

Oh, that would be great.

PAL:

And the whole museum was sort of—we were almost ordered as if we all had to try to elect Simon. And I think that was wrong. I did hear, also, that he and Ed Carter did not get along from UCLA. They were both regents, and, as you know, Simon had tried to take Carter to court once over the whole Irvine Ranch deal. So that was a problem, okay? The second problem was, of course, when they made Hammer a trustee. I think that put Simon off completely. Don't forget Simon was put off already in 1965 because of the naming of the building after Ahmanson.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

As a matter of fact, Ahmanson first wanted the whole museum to be known as the Ahmanson Museum. And of course, Simon had completely—then, as you know, Simon had committed the first million dollars to build a building, which he withdrew when they named the Ahmanson [Gallery] building after Ahmanson. And I think it would have been wrong to have named the whole complex—

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

The whole museum after Ahmanson. I mean, unless Ahmanson had given much more money or something and had a tremendous collection. You know, there must be some better justification than a \$3 million grant for a \$10 million complex. Anyway, you see, Simon was already soured. Then, you see, Simon was essentially a product of Rick [Richard F.] Brown, and Rick Brown was fired. Again, Ahmanson was the principal architect of that. Although Simon, I gather, did nothing to defend Rick Brown. Now, Simon told me his side, that he was not here at the time of the meeting; he was in Europe or somewhere. Whereas I have heard from Rick Brown's side that they did get in touch with him and had told him that this was a serious matter and that he should fly back or come back for the meeting. He never did. I think he then couldn't and wasn't perhaps big enough to confront Ahmanson, also. You know, just as Murphy and Carter capitulated before Hammer, you see. I mean, even big shots have their limitations, right? There are bigger shots always. Okay? So I think this is exactly what must have happened, that Simon had an excuse of not being able to make it back in time for the meeting, and he didn't try because he did not want to get into a confrontation over Rick Brown. And he probably would have lost, because, after all, Ahmanson had given more money. The building was named after Ahmanson. Whereas Simon I don't think had enough—he had a trump card in his hand. He could have turned round and said, "Well, here's my collection."

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

"And I'm giving it to you provided Rick Brown stays." He could have even demanded that "I want my whole collection to stay in, say, the [Frances and Armand] Hammer Building," or something. "Give me the whole building." And I think they could have done that, because later on—after all, why did they sell the Hammer Building? In other words, when Litton [Industries] couldn't pay for it, why did they sell it to Hammer? Why didn't they just say, "Here, Norton, you take this building"? They should have just given him that building, you see? I mean, it seems incredible to me that—you know, there are so many options. When I think what they've done for fifth-rate collections, that here was the greatest collection within their grasp, and they did all the wrong things, thinking he was being pleased, but did not make the bold offers—you see what I mean? Maybe they did. I don't know. I mean, I'm just saying—but I never heard of anyone—you know, there was nothing they could do with the Ahmanson building, and I couldn't see Simon leaving his collection to the Ahmanson building. Don't you see? I mean, someone should have thought of that.

RIKALA:

Yes, it's—

PAL:

That here are these two men who didn't get along from day one. And, of course Simon was hanging the pictures in the museum because he had to. By law he had to. His collection had to be in a public place because it belonged to foundations, you know, the bulk of it. But his collection was dispersed elsewhere, too. I mean, things were being shown in other places. Anyway, so, number one, it goes back to the foundation of the museum and Ahmanson's firing of Rick Brown, then, I think, Carter's presence and their hostility. I'm just telling you why I think Murphy couldn't have succeeded even if he were a genius.

RIKALA:

Yeah. Yeah, he was doomed.

PAL:

And the fourth thing was, I think, the final blow. The straw that broke the camel's back was the election of Armand Hammer. Now, if I were Simon with that kind of quality collection, and I saw my colleagues on the board and the director then going after a fifth-rate collection by comparison then—I mean, now, mind you, at least Hammer does have some good pictures, one of which happens to be an—ex-Simon picture.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

The great van Gogh, you see. But at that time, in 1970, the Hammer collection had been panned that year. That year! That very year we were—*The Washington Post* had written—I mean, you should read that. It's embarrassing. And this, is what Simon definitely told me. I mean, I'm not telling you this part. He's never spoken about his thing about Ed Carter. In fact, he has always said Ed Carter has some very nice Dutch pictures. And Ed Carter has always told me—Ed Carter also admires Norton Simon's collection and taste. I'm sure if Norton Simon had turned around and said, "Well, I'll give you the collection if Ed Carter steps down from the board," Ed Carter would go like that. I mean, immediately. I think that I can tell you. But Norton Simon simply thought it [Hammer's election] was a great insult, almost, to him and to his collecting and his taste, and within a year after that, he left. I think he left—let me tell you, '72, he was still there. I think '73, I—no, '70, I came, so I didn't meet him that year. 'Seventy-one. Did I meet him? You can get the date. I'll have to look up some of it. I think '71 or '72. He left in '72, latest, I know, somewhere around there. He left in '72, and I finally met him. What happened is that he married Jennifer Jones, and Jennifer Jones was always interested in the Orient. She does yoga every morning, and she is interested in India and China and all these countries. Just put that off one minute. [tape recorder off] So it was the summer of '71 when he and Jennifer Jones went off for a belated honeymoon. They went to Hawaii. And I think it took less than twenty-four hours to bore Norton Simon, because he is not the surfing and the beaching

type. He needs constant intellectual stimulation, or business, commercial, or—well, both are intellectual activities. I mean, he is a sharp cookie. There's no question about it. I think of all these men, I think his is the most incisive brain. There's no question about it. That I know. So he told her that he was bored, and she said, "Well, where do you want to go?" They were sort of discussing. She said, "Have you ever been to India?" And he said, "No." She said, "Well, let's go to India." So they flew off to New Delhi. And it's typical of Norton Simon that in New Delhi he thought of this Indian curator that he has in the Los Angeles County Museum. I remember I was installing the Indian collection. I had gotten the board to approve Pauley Hall, on the main floor of the Ahmanson building, to be given to me to install the Indian collection, for which there were no galleries. So imagine. I mean, in 1970, of course, we had done a special exhibition in the Hammer in the fall, but then there was no room. So Pauley Hall was lying vacant, where they used to hold parties. In fact, it's strange. I have never seen a museum where an enormous hall was designed—a banquet, like a banquet hall, a ballroom—literally for parties. That's why it was designed. I mean, I'm just astonished. And that's what Ed [Edwin W.] Pauley wanted. Now, you see, Los Angeles does have very peculiar people. He had paid for it, so I suppose he wanted another Pauley Pavilion, right there in the middle of the museum. [laughter] Well, so this was fallow space. So the board approved, and I was installing the Indian collection, and I got this phone call that Mr. Simon is calling you from New Delhi. So I took the phone, and there was actually Daryl [Eisley] saying, "I'm going to put you on this," whatever, intercom, sort of, and "three-way conversation." He had called his office, and Daryl had called, and Daryl Eisley was then his curator. So three of us had a conversation. He said he was in New Delhi—that's the first time I ever spoke with him—that he was in New Delhi, and where should he go and what should he see? So I said, "Is your bride with you?" And he said, "Yes." So I said, "Well, you must go and see the Taj Mahal in Agra. And you should go to the National Gallery [of Modern Art], the National Museum [of India] in Delhi." So that was it, and he went. And about two, three weeks later, I got a call from him again saying he had brought with him some ivory pieces, and would I come and take a look. And I said, "Well, you are still a trustee." So it is not true that he left in '69, as it has been—you know, some time.

RIKALA:

Yeah, so he was in the seventies.

PAL:

Yeah, but—no, no. No, no. I'll tell you, he left the museum in '72. He was on the board until 1972. Anyway, I had to go and look at them, so I looked at them. Of three, two were modern and one was nineteenth century. And he was quite pleased with himself that he got one out of three right. And it, in fact, is a very fine piece. It's the chess piece, the Indian chess board with men that's with him still in the museum. So then he said he is interested in Indian art, and where could he find some? So I told him who the leading dealers were. So he said, "Well, when are you going to New York next?" And I said, "I am, in fact, going in a month or so." He said, "Well, will you do me a favor? Will you make a selection of the best things with the dealers and reserve them for me, and then I'll go and look at them." And so I did. And a week or so later, I came back, and I reported to him and gave him a list, and he went back to New York a week or so later. I think on that one trip he spent, I think, a million dollars on Indian art. He bought sculpture worth a million dollars basically from three dealers in New York. It was staggering. I mean, this is how—

RIKALA:

So he can capitalize on an interest that quickly.

PAL:

Yes.

RIKALA:

I mean, that he can make sense of something that quickly.

PAL:

That's right. He hadn't done any reading. He realized it's good stuff. Don't forget, it was cheap. I mean, for a million, I think he bought maybe a dozen or more sculptures, or maybe even twenty. Or two dozen, for all I remember now. So that was enormous. I mean, you know, in one blow he had this—again, for a million dollars then, I think you couldn't buy a decent European painting. I mean, impressionists had already shot up and all that. So he bought, and he then, for that—the reason why tell you he had to resign sometime, I think, in '72 is because I had to advise him as long as he was on

the board. So I must have advised him for that first year of his purchase. I was his adviser. And then, finally, a year later he bought this [Shivapuram] Nataraja, the bronze.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

Dancing Shiva. And that's when I told him frankly that I couldn't advise him any longer, because I knew he would become embroiled in a controversy with the government of India. There might be trouble over this Nataraja, and I didn't want to be in the middle of it.

RIKALA:

Yeah. Would you tell the whole story around that?

PAL:

Well, the fact is that this Nataraja was a very well-known Nataraja, and it was found in India in a temple compound, underground. So it was a treasure trove. Now, in India, anything found underground as a treasure trove belongs to the state, not to the individual who finds it. That's the Indian law.

RIKALA:

But how would someone come upon it? Archaeologically, or—?

PAL:

No, no. It was found in the temple compound.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

You see, it had been hidden in the fourteenth century.

RIKALA:

Oh, my goodness.

PAL:

Probably in anticipation of a Muslim attack. That's what they used to do. They used to throw the images into a tank or throw them in a well for safekeeping so that the Muslims didn't vandalize their images. So this, along with a hoard, in fact, had been found. And that temple is still in worship. So it's not even an abandoned temple. So it's really the property of the temple. But it had been found at least ten years before Simon bought it. At least. Or even earlier, really. It was found, I think, in the early fifties. They were deposited in the temple, then somehow they appeared—they disappeared. Some of them, the Nataraja, let's say, disappeared from the temple. The original disappeared, and a replacement was placed in the temple. The original was in a private collector's house in Bombay. And then he sold it. It was sold to a man called Ben [Benjamin] Heller, who lives in New York, who was a collector. In fact, he had, I think—Pollock—he was a collector of—

RIKALA:

Jackson Pollock?

PAL:

He was a textile merchant who had bought several Jackson Pollocks for, oh, \$2,000, \$3,800 each in the forties or thirties, when Pollock was totally unknown.

RIKALA:

Forties and fifties.

PAL:

Yeah, that's when he bought them. And I know that he sold one in the sixties or seventies. In the late sixties he sold the famous one that's now in the [Australian] National Gallery in Canberra, Australia. That's Ben Heller's painting. He sold it for over a million [dollars]. So Ben Heller was flush with all this Pollock money. So he went and bought this. I think he bought the Nataraja for, oh, not more than \$150,000 or \$200,000. He decided this was one of the greatest objects ever. So having sold the Pollock, I suppose his reasoning was, you know, "If I can get a million dollars for a Pollock, my God, this Nataraja, which is of the tenth century or eleventh century, should also be at least \$3

million." So he asked \$1 million for the Nataraja. I didn't have a Nataraja then, but, first of all, none of us could afford it. Secondly, because it was from that particular temple that we knew, Shivapuram, we felt that the Indian government could claim it, and probably would, you know, had a good reason to. Anyway, I mean, if the government claims something from a museum, it's much more difficult for us to fight them than it is for an individual. So Ben Heller did a deal with Norton Simon. Now, this deal was interesting, because he bought a group of objects, say, including the Shivapuram Nataraja. I think he made a \$1.5 million package. In that package I think the Nataraja was priced at, oh, \$800,000, probably. I don't think it was more. But he [Simon] insisted—now, this is the man with whom you have to deal. This is just to give you an idea of his sharpness. He said to Ben Heller that, "Well, when you write up the bill of sale, say the Nataraja is \$1 million and the other five objects are for \$500,000. Okay?" And Heller said, "Fine, it doesn't matter." After all, he's getting \$1.5 million total. Besides, it tickled his ego, because he would have a document to show that actually he got his million dollars. So those of us who were skeptics, he could wave this at us and say, "Look! Norton paid me a million dollars." Fine. So he did that, and both were happy. And then, of course, the lawsuit became a cause celebre, which in itself is a very interesting—although there were lots of interesting legal issues involved in that, the first case was fought in London where, in fact, the government of India lost. Then they sued in New York, but Norton Simon, luckily for them, decided to settle the case by then. And that's how it was settled, out of court, I mean. But Norton Simon—you know, the Indian government wouldn't have gotten the Nataraja, because the statute of limitations had passed, also. And besides, it wasn't stolen or anything. Now what happened is that when he made this deal with the Indian government and said, "Yes, I'll return the Nataraja in ten years after showing it here for ten years," he confronted Ben Heller and demanded his money back for the Nataraja, because that was part of the clause.

RIKALA:

Oh, such a clever, clever man.

PAL:

You see? And not only that. He had actually paid \$800,000 for it, but he had to get \$1 million back.

RIKALA:

Because that's what the contract said.

PAL:

That's what the bill of sale said.

RIKALA:

That's extraordinary.

PAL:

Okay? Now, you see? That's Norton Simon. Okay? Norton Simon, as you know, got the Pasadena [Art Museum] building by paying off the million dollars that the board of trustees owed on that building. I mean, now, there were thirty of them, okay, on that board, say, twenty-five, thirty people, including Norton Simon's brother-in-law, Fred Weisman, and Bob [Robert A.] Rowan, and all these others. It was not that it was an impoverished board or anything, the Pasadena Art Museum. Now, having raised the money, built this building and all that, just think how stupid they were—their own self-centeredness and their own bickering—that they couldn't raise the last million dollars. Which, frankly, I mean, Fred Weisman could have himself—

RIKALA:

Pocket money. [laughter]

PAL:

Yeah, given, okay? They didn't. And Norton Simon, smart as he is, took advantage of that and came out and said, "Fine. Here is a million dollars. But sign me a ninety-nine-year lease for the building." The stupid people did. So Norton Simon got that building from them. For \$1 million, he practically bought—I think at that time it was—a \$13 million complex.

1.19. TAPE NUMBER: XI, Side One (November 8, 1989)

RIKALA:

I thought tonight we would resume our discussion of Norton Simon, finish up a little bit with that. Then we could move on to talk about "Rusty" [Earl A.] Powell [III], if we have the time to get onto that, and how LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] has changed over the eighties. But we sort of left off at the part where Norton Simon leaves LACMA, and I was wondering what the actual circumstances were, to recount what the circumstances were that Simon left LACMA. We finished up last time talking about how he acquired the Pasadena Art Museum, but I'm not—

PAL:

Yes, but I think we also did discuss, really—at least, I gave you some speculative reasons why I thought Simon left.

RIKALA:

So it was an accumulation?

PAL:

So, I mean, apart from his displeasure with some of the actions of the board and perhaps some of the individuals on the board, he also claimed that we had—at least he told me that we had damaged some of his art and didn't know how to take care of the art properly at that time. But frankly, I don't believe that. I think that's just an excuse. And, of course, now that you see he has his own museum, I mean, one wonders whether he ever intended to be part of a larger organization such as LACMA. Like [Armand] Hammer, he probably nurtured the desire always to have his own museum.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

And certainly collection-wise he has much more reason to have his own museum than does Armand Hammer or, I think, anyone else in this city. I mean, Fred [Frederick] Weisman sometimes thinks of having his own museum, but I think it absolutely makes no sense, especially now that we have two contemporary art museums [Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) and the Temporary Contemporary] in this city. I mean, apart from the [Museum of] Contemporary Art downtown, LACMA also has its new contemporary wing.

And virtually every other museum within a fifty-mile radius of Los Angeles shows and deals with contemporary art. I mean, Newport Beach [Newport Harbor Art Museum] and Long Beach [Museum of Art] and La Jolla [Museum of Contemporary Art], and, I mean, the whole lot. So that I really don't see that, in any case, again, in terms of—I don't know whether a private museum of contemporary art can really be popular. Anyway, I feel it's not necessary. So I think Norton Simon, to some extent, always wanted his own museum. Although perhaps if we had played our cards differently, we may have been able to retain him. I don't know. The problem is really that he is really a very, very intriguing and unpredictable person, so that you really don't know what goes on in his mind. I mean, take, for instance, this whole business of his giving his collection to UCLA.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

I mean, if you recall all this, I think that was all hogwash. And I think, again, UCLA Chancellor [Charles E.] Young was no match for Simon, and he hadn't a clue what was going on. He was completely caught off guard, I think. Simon had no intention of giving his collection to UCLA. I think it was a good publicity ploy for him at the time.

RIKALA:

For Simon.

PAL:

For Simon. You know, he got a lot of coverage in the papers, he got in. And I think from time to time, just as he did with the [Shivapuram] Nataraja image, the dancing Shiva—he got enormous publicity out of that—I mean, getting on the *Today Show* and all that, which is not easy. So I think this UCLA business was also a—

RIKALA:

Do you think he does that with a certain consciousness, though? A forethought? Or is it that the opportunity presents itself?

PAL:

Oh, absolutely. No, no, no, no. I think he does that. He manipulates his own destiny that way, there's no question about it. I mean, he may pounce on an opportunity if it came along, but he does think things out. He does nothing in a hurry. He never, never bought a single piece of work—I mean, he's a very slow buyer. He goes on and on, and he goes all over the world for free opinion if he has to.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

Oh, sure. So that he is very cautious that way. He weighs all the pros and cons of an issue before he acts, so I don't think anything is impulsive with him.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

No. No, nothing is impulsive.

RIKALA:

Well, that's interesting.

PAL:

And as far as I know, his museum is going to remain as is. I mean, there's speculation that, well, [the J. Paul] Getty [Museum] might buy it, or it might merge with the Getty at some time. I don't think at least while he's alive. What happens after his death and what the trustees do ultimately I don't know, I can't predict. I mean, I can't see him wanting to sort of merge with the Getty. After all, he is a name, and he's got an ego, too. He wants the Simon collection to be identified as Simon's collection.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

So that I just don't see how—in any case, I mean, as far as I know, and as far as he has told me, his museum is going to stay as is, where it is. And I don't see that—lord, there's been a lot of speculation that, oh, one reason why he won't be able to keep a museum is that he can't afford to fund it. Well, I don't think that's true, either. I mean, that's really saying that the man is a fool. And for heaven's sake, he is not. I mean, he's one of the smartest men I have ever met, and I have met a lot of smart men. He wouldn't go in to make a museum and take a step like that without having adequate financial means to support it. It costs very little, really, to run his museum. It's run very efficiently. They don't have any exhibition program. They're open only four days a week. So the costs are not enormous. Right now I think the total annual budget of that museum is, I don't know, maybe around \$4 million or so. I mean, it's—you know, so that's not that much money, and after all, they do generate income from admissions and all that. And they have very good attendance, as you know.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

So I think it will stay. It will stay as is.

RIKALA:

What about his collecting policy or philosophy? I mean, he has Cambodian art, which you mentioned not very many people collect. He seems to have a very vanguard philosophy towards art.

PAL:

Not really, no.

RIKALA:

I mean, not risky.

PAL:

No, no. I don't think that. I mean, after all, he's quite conservative in his collecting. Did you know he collects old masters and nineteenth century? Basically he's a collector of European painting. He has some sculpture, but not

much. Most of them are twentieth-century sculptures, Rodin and some of the later—Barbara Hepworth and Degas and [Andre] Malliot, also. Anyway, I mean, most of the sculpture he has is twentieth century. But not modern. He does not collect modern art. I don't think he has any empathy for contemporary art at all. And as you know, that has caused some problem ever since he took over the Pasadena Art Museum, because Pasadena did and does have a collection of contemporary art.

RIKALA:

And they have the Galka Scheyer [Blue Four Collection].

PAL:

The Galka Scheyer is all right because, you see, [Paul] Klee and [Wassily] Kandinsky and [Alexei von] Jawlensky and all these are part of his collecting pattern. When I say contemporary, I mean real contemporary stuff. I mean, say, post-World War II stuff, American stuff. I don't think he will—he has not collected that, and he probably won't. He definitely won't. There's no question about it. But no. He is an extraordinarily shrewd buyer. I think, considering the times and the period when he started collecting, I think he's done fantastically. I mean, just think, even though he sold a van Gogh, which now belongs to Hammer, he still has seven van Goghs, you know. I mean, that's—

RIKALA:

That's quite a lot.

PAL:

That's a lot of van Goghs for one person to own. If you calculate by today's prices, that's over \$200 million at a very conservative estimate. I mean, technically, don't you see that he can't really—? Even if he needed some money to add to an endowment, he could sell one or two paintings and still keep the bulk of—if he sold one van Gogh, he'd still have six. And one van Gogh, if you got \$50 million and added to that, I think that's plenty to take care of his museum.

RIKALA:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

PAL:

Say if he has \$50 million. And if you think that's not enough—and some people may think that a \$50 million endowment isn't enough to run a museum in perpetuity—so he needs another \$50 million. Well, they can sell one painting or two paintings, and they'll have the other \$50 [million]. Then they'll have a \$100 million endowment, which is enormous.

RIKALA:

Yeah, yeah.

PAL:

Which should definitely take care of his museum. But apart from that, I mean, he is essentially an aesthetic person, although I think now he's a little more interested in the broader art-historical aspect and also in the culture behind the art. But by and large I would say that he believes that art should be seen and bought also by the eye. And that's what he has done. He has bought pictures, but he has bought—at least that's the impression he gives. But then, as I told you, the way he goes and picks everyone's brain before making a decision or buying a picture also shows you that he doesn't, at the same time, really have enough self-confidence almost. Because, I mean, why would you want to have every Tom, Dick, and Harry's opinion to buy a piece if you were absolutely sure that this is it, you like it, and you should buy it? No, he'll ask them, like, questions that the board usually asks curators. So he does make his final decision by taking everything [into consideration]—the importance of the picture, its rarity. All that also goes into his decision. Now, the Indian and Cambodian collections, I have to say, why he bought such a large collection is a bit puzzling to me.

RIKALA:

It is?

PAL:

Because, as I said, his main emphasis has always been on painting. European painting. And although he will tell you, if you talk to him, that he has never disliked oriental art, that he has always been interested in it, the spark may have been lit initially by Jennifer Jones [Simon], But what fanned the fire,

really, was perhaps two things. Maybe at that point he had reached a sort of a peak or a plateau in his European collecting. I think European prices started escalating, so he also had—you know, he had also built—the basic collection was already very well formed by 1971, when he became interested in India. I mean, as you know, he had bought the whole [Joseph] Duveen estate collection and kept the best things and sold the less interesting stuff and got quite a lot of money. Then I don't know when exactly, which year, he bought all the Degas collection.

RIKALA:

Right, which is a—

PAL:

The Degas maquettes.

RIKALA:

It's like a very large—

PAL:

That was a very, very big collection. But it was not much money at the time, as far as I remember. It was really very, very reasonable—I think maybe a couple of million. I don't think it was more than that. So Indian sculpture, when he went to India and saw it in its context, I think he did realize that it is a great tradition in sculpture. He then found the prices, I think, extraordinarily cheap compared to European art.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

And I think he genuinely got to like Chola bronzes. Now, that he did. I have no doubt about it, that he loves Chola bronzes. And that's very easy to do, because Chola bronzes, in some ways, they are the closest to the Western art aesthetic tradition in sculpture, because most Indian sculpture otherwise, especially in stone, is relief sculpture.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

Whereas Chola bronzes are modeled in the round. They're free-standing bronzes. You can put them on a pedestal as you can a Greek or Roman sculpture. And it's very naturalistic, also, much more naturalistic than most other schools of Indian sculpture. I think it's simpler. Iconographically, also, it's simpler. I think this likeness of Chola sculpture is a genuine aesthetic experience for him. But he went gung ho. And there again, you see, you would have thought he would have said, "Well, why should I duplicate what is already there in Los Angeles in the county museum?" I mean, why not buy in some area that is not well represented in Los Angeles?

RIKALA:

But don't you also—? The other interpretation is because L.A. has it, it must be good. Because L.A. has such a big collection, it must be good. Therefore, I too must have something that's good.

PAL:

Well, that could be, but, I mean—

RIKALA:

I mean, that's very simple, but I wondered about that.

PAL:

Yeah, that could be. But I mean, I wonder if L.A. had a great Chinese ceramic collection, would he have gone into Chinese ceramics? I don't know. I mean, that's why I can't really say whether L.A. 's purchasing the Indian collection influenced him in any way to buy. But, again, if the policy was—there has been sort of an unwritten sort of agreement around here about the museums. Except for European art, which they all seem to duplicate—but in other areas, they shouldn't duplicate. And, oh, that Brancusi, in fact.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Yeah. He has that Brancusi, which is an Indian—it came out of India, anyway.

RIKALA:

But he shows it with the other European modern—it's not in the same gallery space at all.

PAL:

No, no, no. No.

RIKALA:

It's way in the back.

PAL:

Yeah, that's right.

RIKALA:

He's taken the context.

PAL:

He did try. He did even try in the display—he did intersperse various arts, various traditions in galleries. I mean, at one point you could go in and, some years ago, you could—he put a Chola bronze, let's say, in a European painting gallery, which, I think, is Rick [Richard F.] Brown's philosophy he was following. That's how Rick Brown—

RIKALA:

Really?

PAL:

Yes. When I went to Fort Worth [Texas, Kimbell Art Foundation], I saw that he had all of the arts sort of mixed all over. But I think in his—it doesn't work. I think you can have sculpture. in a gallery. I think it would be very effective to have a Greek sculpture, an Indian sculpture, a Chinese sculpture, say, to show the differences, or looking at form. But I think if you put a sculpture out there against a wall with a lot of huge European paintings, I think you'll lose it. There's no way that people are going to look at it. So he withdrew that. Anyway, as I said, with Indian art, I think the market and his—I think he was

like a little boy who had gotten a new toy and began to then become obsessed and to play with it until it bores them, and then they sort of cast it aside. And I think that's what happened with him when he first got into Indian sculpture. He never bought Indian—he has some Indian paintings. He does. Yes, I must say. But, I mean, they're unimportant, and he never liked Indian paintings. And I can see that, because once you really are tuned into Western painting, European painting, it's very difficult to like Indian painting, technically anyway. I think you can still aesthetically. But anyway, he didn't. With regard to sculpture, Indian sculpture, there was no method there. I mean, he bought what was available, maybe what he liked, what he thought the price was right for. And he bargained, obviously, with people, with dealers, and it was that game, that transaction that was very important to him.

RIKALA:

It was the appeal.

PAL:

He loved that, yeah, the negotiation and the bargaining. And so it's spotty. It's not quite an art historically complete collection like ours is. But it has extraordinary things in it, no question about it.

RIKALA:

Pieces, yeah.

PAL:

And one thing that he did, and I'm glad he did that, was that he concentrated—he also bought quite a bit of Cambodian and Thai material, which we have very little of. So in that sense, that part of the collection does compliment ours. But I have to tell you that if the two collections were put together under one roof—his Indian and Southeast and ours—I mean, it would almost be unbeatable anywhere. I mean, it's just staggering. It's a staggering collection. And in my opinion, that's what he should do. But I don't think he will. And now he's too ill, really, to sort of take an important step like that. I think that was also—his health was also against the whole UCLA merger.

RIKALA:

Really?

PAL:

I mean, I couldn't see Simon sort of upsetting the apple cart or taking an initiative in the condition that he has been in for the last four, five years. I just don't see that.

RIKALA:

I don't know what his illness—

PAL:

Well, he is very ill, let's say. He is virtually paralyzed.

RIKALA:

Oh.

PAL:

And can only move in a wheelchair, paralyzed from the neck downwards, more or less. So, you know, he's—

RIKALA:

That's very sad.

PAL:

Yeah. The UCLA project would have been a major, major undertaking, and I couldn't see him being serious about it. And I'm very surprised that people like Young and others who know him, have known him probably longer than I have, don't seem to know the man as well as I think I do. I mean, to be honest, it's just amazing. I read all the statements, and Bill [William] Wilson and the *L.A. Times* and their reporting. It was rubbish! I mean, they haven't even a clue. They didn't have a clue what was going on—all speculative and without any real knowledge of the personality or the brain behind that facade. The way it works, the subtle—. [laughter] I mean, it's just—it's quite fascinating, I must say. Although it can be a very frustrating experience with him, at the same time I must say it's very stimulating, stimulating, intellectually stimulating in some ways, because it's sort of like a game. You are playing a game, and he's playing a game, and you don't know what's going to be next.

And I found that, with him, quite interesting. I mean, even as late as two years ago—what was it? Not last—no. In fact, December '88, I think, he called me up, and we met, and we had a two-hour session about his museum and this and that. He again asked me if I would go and work for the museum.

RIKALA:

Really?

PAL:

Yeah. So there has been that love-hate relation. I mean, we fought. There, you see, it's very interesting. Now, as I told you, I dropped him the day he decided to buy the Shivapuram Nataraja. I said, "I'll be in trouble with the Indian government." So I said no. I said, "Don't say anything about my advising you," this and that. And then, of course, he left the museum, and so our rift was sort of permanent. And I also started resenting the fact that he had used us and we had nothing to show for it. I told him that, "I don't see why I should give you free advice." You see, I mean, "You haven't given a single piece to the museum. You haven't given any money to the museum for—well, Dr. Pal has been nice and helpful, and here is \$10,000, or something."

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

Nothing. "So I don't see why I should give you free advice." And I remember we had a long—in '73 or so, I think, we had a long meeting at which he offered to sort of retain me privately as an adviser. But I turned it down, because I didn't want to work for an individual, because then you are obligated. If you get paid, you have to do what the man says.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

But we always spoke frankly. I told him what was on my mind, and he—and look at it. We parted company as far back as '73, by which time his basic Indian sculpture collection had been formed, anyway. And I don't think he

bought much further, much beyond that date. I think he continued buying till about '75 or so and then stopped. Completely stopped. He hasn't bought an Indian piece in the last, oh, ten years at least, if not more. He just stopped. And, of course, even European, he has bought very few things. Very choice, but very—the last two, three years, I don't think he's bought a single European thing of any kind. So the collection has become static, from that point of view. It hasn't grown much. Certainly the Indian collection, there has been absolutely no addition. He fools around, and he occasionally says he'll buy and brings an object out and keeps it for months and months, but then he doesn't buy it. So, I mean, I think his buying days are over. He's not going to buy any more art before he dies. I'm sure of this. But anyway, so he did—now, that's why I feel that I am right in saying that most of these men, if you continuously give in to them, then they lose interest in you, and the challenge is gone, sort of. If you stand up to them and tell them what you think and they respect you, then I think you have a better chance to get things out of them. That's my feeling. And I think that's where we have erred. The museum has consistently been too obliging to all these guys, and I think that's been part of the problem.

RIKALA:

What's interesting about the Norton Simon Museum [of Art] is the unexpectedness of finding the Indian art there in the gallery. You turn a corner, you're in a very long rectangular space, and suddenly you walk into this other kind of space. The quality of light is very different, and it's dramatically very different than any other part of the museum. It's intriguing in that it's shocking in some way. And I'm always curious as to the appeal of that. You know, is it inviting? Do people go in? Or do they shy away from it?

PAL:

Oh, yeah, there are a lot of people there. They do go in. I mean, they may not look at the stuff with the same sort of interest as they do with his van Gogh or Picassos or Gauguins and all that. But every time I've been there, people have—I think they're intrigued by the fact—they're surprised.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

So they go in, and they look around. They walk around, some look. So I think more people see that Indian collection than see [the one] in our museum.

RIKALA:

Yeah, partly because it's attached. Because it's an attached wing rather than a separate floor.

PAL:

Well, yes, of course. That design of that [LACMA] building is a disaster. And now it's even worse. People just don't come in. And we are right on the fourth floor, so by the time people have gone through two floors, they are exhausted, and they leave, probably, if they do come into the museum. Whereas you're right, in Norton Simon, it's such a small place, anyway—

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

So people do see it.

RIKALA:

How do you feel about the sculpture garden at the Norton Simon, that there are pieces outside? Is that—?

PAL:

Oh, I think that's very nice.

RIKALA:

Is that appropriate?

PAL:

There are a lot of Indian pieces outside.

RIKALA:

Yeah, that—

PAL:

I think that's very handsome. I think there's nothing wrong with that.

RIKALA:

Is it appropriate, though, or—?

PAL:

Sure. I don't see anything wrong with it.

RIKALA:

Yeah. Because that's quite delightful, then. That's a very different-feeling environment. I guess that's the interesting aspect of that museum, that you have one room that has reds [color of walls] and spotlights and very singular pieces.

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

And then you have this outdoor environment, which challenges you to interact with the sculpture quite differently.

PAL:

Well, except that, again, I find that, first of all, as you know, there are staff—there's that, as you say, round gallery on the main floor, up there, and then here's a second gallery downstairs, and then stuff outside. Now, outside stuff is fine; I have nothing against it. It's better to be seen than—I mean, to have it there, so that one can see it, then. But this separation doesn't make much sense to me. And it's a hodgepodge downstairs, and it's a hodgepodge upstairs. It's not as if, say, you could follow something chronologically and see the early stuff and then go down—

RIKALA:

No, it's very hard to make sense of it.

PAL:

No, no, it doesn't—

RIKALA:

Indeed, I think what makes that even more apparent is the way the spotlights are used in the galleries, that each object is considered very individually, even inside the gallery space. And that it's a very—

PAL:

Yeah, well, that's only the upstairs gallery.

RIKALA:

That's true.

PAL:

There's no such drama in the downstairs gallery.

RIKALA:

That's true. That's true, it's just—so I guess the next question would be, then, how is Indian art best meant to be seen, in a broader question? Because something about this doesn't make sense somehow. It's as if you wanted each piece to have its own individual space in that upstairs gallery. For me, anyway, as a museum goer, it's a bit of a conflict for me there.

PAL:

I see. Well, no, I wouldn't display the stuff that way. I would probably do it some other way. Also, the space is unfortunate. You know, it's a circular gallery, and somehow it doesn't work very well.

RIKALA:

This is an old photograph, because there's quite a lot more in the space now. Let me ask another broad question. How, then, has exhibition and installation style changed in regard to Indian art over the twenty years that you've been doing exhibitions? Do you feel that there's been a change? Has the audience become a little bit better educated in L.A. or the U.S.?

PAL:

Oh, now, let's see. It probably has a little more, but marginally. I don't think that we have that much of a bigger audience than we did in, say, 1970.

Although we should. I don't understand why not. I mean, more people travel now to India and, say, China and Japan and all these places than they did twenty years ago. So you'd think that if there was an Indian art exhibition they would come in to see it, having gone, visited the country, and become familiar. But I don't think they do. I don't think that's the case. But then, I don't know. I mean, here, of course—you know, in other places I can't tell you exactly how it is. I have just been told, for instance, that this exhibition that we've lent to the [Arthur M.] Sackler [Gallery] in Washington [D.C.] right now—we've lent an exhibition of 103 objects from our collection to the Sackler, which, I think, will give you some indication of how important this collection is, that we can spare 103 objects.

RIKALA:

Yeah, that's very—

PAL:

And I hear it's very well attended at the Sackler, you see. But the galleries, the permanent galleries here, are almost empty. But for that matter, the entire Ahmanson building is almost empty.

RIKALA:

It's often empty.

PAL:

Because Los Angeles people are just not museum goers, I'm afraid, except for flashy shows—Georgia O'Keefe flowers or [David] Hockney swimming pools or impressionists. This is about the extent of their intellectual ability to be able to take exhibitions. So I don't think there's been any dramatic increase in the number of people who come in to see Indian or Asian art, for that matter. I don't think so. To give you an example of how the Los Angeles audience is a very hyped-up audience, after the opening of China, and then when that first Chinese show came to this country, the big terracotta figures and all that, well, that show was mobbed. Mobbed. And then, I think, six, seven years later, another show came from China with some more of these figures and other things, and hardly anyone came to see that show, you see. It's not deep. It's just skin deep, I think, the interest in any art around here. And perhaps that's

because of the nature of the beast. After all, a lot of people have moved here to sort of get away from urban culture, you might say—for the mountains and the ocean and the sea and the outdoor life and all that. So they're not that interested in going to art museums on a fine, nice day. You see? I think if it rained here more, perhaps we would have more people. Yeah. I am not joking. I think the weather is against us. The climate is against us. Whereas in New York, what do you do on a rainy Sunday in New York, say? You go to the museums. But here it never rains, so you're always out on the beach.

RIKALA:

. [laughter] Some people are. Yeah. . Well, what do you aspire, then, to convey to the public once you've got them in the museum? What do you hope to communicate?

PAL:

With my collection?

RIKALA:

Yeah, with your personal contribution.

PAL:

Well, my hope is that if a hundred visitors come a day to go through my galleries, and that if these hundred people, say, had never heard of India before, they will at least become aware of this country called India, even if they finds its art strange or whatever. And it may capture the imagination of ten people to look further into what this India is. Maybe ten persons will go to India to see the country by being—and I think that is worthwhile. Secondly, I expect that ultimately, maybe not the present generation of Indians, but the next generation of Indians born here will then want to find their roots when they grow up, you see. Which is a very interesting phenomenon. You see, the Indians who have moved here—and this is true not of just the Indians, I am told of the Iranians also—they are just not interested in their arts and culture at all. At, least not in the arts. I mean, they may be interested in other aspects of culture, like dancing and all that, but they are not interested in the visual arts at all, and they have—unlike the Chinese, the Japanese, you know—I think of all Asian people, the only people who really are as interested in their

arts as the Western people are are the Japanese. The rest of Asians couldn't care less about their artistic heritage. So Indians never come, or rarely do they come to see the collections. And we've just had a spectacular show that just closed this week, *Timur, the Princely Vision*, which was a great show of Timurid art from Iran. And, as you know, we have a very big Iranian population and also Arab population in Los Angeles. Well, the total attendance reached only fifty thousand, you see. Now, that's awfully low, awfully low. I mean, if you think that—I think that a hundred and fifty thousand came to see O'Keeffe, Georgia O'Keeffe. Now, in my opinion, with all due respect, the Timurid show is culturally far more significant than Georgia O'Keeffe's work. But of the fifty thousand that came, I don't think even one thousand were Iranians, probably, you see? Now, Indians are no better. And even the Chinese are not that interested, which surprises me. I mean, when we've had Chinese shows, if all the Chinese in the region came to the shows, we'd have a record attendance.

RIKALA:

[laughter] That's true.

PAL:

But they don't come. So that's a problem we've got, and I don't know how to solve it. In fact, I don't think there's any way to solve it, because they were not ever taken to museums or anything in India, so they just don't see this as an educational experience. They never come, they never bring their children, which is sad. But I'm hoping that when these children grow up, then they will become more conscious that they're different from the other, say, white Americans and the black Americans or the Hispanic Americans, and then they'll realize, "Ah, I am an Indian American, so therefore I have my own culture. And what is that culture?" And maybe then they will start coming to the museum and using this cultural resource. But it's very sad, in my opinion, that this is so.

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PAL:

—Indian and other communities. Of course, I think the museum also does very little to reach any particular community. I mean, there's no outreach program

of any kind. We don't even bother whether schoolchildren come in or not anymore. And we have no funding of any kind for publicity, advertising. We do no advertising. And, you know, advertising is essential to bring people in. Media coverage here is very poor. And I think Los Angeles, more than the East Coast, is much more geared to, or much more influenced by, television than any other city I know. I mean, after all, if you think that you are talking, in the greater Los Angeles area, of a constituency of 11 million people—okay? And you've just seen what happened. The [*Los Angeles*] *Herald-Examiner* died.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

And do you know that the total sales of the *L.A. Times* is 1.1 million?

RIKALA:

That's very sad.

PAL:

And I believe that even 50 percent of that 1.1 million don't read the *L.A. Times*, probably don't look at it. Certainly they don't read the "Calendar."

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

I think that half a million probably look at the sports page and the funnies more than anything else.

RIKALA:

Do the crossword puzzle.

PAL:

Yeah, crossword. Well, no, no, no. Crossword, no, no, no, no, no.

RIKALA:

Not even that?, [laughter]

PAL:

Not at all. You're totally wrong. Sports is the main section in that. So that there's this vast, vast—eleven million people, and just tell me that a major exhibition of Persian art. can't even draw 50,000 people in what?—in over two months. Okay? I mean, that is awful. That is awful. So, you see, through newspapers, even if we took out huge ads in the newspaper, it wouldn't do much good. After all, we have 90,000 members now. So they get the member's calendar. Ninety thousand calendars are mailed. If each member came once, not even with spouse or children, just one member, mind you—okay? Membership is for two. Or a family, right? I'm saying, per card, one person came, then the attendance would have been 90,000. So even the members don't come, you see. But I think if television coverage was adequate and they blasted these television commentators, or newsmen said that, yes, this is a good show, go and see, I think more people would go. But television gives no coverage. In fact, have you noticed that with so many channels here, there is absolutely no channel that even in the whole day has five minutes given to cultural events in L.A.?

RIKALA:

That's true.

PAL:

Nothing.

RIKALA:

They'll review movies over and over and over again.

PAL:

Oh, well, my gosh! Every day they review a movie, but they never review anything else. They will never review any exhibitions, no matter how important it is. They won't have a critical reviewer, also. But they, should have ten or fifteen minutes of program—even the public television, I'm shocked that they don't devote fifteen minutes a day to what's happening in the Music Center [of Los Angeles County] or the museum. They have nothing.

RIKALA:

Yeah. That's a good point.

PAL:

Okay? And that's what I think the Getty could do usefully with some of its money. Perhaps even buy time and have a program on television for half an hour.

RIKALA:

That's great.

PAL:

And get personalities. Because there are interesting issues in art today. It's not that the public is totally uninterested in thefts and smuggling and this and that. I mean, there are all sorts of issues. So a television program like that I think could be done both informationally and, you might say, even as a bit of a scandal sheet, if that's what it will take to attract people—readers, viewers. And I think it might help.

RIKALA:

Yeah. That's a good point. Well, who are the critics and reviewers?

PAL:

Oh, nothing. There's only one paper now. You know, there was at least—and I think the L. A. Times reviewer. Bill Wilson, is—I don't have a good opinion of him and his team. So that's unfortunate again. They are not in the least interested in non-Western art, as far as I can see. They know nothing about it, and they don't want to know anything about it, also. So he'll come, and he will review. There will be a review, and he won't have anything exciting to say about it. As a matter of fact, to give you an example, in the last review of the Timurid show, he referred to the Taj Mahal as a palace. Now, if the chief art critic of the L. A. Times doesn't know that the Taj Mahal is a tomb, I mean, then what the hell am I going to do? How am I going to bring the plumber into the museum?

RIKALA:

[laughter] Yeah, that's a good point. Well, going back to the comparison with the attendance at the Georgia O'Keeffe, that seems to indicate that the

museum [is] going public is trying to respond to this very Western tradition of the individual artist, that since the Renaissance we've been concerned with the great individual rather than looking at a cultural development or looking at a development in sculpture or a development in—

PAL:

Well, that's not just this museum, that' s—

RIKALA:

No, no, no. I don't think that. I think that—

PAL:

I think in general all museums in America have that tendency, too. I'm not saying that there shouldn't have been a Georgia O'Keeffe show.

RIKALA:

No, I agree, but—

PAL:

After all, she is a very interesting figure. I mean, honestly, I think more people should have gone to see her. That's not the point, I think. But equally they should come and see the other shows, too. And they should—I mean, it's very frustrating to put in all that work. For instance, that show, the Timurid, was funded to the hilt. I think NEH [the National Endowment for the Humanities] and NEA [the National Endowment for the Arts] between them gave it probably almost a million dollars. Now, if you then divide that amount by the amount of people seeing it, that's a very expensive show. No, the museum does have a pretty broad policy, but it takes about four to five years to plug in a show.

RIKALA:

To book it?

PAL:

To book it. That's how—

RIKALA:

Wow.

PAL:

Yeah, that's how the situation is.

RIKALA:

Well, that's interesting, too. That means that there's some sort of consciousness of what people are interested in seeing, what they—

PAL:

Oh, no, no, no, no. I don't think—when we sit down and discuss shows, people never come into the question, and nothing is done as a policy. There's no philosophy behind it. I mean, it's entirely fortuitous almost. Whoever wants to—this curator feels like doing a show, so we—I mean, I'll give you an idea: We bought a Guido Reni when I was acting director, and it was the first Reni that this museum bought. It was bought with the Ahmanson Foundation. And someone then said, "Well, wouldn't it be nice to do a Guido Reni show one day?" So that's how a Guido Reni show came about. It had no particular reason or philosophy behind it. And most of the shows are done that way, you see. Anyway, we are supposed to sit down and discuss all these things. You know, there's a meeting. All the curators meet with the director once a month, where we discuss acquisitions and exhibitions. The idea being that, "Oh, we should all put our heads together and come up with a rational and defensible policy and send it to the board of trustees for their approval." Well, I mean, as far as acquisitions go, who is going to say anything against someone else's acquisition, sort of? And it's moot, anyway. It's not as if there is a pot of money and we are all trying to sell our idea. There is no money. So we just sit there. We bring something in, and "Joe Blow" presents this, and someone else presents that, and we listen to him or her. And 99 percent of the time, no one even says, "Ah, well, it's a nice painting." You know, nothing. No comments. You know, you present your case before ten wooden faces. So you don't criticize his stuff, and he doesn't criticize yours, and that's how we buy art, okay? So exhibitions, too, basically—that's how we—often exhibitions are not even—in fact, the rule is that we should generate all the ideas for exhibitions and that. But half the time it doesn't even happen that way. The director hears of some exhibition, and he wants it, and so we get it. Or maybe a trustee hears

of an exhibition sometimes. So we have no philosophy behind what we are doing, just as we don't really have one in terms of collecting.

RIKALA:

It's interesting, because MOCA [the Museum of Contemporary Art] seems to have, at least in terms of what I've recently heard, their architectural exhibitions that they're planning to do one now every two years, and they have two or three ideas scheduled in that they're working on. And they've made that a policy now. You know, they've started with the case study house exhibition [*Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses*] as their first architectural show, and they're going to implement that. That seemed quite striking, actually, when they revealed that, because it was, compared to other museums locally, such a firm statement about what we're planning to do with this.

PAL:

No, there is nothing of the sort. I'll give you a couple of instances. I think that will be interesting. When I was acting director, I had to go to Washington for some meetings in connection with the [Hans Heinrich] Thyssen[-Bornemisza] collection/exhibition which had been organized for the National Gallery [of Art]. So there was a press conference, and all the institutions that were getting that show, the directors were invited to the National Gallery to have this national press conference. So I went representing this museum. Then, that evening, I called Charlie [Charles W.] Millard [III], who was then the chief curator at the Hirshhorn [Museum and Sculpture Garden], and said, "Are you free for dinner?" He said, "Yes, I am free for dinner, but there's a very interesting program here, and would you like to attend it after? Let's have dinner and then we'll attend it." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, we have this California artist, Hockney, showing here at the Hirshhorn. His show opened yesterday," or something. "And tonight Hockney and Henry Geldzahler," I think, from New York, an eminent contemporary art expert, "they will be sort of appearing on stage. There will be sort of a colloquium type—." So I said, "Sure, I'd like to. I will go." So in the afternoon I decided to go and see the show. I'd never heard of Hockney, frankly, and I said, "Let me go and see what this guy's—." I went, and I was very, very surprised by seeing these studies of L.A. and the swimming pool series and all these. I said, "God, this is a very

interesting artist. It's all about California. How come I have never heard of him? He lives in L.A., and our contemporary art department has never even mentioned Hockney." So I got quite excited by the material, and I went and attended the colloquium, or presentation, whatever. I even met Hockney, and he was then rather a humble sort of fellow. You know, he was quite shy. I came back, and at the next curatorial meeting I reported on what happened at my Washington visit. And then I said, "By the way, I saw this artist called Hockney, and I thought he is very good. How come we don't have a Hockney show here?" This and that. And our great curator of modern art, Maurice Tuchman, said, "Can I come and talk to you after the meeting in your office?" I said, "All right." So they didn't take up my suggestion of Hockney. In fact, I could see that they didn't think much of the idea. When I went back to the office, Maurice Tuchman came in, and, believe it or not, he virtually told me that I should stick to my expertise in Indian art and leave modern art to him, and that Hockney was a third-rate artist, and they would—no, I mean, I swear to you—

RIKALA:

I believe you.

PAL:

I mean, this is absolute gospel truth. Maurice Tuchman probably won't remember it now, you know.

RIKALA:

[laughter] After last year's—

PAL:

You know, he won't.

RIKALA:

Oh, my God.

PAL:

Okay, so here we could have been the leader in contemporary art. Instead, what do we do? After the whole world has—then, when Hockney goes up to the sky, then, of course, we arrange a Hockney show. So there you are. That's

the kind of environment, you might say. There is no collective responsibility at all there, and nothing is done really by any democratic decision. Each suggests something. Now, I'll give you another example from last week's meeting. We were discussing future exhibitions, and, again, Maurice Tuchman proposes—he first begins by saying, "Well, as you people know, for the last twenty-seven years I have been working on a catalog raisonne of Soutine." You see? You know, I would have been ashamed to announce to the public that it has taken me twenty-seven years to write one wretched book, [laughter] Anyway. "And now I am about to complete that catalogue raisonne, so I'd like to do a Soutine show for 1991 or '92 or '93 or whatever, a retrospective. Of course, we did do a Soutine show twenty years ago here, but I think it's time to take a fresh look at Soutine." And that's it. He sat back, and no one asked him any question. No one even raised the issue, "This sounds fishy." You know, "Your book by an outside publisher is going to come out the same day you're doing the show. We've done a show of Soutine, and Soutine, after all, is not a major, major figure. So why should this institution twenty years later sort of again do another—?" I mean, there are questions one could raise. Nothing. No one raised a voice. I mean, no one could care less. So his show was approved.

RIKALA:

Well, we'll look forward to it.

PAL:

That's how an exhibition was born.

RIKALA:

Oh, my gosh.

PAL:

Whether it has any relevance to our collection, whether it does anything to our collection, whether—does this really, have any sort of a contribution to scholarship? Will it break new ground? Will it be a new interpretation of Soutine? Or is it going to bring an enormous amount of new material into the—? I mean, these are the things you should discuss before—because you are talking of, ultimately, spending at least a million dollars or more. Nothing. All right? Then we hear that, oh, we can't show any—we have a policy, I think,

even. The board even has a policy that private collections really should not be shown in the museum unless a good part of that collection comes to the museum or is promised to the museum or expenses are covered or something, all right? Well, then, why are we taking the [Walter H.] Annenberg show? Annenberg isn't giving us a single picture. As a matter of fact, let me tell you, Annenberg, as you know, a month ago announced he's giving—he gave \$15 million to the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] for acquisitions. He gave, I think, \$10 million to the National Gallery, \$5 million to Philadelphia [Museum of Art]. We are also taking the show, but he didn't give us a penny.

RIKALA:

Well, that's extraordinary.

PAL:

But then, if I go and propose a show of "Joe Blow"'s private collection, then all hell will break loose, and they'll say, "Well, are we getting anything out of it? This and that? No."

RIKALA:

Seems very strange. Very strange. Well, let's talk about the direction—I mean, we've been hinting at this—the direction the museum has been taking in the last, whatever, eight years since "Rusty" [Earl A.] Powell [III] became director. Does his directorship coincide with plans to start the Japanese Pavilion? Did that come soon after? Or is it about the same time?

PAL:

Oh, that came a good deal later.

RIKALA:

Did it?

PAL:

The expansion of the museum really began before Rusty Powell came. What happened, I think that once Norton Simon bought the Pasadena museum, which, as you know, was Pasadena museum of modern art—

RIKALA:

Oh, yeah.

PAL:

There were all these modern art people at a loose end with collections—Frederick Weisman and all these people. Now, some gravitated—and that's when, also, Los Angeles's nouveau riche started collecting modern art, as you know, in a big way. I mean, I don't know, there are a thousand modern art collectors in this city, do you know that?

RIKALA:

Oh, no.

PAL:

A thousand, yes!

RIKALA:

Oh, gosh.

PAL:

And I don't think more than two old masters collectors. Anyway, so I remember that the board immediately pounced on Fred Weisman and made him a trustee of our museum. Okay? They also brought in a man called Eli Broad and Nathan Smooke, both big collectors of—Eli Broad of modern art, and now he has his collection [Eli Broad Family Foundation] in a big warehouse in Santa Monica where you can make an appointment and see it. It's set up there like a public gallery, the Broad collection. And Nathan Smooke, who is an early twentieth-century collector, Picasso and all this. So they thought, "Well, this is the time to rope them in," so to say, and Broad and Smooke were not trustees, but they sort of, by invitation, used to come and sit at trustee meetings, which I found very, very curious, to say the least. I mean, I didn't like it at all. I thought it was very wrong to do that. Acquisitions meetings they were sort of invited to. This was, I don't know, feelers or whatever. Anyway, then, of course, some of them decided to have a museum of modern art there. Now, I remember—again, when I was acting director—now, this is very interesting, let me tell you, because in a sense, I have to take a little credit, although no one else knows or will give me any credit, for the present location of the Los Angeles Children's Museum. Okay? I'll tell you how

that came about. That building is a city building. It's owned by the city. It was, I think, built by the city to be a big restaurant, and no one took the lease, I think. I mean, no restaurant was ever opened there. And that building was lying vacant. And Marcia Weisman—Fred's ex-wife, Norton Simon's sister—Marcia Weisman called me up one day and said, "This building is sitting downtown. Why don't we go to the city and get it, take it, and make it a downtown extension of our museum's contemporary wing, set up a contemporary gallery there?" So I said, "Well, we'd better go and see it first." So one day she came over in her Rolls Royce, and Mort [Morton J.] Golden, the deputy director, and I got into her Rolls and went downtown and saw this building, which is a big, long, like a hanger type of building. It would have been very fine for—so I said, "Yes, that sounds like a good idea." So we then went to talk to the city. And the city said—well, the city didn't quite like the idea of that building being given over to the county. You see, that's when I noticed that there is a tremendous rivalry between the city and the county. We had a long chat, and they sort of said this and that and the other. So we came back that day, nothing happened, and we said, "Well, we'll think about it." We talked. I presented the idea to the board, and we talked. The question was, of course, also, where will we get the money to fix the place up? I mean, it was more expense, and here we were with Proposition 13 and this and that. So it didn't go anywhere. Just then, two young ladies, whose names I forget, made an appointment with me and came and said that they would like to set up a children's museum in our museum, as part of our museum. Anna Bing Arnold had told them to come and see me.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's good.

PAL:

Now, Anna Bing Arnold, one of her passions was, in fact, to have some facility in the museum for children. She always felt that there should be something. And we did have. We used to have a children's workshop, for instance.

RIKALA:

Oh.

PAL:

Yeah, and all that. Unfortunately, all that has gone. Okay? And towards the end of her life, Mrs. Arnold became a bit alienated, I think. You know, her enthusiasm for us had certainly cooled, and I think partly because of all this, you know. She didn't like what was happening. She didn't like the idea of the new building. I know that for a fact. And also the Bing Theater, where, in fact, this children's workshop was underneath, she wanted that to be expanded and something done like a little children's museum. Well, I didn't want to annoy Mrs. Arnold, and I knew that that wouldn't fly at all, because we really didn't have the space there. So that's when it occurred to me that they could take that building downtown, the city building.

RIKALA:

Oh, yeah.

PAL:

So I told them about the building, and I said, "It's absolutely ideal. You go and see it, and you call me up if you like it, and then I'll tell you where to go and who to get in touch with and all that." So the two of them went off. I forget their names now, but if you go to that museum, you can get their names. If you ask them to tell you the names of the two young women who were the founding directors of that museum, they'll tell you. And I'll be able to recognize the names once I hear them. [Ellen Levitt and Jackie Dubey] Anyway, they called. So I gave them the names, and that's how the Children's Museum got that building.

RIKALA:

Very interesting.

PAL:

So I have to say that I did have an indirect hand in the site—not in creating the museum, but at least in helping them get the site. Anyway, so once Proposition 13 happened and we didn't go bankrupt and we were still functioning as a museum, by Christmas, we—Proposition 13 happened in June, and by the end of that Christmas we realized we were okay. That's when what's-his-name, Anderson, Bob [Robert O.] Anderson, who was the chairman and chief executive officer of ARCO [Atlantic-Richfield Company], was on our

board. He's always been interested in contemporary art. So some of the trustees I think persuaded him to get \$3 million from ARCO towards a building for contemporary art. So that was the first announcement of this money given to us. Of course, by that time another group had started toying with the idea of building a contemporary art museum downtown. But, I mean, we felt that there was plenty of room for two sort of institutions being interested in contemporary art. And certainly collection-wise that's true. I mean, there's so much of it here that you could fill ten museums, leave alone two. So that was the first seed money that we got, and it was to be known as the ARCO Gallery of Contemporary Art. The proposal was to build a building for about \$10 million. And this was, of course, done primarily to lure Fred Weisman and possibly Eli Broad and Nathan Smooke. I remember Bill [William] Ahmanson was then the chairman of the facilities committee, and we invited Frank Gehry one day, and Bill Ahmanson and Frank Gehry and Mort [Morton J.] Golden and I went around the whole place sort of roughly trying to figure out, and we decided that the only place to do the building would be, in fact, in front. So that's where the thing was when I really left. That was to be a \$10 million building in front. And I think Frank Gehry had also made a little model of a building at the time. So then, of course, I left, and Rusty Powell came in. And within a year, we—then, of course, we heard that it was going to be by a competition, sort of. You know, at least present-day architects would be invited to present things, and then they will make a selection. A board committee will make a selection. So I know Frank Gehry had made a presentation, but the board went and chose this Hardy, Holzman, and Pfeiffer, a New York company who, I think, made the flashiest presentations. I gather they were so smart, and they had all these green and red and yellow and blue, all sorts of mock-ups in different colors, and so they won the—. [laughter] Strangely, by then—I mean, it was incredible. The building had gone up from \$10 to \$40 million. The cost! So they were going to build a \$40 million building. I said, "Oh, my God." I mean, what really surprised me—I think the biggest change—whether Rusty has done it or who's done it, I don't know. But from the most fiscally conservative board that I had worked with, and certainly before that, that [Kenneth] Donahue knew, all of a sudden we had a board that had gone to the other extreme and gone bananas about spending money. I mean, it just seemed to me—and that's been true for the last—you know, prior to that we never had a deficit budget ever. Now we've never been

in the black for the past ten years. It's always a deficit budget every year, from \$750,000 to \$1 million. So that, you see, has made it necessary to have big blockbuster exhibitions and more exhibitions to generate revenue. We have cut into the attendance of the museum by continuously increasing the daily ordinary admission, which is now I think four dollars or four fifty or something. And, of course, membership has increased to ninety thousand, but it's the kind of membership, I think, that just sends in the check. And my point is whether it's better to have ninety thousand members paying thirty-five dollars or whether it's better to have a two dollar admission and have a hundred thousand people come in, more, or whatever. I don't know, I mean, I would probably prefer the latter, because I think the more people come in, the better for the museum. But all this is partly also because—and that's when I think it's amazing. If you think that in 1978, with Proposition 13, there the museum was almost afraid of closing, and now we have a—what?—\$22-million-a-year budget. Just operating expenses. That's not counting acquisitions or anything, you know. Anyway, so that's what happened. We were already a very exclusive sort of club. We now became an even more exclusive one. The other funny part is that the emphasis of the museum was on the exhibition. We were trying to get away from the exhibition syndrome. And in '78 or something, we were saying that we must try and develop a steady clientele through the permanent collection. But that's all gone through the window, and we have really become a transit place for passing exhibitions. Particularly, the entire logic on which this Anderson gallery was built is nonexistent, you see? No collection came. Fred Weisman, although he is still a trustee, has clearly decided not to give us any—you know, amazing. This building was virtually built for him. I don't know if any trustees have talked with him about it, but certainly he's not going to give us the collection or even a part of it. Nathan Smooke, we gave him a show and a catalog. All right? We even put him on the board. And he has disappeared and I gather is even negotiating with UCLA to do something there with his collection, I think after Simon fell through. Eli Broad had abandoned ship long ago, anyway, before the building came, and went off downtown and became a trustee and patron of the downtown museum.

RIKALA:

MOCA.

PAL:

So here we've put in a—instead of a \$10 million, we've put in a \$40 million building in which we have no collection promised, even, which therefore has become now a showcase for exhibitions. Again, what we do there are these transient exhibitions.

RIKALA:

That's really sad.

PAL:

All right. The building is so awkwardly placed, it's so monumental there, that it completely overshadows all the other buildings.

RIKALA:

The old buildings, it's true.

PAL:

Okay. You come in via this long walkway, stairway, with the Vietnam memorial on your right—you know, I call that big gray slab with all the names the Vietnam memorial.

RIKALA:

That's good.

PAL:

On your right as you come in. And then there's a lot of action—of course, that plaza has become the focal point of the museum. But I don't think anyone realizes that that has been a disaster for the Ahmanson [Gallery] building. You see, what happens now, they come in, if there is a special show they go into the Hammer and see the show. Otherwise they go into the Anderson. They go into the shop. And now, of course, the Japanese Pavilion is there, and that attracts them because that's a classic building for Los Angeles. I mean, that is Hollywood and Disneyland and everything. It epitomizes the L.A. ethos, all right? So people go in there. And not all. I don't think all can do all this, you see, because there are too many distractions. They really can't even walk over to the Ahmanson building, as a result. I don't know. Say, if the museum's total

attendance a year is a million, I don't think even 10 percent come into the Ahmanson building. So the permanent collection's languishing. And then, if you've gone there and seen what they have done, they've put a hot dog stand with benches and chairs—

RIKALA:

Yeah, that gets in the way.

PAL:

Right, so that people don't even know that there is an entrance there to the Ahmanson building.

RIKALA:

No, that gets in the way.

PAL:

Now, for the last two years I have mentioned this to everyone in that museum—to the president, to the chairman, to the ex-chairman, to trustees. No one gives a damn. So I've decided I don't give a damn, either. I think it's most unfortunate. I mean, the principal purpose of the museum is not to make money by this sort of crass commercialism. Do it with taste; don't cut the branch you are sitting on. What amazes me is that the Ahmansons also don't seem to care. Because you'd think that if they wanted they could say, "Look, this is where we are putting all our money. We are buying \$3 million paintings that we want people to come and see." But I haven't heard any of them, or anyone, or—in fact, the president of the board [Daniel N. Belin] is the lawyer for the Ahmanson Foundation.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

So I am afraid great harm has been done to the permanent collections of the museum. Now, although we have increased a bit, what have we bought? We bought, curiously again, there, sort of, we bought some collections.

1.21. TAPE NUMBER: XII, Side One (November 8, 1989)

RIKALA:

So a German collection, you were saying.

PAL:

Well, yes, we [Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)] bought the [Robert Gore] Rifkind [collection].

RIKALA:

Rifkind, that's right.

PAL:

German expressionist collection. We acquired the [Constance McCormick] Fearing pre-Columbian collection, which was a gift. We bought the Proctor Stafford collection for another million [dollars]. I think the Rifkind collection we bought for a million, which was a great buy, no question about it. So what else? Now, again, you see, what amazes me is that we were told that we shouldn't be duplicating, and all the pre-Columbian collection was left behind at the [Los Angeles County Museum of] Natural History, which at that time you would have thought they would have gotten as part of this museum's collection. It was left behind as ethnic material. See how tastes and times change? And here now, despite the fact that there is a big pre-Columbian collection there, we are now buying pre-Columbian art again. But I think it's not going to go any further. As far as I know, it's going to stay more or less static where it is. Anyway, what else have we bought? Well, that's about all. That's really the three collections that—well, one was a gift. The Fearing collection we didn't buy. So we've really bought only two collections, major collections in "Rusty" [Earl A. Powell III]'s tenure, and that's the Proctor Stafford pre-Columbian collection and the Rifkind German expressionists collection. Otherwise, the other major collection that we got as a gift, which I brought in, is the [Edwin] Binney [III] Turkish collection, which is a very significant addition, also. In fact, it's far more important than, say, the Proctor Stafford pre-Columbian collection in the sense that acquiring that collection has made us probably the most important collection of Turkish art outside of Turkey. Whereas the Proctor Stafford collection does not make us the biggest collector of pre-Columbian art outside of anywhere. So from that point of view, the Turkish collection is extraordinarily important.

RIKALA:

And this is Binney, Edwin Binney.

PAL:

This is Ed Binney. And Ed Binney was at one time the biggest collector of Islamic art, I would say, in America. He was a very interesting fellow. He was an heir to the Binney [and Smith] pencil fortune. You know, crayons?

RIKALA:

Uh-huh [affirmative]. Crayola, yeah.

PAL:

Crayola. That's Binney. He was, as I said, the heir to that fortune. And it was a family from Portland, Oregon. He himself was educated at Harvard [University]. He has a doctorate in French literature. He has a doctorate in French literature from Harvard. He, of course, never worked and lived off the income of the Binney pencil thing. Then why he became interested in Islamic art, frankly, I don't know. But he used to collect Persian, Turkish, and Indian. And I don't know that anyone else, apart from maybe Chester Beatty—although Chester Beatty has very little Turkish material, so that Binney is the only one I know that bought in all three areas extensively. And then in the seventies, when, in fact, the Persian market just shot up, he, I think very wisely, decided that he would like to concentrate on the Turkish and the Indian. So he sold all the Persian material, or most of it. And he then really strengthened his Turkish collection. He was the biggest buyer. I mean, anything that came into the market he bought. I had first met him in 1964, when I came in 1964, and we liked each other, and we had become friends. After I moved—when I joined Boston [Museum of Fine Arts], he was living in Boston, in Brookline, Massachusetts, as a matter of fact. So we met again and we continued to remain friends, and he used to come into the Boston museum. Then, when I got this job and moved to L.A. in 1970, lo-and-behold—not because of me—it was very, very interesting that within a few months he, in fact, bought a house in San Diego. He sold his Boston house and lived—he had a house in Cape Cod, so he lived six months in the Cape and the winter here in San Diego. So we naturally saw each other, and I used to advise him, also. You know, if I found things, I'd tell him and this and that. So Ed, as I say,

we just became very good friends. Then Ed, I think just after—two things happened after his sixtieth birthday. One was that Binney Pencil was bought off by Hallmark [Marketing Corporation]. So he got a lot of money. But at about the same time he unfortunately became very ill. And then it was a slow, progressive thing. And then I remember, about a year before his death he came to the museum, and we were talking, and he said that he was aware of his mortality, and that he had decided to He was making his will, and he had decided to leave—oh, apart from these collections, by the way, he was very interested in the ballet, so he had one of the most extensive collections of ballet prints in the world—in fact, the most extensive—and he said he was leaving his ballet prints to Harvard, that he was going to divide his Indian collection, which was the biggest collection, into ten groups of a hundred paintings each and leave them to ten smaller museums, and that he would leave me one or two Indian paintings—he would give us a few. And he was going to give his entire Turkish collection to the Fogg [Art Museum] at Harvard. You see? At that point, I said, "Well, Ed, I mean, why give it all to the Fogg?" I said, "We are just as interested, and, as you know, I have done a lot to get the [Nasli M.] Heeramaneck Islamic collection, which is very strong in Persian but very weak in Turkish. So if you gave us some [Turkish] stuff it would help us." And he said, "Oh, are you interested, really?" And I said, "Yes, very much." He said, "Well, then maybe let me think about it." I said, "Yes, do think about it." So he went back to San Diego. He was here then, and he had come up from San Diego. About a week later he came in again, and he came straight on, and he said, "By the way, that was a good idea of yours. I have now decided to divide the whole Turkish collection into two halves and give one half to Los Angeles."

RIKALA:

That's terrific. That's really good.

PAL:

So that's how the Turkish collection, Binney Turkish collection, came into the museum. So those are, I think—I can't think of any other collection that has come in since—oh, yes. No, no, another collection did. Yes, yes. The Hans Cohn glass collection. And this has a rather interesting history, which I think should be told. Hans Cohn is a Jewish banker, I think. I first heard of him after I

came herein 1970 from—oh, gosh, what's his name? I'm sorry, I'll let you know later. The name just isn't coming to me. He was a trustee at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art]. Schimmel, Schimmel, Norbert Schimmel, whom I knew. He was a great collector of ancient art—Near Eastern and Greek and Roman and Egyptian, but everything exquisite. A man of exquisite taste, and loved small objects. He never collected big things. Norbert used to come to Los Angeles occasionally, once or twice a year in the early seventies. Then, later on, he never did as he grew older. He always used to come and call, and we used to have lunch. And he told me, he said, "By the way, there's a great collector of glass here from all over the world, ancient glass and all, a man named Hans Cohn. But apparently your museum, your [Kenneth] Donahue doesn't like him." They had fallen off for some reason. "There's some misunderstanding or something. But he is worth cultivating." Well, when I heard that, the next time I went to see Donahue I said to him, "By the way, you know this collector called Hans Cohn? I hear he has a great glass collection." And Donahue just dismissed him immediately and didn't tell me why. But he said, "Oh, well, it's junk, and blah, blah, and this and that," you know. So I said, well, all right, maybe he knows. But I did not believe Donahue, because I know Norbert Schimmel and his tastes. I realized there was something else. And I've never been able to find out what happened between him and Donahue. But anyway, then, some years later, one day we—the photographer, head photographer at the museum was then a man called Edward Cornaccio. We were good friends, and we used to go to lunch quite frequently. One day he said that he was taking photographs of a great glass collection. So I said, "Oh, is it Hans Cohn?" He said, "Yes, how did you—?" I said, "Well, I heard of this guy years ago, but I—." He said, "Well, do you want to see the collection?" I said, "I'd love to." So it was through him that I went and met Hans Cohn.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's nice.

PAL:

I saw the collection at his house, and I was just stunned, stupified. I said, "My God, apart from the Corning Museum of Glass and the Toledo Museum [of Art], this is the third biggest glass collection in America." I said, "It's silly for

this place not to get involved." Well, nothing could be done. Nothing happened. Then, I think, as acting director I told Peter Fusco about Hans Cohn and his collection, and somehow something else came about, and I don't know how, but Peter Fusco went to meet him then. He met him, and they hit it off. And then Donahue, of course, stepped down. I mean, he was no longer there. And then Rusty came, and about four years ago or so, I think, or maybe—yeah, Hans Cohn was persuaded to give his glass collection to us. Otherwise it was going to go off to Israel. Yeah. So I think that's a great, great coup for the museum.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Great coup. It's a very fine collection, very comprehensive.

RIKALA:

That's nice. That's nice.

PAL:

Yeah. So that also came in. So, I mean, I think the collections have grown enormously, and I just think that we are expending far too much energy in exhibitions. I think we should cut down our exhibitions by, oh, 50 percent, or maybe at least 30 percent. I think that will be more balanced. Then the museum can concentrate a little more on the permanent collection. You see, I'll tell you how it affects us, which you may not quite understand. For instance, it's now become almost impossible to—if I can change my galleries—paintings and other things—say, once a year, I consider myself lucky.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Okay? If I can get ten objects cleaned or repaired by our conservation department, I consider myself lucky. And why? Because—I don't blame them, it's not their fault. It's just that they're continuously involved in these exhibitions.

RIKALA:

They're so busy doing everything else.

PAL:

Yeah, because, you see, every time an exhibition comes, every object has to be examined, looked at, this and that. So, I mean, I have got paintings and thankas and they desperately need attention. I can't get any. And it's unfortunate. It's very unfortunate, because that's our bread and butter. Because those objects will deteriorate if they are not taken care of, also, in time. I mean, paper paintings can tear very easily. And if you have a little tear, if you don't repair it immediately, the tears will go on. And we can't stop visitors from looking at these things. People come, scholars come, they want to see, they handle—you know, we can't always be careful, and accidents happen and will happen. So that's the sad part of this heavy exhibition policy. No, there's no question about it, that the principal aim of the museum, it seems to me, is no longer really to provide art for art's sake but to use art to generate income. Money. And that's because we have absolutely no endowment of any kind, either for operations or for acquisitions. And our board, in my opinion, does not raise enough money for operations and permanent collection acquisitions.

RIKALA:

Yes, so there needs to be a change in the priority

PAL:

Yeah, yeah.

RIKALA:

Yeah. That will be an important step. But what about the Japanese Pavilion, the Joe [Joseph D.] Price collection?

PAL:

Oh, yes, now, of course, that also has—

RIKALA:

I mean, those are very much—

PAL:

Now that's, of course, the most visible of all the collections because of the new building, but—

RIKALA:

And that, too, seems to be art for art's sake.

PAL:

No, I—

RIKALA:

No?

PAL:

I am afraid, there again, you see, now we—I personally feel that that's—it's not a great acquisition, because, first of all, it's a very limited collection. It's a Japanese collection of the Edo period, yes. And even there, it is 80 percent a study collection and only 20 percent an exhibitable collection. Okay. For that, what have we had to do? We have had to build a building.

RIKALA:

But Price gave money towards the building.

PAL:

Yes, sure, he gave money towards the building, but I mean, there—I mean, you can go around, and if you want to build that kind of folly, you'll probably have a dozen people who want to give money. But that's not why we are there.

RIKALA:

No.

PAL:

Okay?

RIKALA:

Well, I mean, that's an interesting point, because as far as I understand the story, Price had difficulty finding a suitable place.

PAL:

Absolutely. No one would touch Price.

RIKALA:

Nobody would touch it. And he left—

PAL:

We were the last major institution that—

RIKALA:

Decided to take it.

PAL:

Yeah, and if we hadn't—you know, he went everywhere, and no one accepted him because the condition, I think, was unacceptable, and should have been unacceptable to us.

RIKALA:

Well, it was like putting a private museum in a civic organization.

PAL:

Well, not only that. I think if the building made any sense, if it had any room to expand—nothing! And Price—and there again, I think they made the grave error of not letting Price pay for the whole bloody thing if Price wanted that building. I mean, why should you—? You know, why should we have taken only half the money to build his monumental folly?

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

So again we were stuck. So Price gave \$5 million, so they added—the building cost \$12 million, so they had to go and get another \$7 million, go begging with a begging bowl to all these Japanese and others. Now, of course, we have, I

think, at least two Japanese board members. My God, in 1970, if anyone ever suggested to this board that one day they'll have two Japanese, I think they would have shot him or her. You see, now, it's amazing to watch. I mean, this aspect in a broad sense does really interest me. Because I'll tell you, as an ex-colonial, and having been part of the colonial world, and having seen how the white man, the Western man, has basically trampled upon Asians in Asia, it does give me a little bit of perverse pleasure now to see Americans and other Europeans crawling before the Japanese and going to them with a begging bowl for money. It does. I mean, not that I care much for the Japanese or what they're doing—I'm very nervous about what they're doing—but then when I think of them—of course, now I feel that they're really not Asian at all. I mean, I think Japanese are unique. The most unique. Even more than the Jews, I think the Japanese are the most unique nation on the earth, and you can't classify them as either European or Asians.

RIKALA:

In their homogeneity? Or in their outlook?

PAL:

No, no, in what way are they Asian? I mean, look at the way they have adopted the West. I mean, totally in some ways. If you were to judge by the rest of Asia, like India and the Arab world and China, a lot of it is very inefficient and corrupt and easygoing and all this, whereas the Japanese are like a machine. They've outdone the West in terms of the Protestant work ethic and productivity and efficiency and all this. You see, that's what I'm saying. Sometimes I wonder if they are really Asians that way, you see, because they don't—they are not out of the Asian mold, or at least the Asian stereotype as we understand the Asian. Anyway, so I think it is sort of a thing to see. Or when I hear a Ronald [W.] Reagan or a George [H. W.] Bush going with a begging bowl to the Arabs for this, that, or the other, it's quite amazing. You see what money can do. It's just—anyway. So I feel that we have not shown enough taste for a museum to foist bad architecture on the people of Los Angeles. I think that the Los Angeles County Museum of Art complex is one of the worst cases of urban architecture mishmash that I can think of. Nothing goes with nothing else. And it's not that everything has to conform, but—and it doesn't. I mean, if you go to a place like Cambridge [University] or

Oxford [University], you'll see buildings from the Norman right to modern times, but there is a coherency there that you won't find here. I mean, it's an absolute hodgepodge. And as I said, the Japanese Pavilion, I suppose, is the right building for the right place.

RIKALA:

Well, but again, it's like Price brought his architect along with him. I mean, Bart Prince took over the [Bruce A.] Goff project.

PAL:

Yeah, but—

RIKALA:

Prince is also the architect of Joe Price's own home, even, and doing all the—

PAL:

Yeah, but I mean, that's fine. Let Joe Price, then—he should have gone and made his own museum.

RIKALA:

On his own piece of property.

PAL:

In Oklahoma or Newport Beach [California] or wherever else. It should not be part of the—and we are a public institution. I think there should be a limit to what we allow individuals to do there, number one. Number two, if you really see that \$12 million you've spent, and you've got hardly—how much exhibitable space have you got there? Now, you tell me if tomorrow someone came with an outstanding Japanese collection to give to us, what are you going to do?

RIKALA:

Yeah, there's no space for it in there.

PAL:

There is no space, and it's not the sort of building that you can add a floor to. It's a disaster. It's so shortsighted to do that sort of thing. You see? And that's

exactly it. We've really stumped ourselves. And we are not going to be able to get any more collections for that building.

RIKALA:

No. Indeed, there's just the—

PAL:

No. And in fact, I don't even know why or what we'll do if we keep buying Japanese art, where we'll put it. Apart from the fact that you really can't see anything there after three o'clock, if you go after three o'clock—now after around about two o'clock—because he doesn't allow any lights to be lit in there.

RIKALA:

No, it's all natural lighting.

PAL:

You know, this sort of thing should not be allowed. These sort of idiosyncratic ideas of the collector should be—fine, then you go and establish your Frick [Collection] or whatever you want to do. So I am afraid, as far as I can see, the Shin'enkan or the Price collection has, to my mind, done nothing for the museum. That building is an eyesore, number one. Number two, it is inconvenient, it is restrictive. So on all accounts, it is a disaster.

RIKALA:

Yeah. And what about its attendance? Do you know how people feel—?

PAL:

I don't know. I don't care, to be very—I mean, I don't care. It's a very, very unfriendly place to go into, because the minute you go into it, those guards there, they jump on you.

RIKALA:

The guards are quite extraordinary.

PAL:

I mean, the way they tell you that you have to get into the elevator—

RIKALA:

And you have to go up, yeah, that—

PAL:

You have to go up, and they really—

RIKALA:

It wasn't like that the first month or two. It's a new policy.

PAL:

Oh, now they even have a loudspeaker in the elevator. Do you know that?

RIKALA:

Yeah. It tells you about the building. "This building, blah, blah, blah."

PAL:

Yeah, just in that one second, two seconds.

RIKALA:

Yeah, it's really—

PAL:

Hopeless. And then what do they see there? The first thing you see there— you don't see any art as you come in. You see a shop.

RIKALA:

Yeah. Yeah, they oriented it that way.

PAL:

Awful. That shop should have been in the basement there where people end up. In fact, it would have been a good trap to catch them there.

RIKALA:

Yeah, yeah.

PAL:

Because now you see what happens. As you know, you come out in that—I think it's an awful—I don't go now to the bottom now. I come out of the second floor, basically, because it's very disorienting. You come out down that ramp, and it's dark there, and you look around, and it doesn't give you a nice feeling.

RIKALA:

No, you're down with the bathrooms and then those closed doors.

PAL:

Yeah, yeah. Awful. Awful.

RIKALA:

But that, again, has to do with the way those—

PAL:

And it's not even—after all, the idea is, he talks of—I mean, simply because Japanese aesthetics—now, Japanese never looked at screens like this with a sort of space—

RIKALA:

Moat in between.

PAL:

Moat in between. Then with plastic railings, then walking down a ramp. Who has ever seen a Japanese building—? That's, of course, taken from—

RIKALA:

The Guggenheim [Museum].

PAL:

The Guggenheim, Frank Lloyd Wright. So where is the Japanese deal? The outside is that bilious green.

RIKALA:

Yeah, right.

PAL:

The building isn't Japanese at all. That whole ceiling is so weighted. I mean, Japanese buildings should be light. It should soar. This doesn't soar. It's enormous. These concrete slabs are awful! I mean, what really bugs the hell out of me is that, except I think one architect—it just shows you the poverty of your architectural historians and critics. I mean, some have even praised it. You see, all this again, I'll tell you, is because of this whole individual and originality-oriented culture. It is in keeping with the trash that is being labeled as art in terms of modern art, because you've become such an individual-oriented society that somehow individualism is more important than aesthetics or creativity or anything. So therefore, anyone that does any rubbish like that gets away with it because everyone says, "Ah, oh, yes, you see? He's an interesting, original architect." Bullshit! Sorry, I mean, I—. [laughter] It's just like that, so it's—you know. I think it's—I'll tell you, you go to Washington [D.C.], you go to the Phillips collection, okay? You go and see the new extension that they have made to that. It is superlative. It is superlative. Now, that's what great architecture is, in my opinion.

RIKALA:

I'll have to take a look. I haven't been.

PAL:

And your new east wing of the National Gallery [of Art], another monument. These are all egotists, you see? Modern architects have the biggest inflated egos. I mean, like movie stars—

RIKALA:

Well, because they've become movie stars.

PAL:

Yeah, yeah.

RIKALA:

I mean, they sign every little scrap of paper they've ever drawn.

PAL:

That's right.

RIKALA:

And now sell their drawings, their working drawings, as art objects.

PAL:

So you see? They do any old stuff. In fact, the I. M. Pei building at the Fogg, the [Arthur M.] Sackler [Gallery] there, I think is a disaster. No, no, that's not I. M. Pei. Sorry, that's not the Pei building.

RIKALA:

[Robert] Venturi? Or not?

PAL:

No, that may be Richard Mayor. I'm not sure. Maybe we should—

RIKALA:

I'll look it up.

PAL:

Well, whoever it is, it's another lousy building.

RIKALA:

[laughter] Oh, dear. Well, should we wrap up for tonight?

PAL:

Yeah, yeah.

1.22. TAPE NUMBER: XIII, Side One (November 20, 1989)

RIKALA:

To follow up from last time, I just want to ask a couple of last questions about LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art], I've read that LACMA's future plans include the building of a library and a lecture hall and new galleries. Are these ideas far along? Is [Earl A. "Rusty"] Powell [III]'s contribution to turn LACMA into even a greater kind of cultural center, to include a library, or what? I don't know anything more about the story than that.

PAL:

No, there is no new library in the offing. What we've done, we've just finished extending the present library.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

And getting automatic stacks, these special things that move on rollers.

RIKALA:

Rolling stacks, yeah.

PAL:

Rolling stacks. That has been completed. That was begun, oh, well over a year, maybe two years ago. I'm not sure exactly. But the library reopened on November 1, and it's a lovely facility, although I am already hearing complaints about their being short of space, especially for storage of books. The new lecture hall has also been completed, which is a small lecture theater downstairs below the Bing [Theater]. It will seat about a little over a hundred persons. But that's not anything new. The museum did have a small lecture theater.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

I don't know what happened to it. It was gobbled up as part of—oh, yes, that's right. It was gobbled up as part of the extension. In fact, I think it's part of the business office now or something. So you might say that we've got our lecture theater back, only in a new form.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

So that will be very helpful, because we don't get too many people attending lectures, usually, and the Bing Theater, which seats over six hundred, it would look ridiculous when you had, oh, twenty, thirty people attending a lecture. That's something else that's peculiar, that I find very difficult to understand, is how badly the lectures are attended here. It's very obvious that people are not all that interested. And also, I think the location of the museum, which is in the middle of nowhere, is discouraging.

RIKALA:

The parking is a problem.

PAL:

Yeah, the parking and everything, yeah, for people to come and listen to lectures, especially in the evening. Anyway, so those two things have happened. With regard to further extension, there are plans to fill the atrium in the present Ahmanson Gallery to give more space for the permanent collections in that building. But whether and when it will happen is anybody's guess, because the problem, of course, is we have to clear the asbestos that is in the old building. And that's something the county has to do, and county is dragging its feet because of financial problems. So until county approves removal of all asbestos, I don't know that we can really go ahead and start filling the atrium. Apart from that, there has been some talk of building yet another building over the present parking lot. And that's about the last spot we have.

RIKALA:

Which is west of the Ahmanson.

PAL:

Which is west of the Ahmanson. I think that's also quite remote right now. Of course, we do have the land opposite the museum, on the other side. There's a parking lot. That land is ours. And, I mean, if someone comes and offers \$50 million for a building there, I think they'll build it.

RIKALA:

So there is a possibility.

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

I wanted to ask a more broad question having to do with the U.S. tax laws that overall have really hurt American museums, since there seems to be less incentive to give. What can Rusty Powell and the board of trustees do to keep LACMA afloat through the nineties? What kind of projects should they engage in, in a more general sense, to promote the growth of LACMA?

PAL:

Well, it's going to be very tough to promote the growth of LACMA in terms of collections and acquisitions, simply because, as you said, people are not going to give. All collections are going to go to the chopping block, and, I mean, it's surprising. The Mellons are selling paintings, as you know, their collections. Other important collectors that one never thought would ever sell or would have any reason to sell, financially, are all seduced by this tremendous boom in art prices, and they're all selling them. I mean, look at this recent sale from which—that was a private collection, I forget, from which [Walter H.] Annenberg bought the Picasso for \$40-something million. Over \$40 million. So I just don't see where we are going to get the art. And even financially, we are not going to be able to afford it, because we need now—I mean, if you want to spend minimum \$10 million a year, which is not going to get you that much art in any given field, including contemporary American art, you are talking of having to raise a \$100 million endowment. That's out of the question. I don't think that's going to happen. And people here are just not as generous, really, and as fond of the museum as they are, say, in New York. So I just don't see what the board or the director really can do except hope that from somewhere we'll get some collections or buy the art pieces here and there and—and I suppose European paintings, we'll continue to buy a few things because of the Ahmanson Foundation money. But that's going to be—it's already peanuts. In fact, that money now is buying definitely only second-rate names, unfortunately, because there's no way you can get first-rate—and works are dwindling also.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

So that's why I think increasingly the museum will just continue to focus on exhibitions. I think that will be a continued policy into the nineties until that becomes prohibitive, as it is becoming, in fact, in terms of costs—insurance, courier service, and all this. I mean, it's just becoming—I'm just about to do this exhibition I'm doing called *Romance of the Taj Mahal*, which opens in, oh, mid-December. But just to give you an example, just for that exhibition, beginning next week we are going to have eleven couriers from various parts of America and Europe who will be bringing their objects. And yet, ten years ago, twenty years ago certainly, you didn't have a single courier. I mean, people sent their objects without—this has become another sort of excuse for curators and others to travel, you see. So we have to take care of eleven couriers who will be here. And just imagine the cost, because we have to pay for all their coming and living here and staying in hotels and everything. So that's going to be a problem. I see rather a bleak future in terms of expansion of the museum, artistically concerned.

RIKALA:

Two really interesting dimensions have come up from previous discussions. Maybe they're just subtleties of the same point, but I wanted to bring them up again to talk a little bit more about them. One question I asked previously was, what do you aspire to convey to the public in your curatorial work? And your response indicated a desire to present the museum's collection as a cultural resource, both to future generations of people who are of Indian descent and also a resource to people who might be unfamiliar with India and who are interested and then gain further interest. So this opens up a range of inquiry regarding something that I'm just calling today cultural politics. What I want to get into, the subtleties have to do with some of the concerns you expressed. You expressed a concern that, for example, many of the people of the Arab community didn't attend the *Timur [the Princely Vision]* exhibition.

PAL:

Persians.

RIKALA:

Persians. And that many Indian people and Asians don't attend the museum in the way you would hope. The subtlety is, then, can you describe the cultural heritage, say, of the Hindu Indian Americans in the U.S. today? What is, then, their interest?

PAL:

Well, the problem is that the Hindu does not look at, say, a temple sculpture placed in the museum as an art object, per se. In fact, I have been accused of collecting a lot of broken bits and pieces and putting them in the museum. You see, the Hindu primarily looks at an image, a sculpture, as an image of a god to worship. So he can see it in a religious context, where he does not look at it at all aesthetically. I mean, in fact, they have built a huge temple in Malibu [California]. I don't know if you are aware of it.

RIKALA:

Yes.

PAL:

There's a Hindu temple built in the traditional South Indian architectural style. Which is something else. I can't understand why they can't build something in a contemporary temple in a contemporary style, why they have to go back a thousand years and simply copy a style that has no architectural value at all and recreate it here as a new temple. So that's another point that I find very disturbing culturally, where all these temples are being built all over the world by Hindus. And I think the Muslims are far more progressive in that respect, for you do see modern mosques being built in modern design. But I'm afraid the Hindus are awfully conservative that way and show absolutely no Imagination. And this lack of imagination and lack of interest or really any aesthetic interest or insight is basically responsible for their not visiting the museum and looking at the rich collections here. Even the educated Indians don't—well, most Indians here are highly educated, as a matter of fact, but they don't do it because they also were never taken to museums, or art was never part of their education either at home or at schools or colleges. So they have grown up, in a sense, sort of in a desert of visual art, you might say. I mean, they don't even—neither are they interested in contemporary art. It's

not that they are just interested simply in the ancient. And I just don't know how to reach them.

RIKALA:

What about, just as an example, their contemporaries in India? People of the generation who have experienced India's independence. Are those people—? Yes, they still remain in India, and they still have the structures in their life, but do they experience that same kind of rupture in culture? Is there a break somehow that is asking them to reevaluate or make sense again of their history as a nation, as a goal, or their culture?

PAL:

Oh, they don't know much about their history, either, to be honest with you. Most people may have studied a little bit of history in school, but thereafter they go into either science or medicine or something like that. So there is no liberal education in that there is no compulsory teaching of history in the classes in the universities. So I think most Indians I know know very little about India's past except the broadest outline. But this may be true, also, of the average American. I don't know. I mean, Americans do consider patronizing the museum and visiting the museum at least once a year to be part of their cultural enrichment experience. But I am afraid that that's not the case with any—I mean, don't forget, there were no museums in India a hundred years ago. Museums are, again, a contribution of the British, of European culture. The average Indian has had really almost no contact with art that I can think of, even in my childhood, except in the religious context, where I saw images being made and worshiped. Otherwise, we really had absolutely—I had no contact with Indian art until I took it for my M.A. class. Even when I was an undergraduate in Delhi, I studied history three years, and, would you believe it, one of my papers in University of Delhi as an undergraduate was medieval Muslim history, history of the Moguls, and not once did our professor tell us to go and see a single monument in Delhi, which is so rich in—you know, the Red Fort, the Jumma Masjid [Friday Mosque], the Lodi Tombs. In fact, Delhi is like a graveyard of the kings that have ruled there for the last thousand years. Absolutely no, we were never told to go and see a single monument. You would think we were studying—history was only written or printed on pages of books, and that's it. So there has been—I mean, you can imagine, if history

students were not made aware of their surroundings—so there's absolutely no interest and no concern among the Indians in any way, either at home or, as I said, at schools or colleges, to make them aware of their surroundings, to take pride in their buildings. So buildings are going to wrack and ruin, I mean, in most major cities. So I just don't see these people—unless they learn by seeing that the Americans themselves are interested and they start wondering, "Well, if they're interested in our culture, if this museum is spending so much money getting Indian art, preserving it, maybe it's worthwhile." But I don't know if they'll be converted. I am very skeptical about—and maybe the next generation of Indians, which means our children, may start wondering what their roots are and may start looking at it more closely. But I don't know. I wouldn't bet on it. I mean, as I said, Chinese have been here for three generations, and the third generation of Chinese, as far as I know, boys and girls, I don't think they ever come to the museum.

RIKALA:

Well, that leads on to this other dimension of this same stream of thought that has to do with what I call subject production, in that LACMA and Los Angeles museums are these very Euro-American institutions that have, by fate or somehow, established very large non-Western or non-European art collections.

PAL:

Not that significantly, you know. I mean, we have. Norton Simon has a little, just basically India and Southeast Asia. And we have some. The Pacific Asia Museum is still a fledgling museum, and how extensive it will become I don't know. If we can't afford to collect soon, it's not likely that they are going to do any better. And that's it. I mean, otherwise there's not all that much.

RIKALA:

Well, yeah. I was thinking of the number of collections at LACMA that have been put together. And the question, I don't know, perhaps is a weak one, but do these collections address the demands of the community? Or is this another kind of third-worldism on the part of the institution?

PAL:

Well, no, I don't think it's any conscious third-worldism at all. I don't think the museum is that committed or, as I said, that there is any policy to build a strong Asian collection. I don't think there is. There's absolutely no such. And as I said, rather, our museum has certainly been behaving as an opportunist more than anything else, acquiring what they can get. So the [Nasli M.] Heeramaneck collections are available and we got them. And the [Joseph D.] Price collection came along in terms of Japanese material, and, although it's a very limited collection, well, there it was. It was available, so we got it. So we had absolutely—I mean, if twenty years ago you told me that we would one day make a center for the study of expressionist art, European art, I'd have said, "It's a joke." But now we have a German expressionist collection. Now, tell me. I mean, it's serendipitous that there happened to be a collector here who collected German expressionists and he sold his collection to us, but otherwise, what valid reason does Los Angeles have to become a center for German expressionists, of all things? Or for Edo period Japanese art, for that matter? No, I don't think we were particularly geared to the communities. I mean, in fact, when the museum bought the Indian collection. I don't think there was any Indian, community here. Similarly with the ancient Iranian material. That wasn't bought because of a burgeoning Iranian population. In any case, as I said, these ethnic communities don't care. Not that the museum really cares that much, either. As I said, there is no policy to sit down and think about it and say, "Well, fine, we've got—." Now, for instance, I add to the collection as best as I can by scrounging and by almost stealing and borrowing and all that sort of thing. But I have never heard the board or anyone ever tell me that, "Well, now that we've got a fine Indian collection, we should build on our strength and continue in making strong acquisitions so we don't fall behind." No. You see, they, I think, feel their job is done. They've got an Indian collection, and let it sit there. So there is no aggressive policy in any particular given area. And there are so few collections in Los Angeles in any area that I don't see any chance of our going strong that way, acquisition-wise, except, really, in contemporary art. Because there are apparently a thousand collectors of contemporary art in Los Angeles alone.

RIKALA:

It sounds like such an extraordinary number.

PAL:

Although I don't know that we'll even get two or three out of them. I don't know if that answers your question.

RIKALA:

Yeah, it does. It's just an interesting—the questions come partly out of having browsed an article about Rusty Powell, who seems to have made these collections a virtue. And, of course, the article presents him as this great forward-thinking director. Yet, on the other hand, in our discussions, I've just been sensing a bit of a struggle on my part to make sense—

PAL:

Well, I think it's not Rusty's fault if the collections don't grow by leaps and bounds.

RIKALA:

No.

PAL:

I don't think it's anybody's fault in that sense. We can't go out and get collections, I mean, because there are no real collections to get. And that's the thing. For instance, as I said, in old masters our only hope is the [Edward W.] Carter collection. We are told it's going to be left to us after both of them die, and that may be in the year 2050 or whenever. And it may not happen. So forget about that if you are talking of sort of birds in the hand. If we get the [Jo Ann and Julian] Ganz [Jr.] collection of American art, we will have a respectable American collection. But my hunch is that we won't get it. So where are these collections that—?

RIKALA:

And the Fred [Frederick] Weisman collection seems—

PAL:

Well, as I have already said, Fred Weisman has no intention of giving us anything, I think. Nathan Smooke doesn't. I don't know of any contemporary art collection that I even hear any rumors of it coming to LACMA. And Rusty has to be given money if he is to go out and get or buy collections. But that will be astronomical nowadays. Even contemporary art, just imagine, with all

these [Willem] de Koonings and [Jackson] Pollocks and all these selling for \$10, \$15 million, where are you going to buy collections? No chance. No chance.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

So I don't know that—as I say, collection-wise it's rather a bleak picture for us here.

RIKALA:

Let's talk a little bit about this upcoming exhibition. I'm intrigued by the title. And as I've mentioned it to people, I've gotten back the same response, and the question always is, what exactly is the romance in *The Romance of the Taj Mahal*? And you've mentioned it, and several people that I've run across who've been to India said the same thing, that if you go to India, and you only have three hours to spend there, the one place you have to go is to the Taj Mahal.

PAL:

Well, isn't that the romance of the—? That's the romance of the Taj Mahal! That's the thing!

RIKALA:

That everyone needs to be able to see it?

PAL:

That everyone must go to see that.

RIKALA:

No, there's something—it's an interesting—I mean, it's such an evocative word in terms of a building.

PAL:

Well, it is the—I mean, apart from the fact that it is the world's most romantic building. It was built by a man in memory of his wife, so it has become the symbol of a man's love for a woman. I mean, whichever angle you look at it,

you come back to the word romance, you see, with the Taj Mahal. And I mean, no one tells you, if you go to London, that—

RIKALA:

[laughter] No, they tell you to go to the Tower [of London]!

PAL:

They don't tell you really to go anywhere. I mean, or even if one does—one says one goes to France to see Paris. One does not say one goes to France to see the Eiffel Tower. Or no one says that if you go to Paris, if you have three hours, go and see the Eiffel Tower, right? Or the same with the Great Wall of China. The only other thing, perhaps, yeah, I think that is quintessentially associated with a country one might tell you, is that if you go to Egypt, if you have three hours, go and see a pyramid.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Probably they will say it. And there is a romance of the pyramids. I mean, one could do a book, a wonderful book called—because pyramids have—it's more than a romance; it's more of a mystery, I think, a mystique. Whereas the Taj Mahal is the—you know, I mean, honeymooners, and it's just this great architectural symbol of love. No other building in the world has captured the human imagination from that point of view as the Taj Mahal has. And everyone has waxed eloquent. You know, whoever has been—anyone who's of any importance, whether it's Eleanor Roosevelt or Jacqueline Kennedy or whoever, has gone and has something to say about it. Artists have drawn it and they have written at length about it, American artists and European artists and Japanese, and everyone. I don't think any other building has been—really, what you'll see there is that it's an image created by the British entirely. It was not—I mean, no one ever went to the Taj until the British discovered it and said, "Here. This is it. This is where you must come." So, see, this strangely Muslim mausoleum has become the symbol of a predominantly Hindu India. That in itself is, I think, a very interesting sociological issue that someone ought to—you know, ours is concerned more with art, but it's something that I

have raised in the book [exhibition catalog], *Romance of the Taj Mahal*. So I thought it would be a good focal point around which to build a show of Mogul paintings, Mogul decorative arts and textiles and all this, and around the personality of Shah Jahan, the builder of the Taj. And that's what we've done.

RIKALA:

That sounds really exciting.

PAL:

And I am hoping that maybe this is the—in fact, if this show does not bring them in, then no Indian show will ever, sort of. So I'm hoping that there will be a respectable crowd.

RIKALA:

Well, certainly, as you say, it has this wide appeal.

PAL:

It should have some mass appeal.

RIKALA:

And yet, it is culturally intriguing, but it's also, I guess from my perspective, very architecturally intriguing. You've mentioned all the reasons very quickly, and of the four or five buildings that anybody could list of great buildings in the world, certainly that would come as number one or two by everyone. So everyone's curious about it, and that's exciting.

PAL:

Well, I hope so. I do hope people come, because I just don't see—this is my last card, so to say. I mean, there's nothing else that will bring people in.

RIKALA:

What I'd like to move on to for the rest of tonight is to talk about your teaching, various teaching positions, and kind of highlight the different universities you've been to, but also bring together the common element. And the question that goes back to all that we've, been talking to so far is, in what ways do you aspire to teach the cultural history of India? Because I guess that's what I see you doing.

PAL:

Well, I would like to teach the cultural history of India, but I am afraid there is no course anywhere called the cultural history of India, which is unfortunate. You see, India is taught in a segmented fashion in universities here. So a history department will teach you history of India without any reference to the arts and other things. Then in order to learn about art, you have to go to the art history department, where you will learn really more about styles than anything else, you see, because basically it's being taught the way Western art history is taught, or it will be more emphasis on form and evolution of form than content. I don't think Indian architecture is even mentioned in any architectural department, and yet India has a great past in terms of urban planning, beginning with Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Two of the earliest planned cities in the world were built in India. But, you see, that's again, unfortunately, your very Euro- and Western-centric education. Then I suppose religions are taught in the history of religion. And yet, you see, what you should have, in my opinion, much more, is—which I think will have much broader appeal to students and others—to teach something like the history of ideas, or the cultural history of India in a more broad perspective. And true, that's what I'd like to do, because in a sense, to study art and architecture, you have to have a very wide, broad knowledge of the history and culture and religion. Anyway, that's not possible. So I have taught. Yes, I have taught at Harvard [University] and at UCLA, at UCSB [University of California, Santa Barbara], but most of my teaching has been at USC [University of Southern California], where I have taught art history. At USC, I think I began teaching there in 1971, and I gave it up, oh, early January this year, after ray heart attack. So I taught for almost seventeen years at USC. I used to teach only one course a week. In the beginning I used to go over to USC and take the classes there with slides. Then it dawned on me that it was silly to do that when we have all this Indian art in the collection. So I gave up taking the class at USC. For at least the last fifteen years, I suppose, or fourteen or fifteen years, I used to take my class in the museum with the objects, never with slides. They used to usually be a seminar and a general class, and I have also had several Ph.D. students at USC. As a matter of fact, I began the Ph.D. program in art history at USC, really.

RIKALA:

I see.

PAL:

I mean, I pushed it. There was no graduate program at all when I came. Some of us got together and persuaded the university to begin a Ph.D. program. And I think the first four Ph.D. students were in Indian art at USC. At least four South Asian art. But I must say that increasingly it became unsatisfactory teaching at USC. First of all, USC doesn't get a very good crop of students. They're not very bright. You know, it's an expensive school, private school, and I think a lot of people are sort of like debutant types. I mean, they come there because their parents have sent them, and their parents went there, and their parents are wealthy. So they're not really serious students. Intellectually I was not really profiting from it in any way. And I think teaching is a two-way traffic. You just can't go and stand up and deliver lectures and get out. That is, I would think, very unsatisfactory sort of teaching. It would prove to be, at least, for me. I mean, you need this. And I really need solid graduate students. Teaching undergraduates is really very boring for me now. Again, you see, as I said, if there was a cultural history program, I think I could get some ideas across to someone who has had no experience of India before, or no knowledge of India. But just think, you get about eight or ten of them who come to the class. They don't even know where India is on the map. I mean, they've never heard of India in their life, and here I have to teach them Indian art history. That's outrageous. So you spend the first three sessions at least trying to tell them, showing them maps where India is and what its geography is and what its history is and what religions are. And then there are all these terms that they can't understand. I mean, it's a nightmare. It's a nightmare for the teacher as well as for the students. I think Indian art should be taught only at a very high level, really, a very high level. Before that, they should have general courses. In fact, I would be better off having a student coming to do study of Indian art with, say, a background of Indian history than with a general background of art history, non-Indian art history. Useless. That background is useless. I think instead of, as I said, teaching a bit of history in the history department, a little of this, they should have more centers for South Asia or centers for Southeast Asia in each university, have people of various disciplines within that department and offer interdisciplinary courses and have other students from other departments come in and take these also, apart from giving degrees. I

think that would be more satisfactory, and you'll have more students than what you've got now.

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RIKALA:

So a cultural history would be defined in a trans-disciplinary way. And it's true, there isn't such a program at UCLA, either. It's a real failing in some way, because it's very hard to make sense of culture and a people and a history and a country without having that kind of interdisciplinary knowledge. Because it's very hard to gain access to it on your own.

PAL:

No, I mean, I can visualize the course. You can give an introduction that would give some idea of the geography and ethnogeography of the subcontinent, the major religions that are there, the various linguistic groups and languages, so that you get across the complexity of the place and give them an idea of—whether you do it by comparison with Europe or Soviet Russia or whatever—in terms of the different languages and language groups, and explain their differences as well as similarities. Say that the north Indian languages are of the Indo-European group, to which also languages like Latin, Greek, German, Spanish, French, all these belong. And then give them an overview of the architecture, not of art history, but the way Indians look at art or use it in terms of images and temple sculptures, etc. And I think then you've given an undergraduate freshman, or second-year undergraduate, something that's not forbidding, and yet he or she will have an overview. And then they can go on. They might take other, more specialized courses, and some may go on to art history, and they'll be stronger for it than what they're doing right now.

RIKALA:

Yeah. Yeah, because art history, at a very early stage, you're taught to compartmentalize. So first you learn the Renaissance, and then you learn the northern Renaissance—

PAL:

Well, that's the whole problem, you see, because it takes a totally different type of mentality. You have to switch gears so sharply to appreciate Indian art, say, after taking a course in Renaissance. I mean, they do two different things. I mean, in here you don't have names of artists, nothing. It's much more abstract. Whereas the Renaissance and post-Renaissance European art is sort of a solid and concrete basis, with all the artists and their personalities and their lives and all that. We are at a disadvantage. We don't have all that.

RIKALA:

I don't know that that's really a disadvantage, is it? It's just—

PAL:

Yeah, we are at a disadvantage, because your society is so geared to personality cult that unless you can drop names like Rembrandt and Picasso—I mean, that's obvious, isn't it? That's why Picasso sells for \$40 million, as opposed to some other artist of his time.

RIKALA:

Yeah, that's true.

PAL:

You see? This is the name. Without that name Picasso, would that have the same value? No. So there you are. You see, names are very important.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

If Picasso was an anonymous artist—

RIKALA:

Boy, that would be so frustrating. [laughter]

PAL:

There you are.

RIKALA:

That would be so frustrating.

PAL:

So anyway, I wanted to stay in touch with teaching, because I do like to teach and interact with people. I wish I could have said that I had found my seventeen years in USC highly profitable, but I didn't, because it's a very—again, first of all, UCLA is a much bigger department, and naturally, being a state university, cheaper university, draws more students.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

It's a bigger department, although that department, from everything I have heard—ever since I have come here, I have heard nothing but problems there. It's a den of Marxist interpretation, I am told, and all that sort of thing, and highly politically charged.

RIKALA:

Semiotics. Yeah, that's a factionalism there.

PAL:

Yeah, and all that. Whereas, by comparison, USC is almost dead. [laughter] There is nothing happening there. I mean, it's a limping art history department. After all, no one really goes to USC to get an art history degree. That's not their major concern. They go for other things at USC: dentistry or football or—

RIKALA:

Football. [laughter]

PAL:

No, business management or something, so that there is no emphasis there on art history. I really thought that with all the resources here, one would probably be able to build up a strong student base for the study of Indian art history. But, of course, it doesn't happen that way, because students go take areas where there are plenty of jobs. That's their first concern, really, most

students. And certainly there are very few available jobs in Indian art. And on that score, I don't know that you are any better off taking art history, Indian art history at UCLA, for that matter, because the available jobs are really extremely few. I have always felt—you see what happens—the brightest minds really go into—think of any given year's graduating class. The brightest minds from high school, as they come, they go up for science professions, right? Medicine, engineers, physics, chemistry, biology, all these, really. And then economics and all sorts of business management. You know, they go into this kind—Law. Then you start coming down, history, and this and that, and political science, and on. And art history is at about the bottom of the ladder. So you sort of get the dregs, anyway, generally in art history. Among them a few are, of course, the exceptions who from early on think they are going to do art history.

RIKALA:

Or rejected economics and physics. [laughter]

PAL:

Yeah. So let's say 10 percent of the art history students—perhaps even less, probably 5 percent—are the few bright ones that come to do art history. The rest are really not. And among them, I think, those who come into Indian art history and all are not even, you see—I may be wrong, but that's what I've always felt.

RIKALA:

So it is a small group. I wonder if it's like that in other—in England is it? Is it that way, too?

PAL:

Oh, in England it's finished almost. I mean, in England Indian studies and Indian art history and all that are almost over.

RIKALA:

Really?

PAL:

There is no interest at all. No interest.

RIKALA:

That's sad.

PAL:

Yeah. America is much more active. Much more.

RIKALA:

Really? And in India itself, are there Ph.D. 's available in art history?

PAL:

Oh, plenty, plenty. Every university gives dozens. I mean, that's not the problem. But the standard is awfully low. Awfully low.

RIKALA:

Compared to the U.S.?

PAL:

Anywhere. Even compared to my times.

RIKALA:

Really? It's declined?

PAL:

Oh, sure. Well, I see theses, I see books that are being published. Rubbish, utter rubbish. I can't think of really a single art historian of any merit who has come up in India in the last twenty years.

RIKALA:

That's a shame. That's really a shame. So it's a field that also somehow has seen a very quick ascent, and now it seems to be folding in on itself. I don't know if I have any ways of making sense of that. That's an interesting point. We've been talking about teaching. How have you perhaps structured ways to balance the teaching and the scholarship and the curatorial work? I mean, clearly, you've always, it seems, from my point of view, always given most emphasis to the scholarship. And that's probably your major contribution. But how—? How does one—? I don't know how to even ask the question. How

does one make sense of those things as you're going through? How do you juggle it all?

PAL:

Oh, I don't know that it's that much juggling, really. After all, if you didn't read or write, what would you do in a museum the whole day? Now, what does a curator do otherwise? I mean, I just wonder. There's some distraction. People come to see him or her and all that. All right, you spend half the day in administration and chitchat, so spend half the day reading and writing. Now, there you are. That's four hours out of the eight hours, which is not bad. Then you have your evenings and you have your weekends. Now, I mean, what would I do if I didn't spend a little time reading and writing on the weekends? I mean, I spend some time shopping. Now, of course, I go for my walks and all that. But like in the mornings—let's take Saturday morning. My family doesn't even get ready before, say, noon at least, by the time they get up and have their breakfast and lounge around and do this or that. You know, I'm up by seven, so I have at least four solid hours to myself. Now, I can't lounge around, so I read or I write a paper or I write an article or something for at least four hours every Saturday or Sunday morning I can get. Now, that's quite a lot of time in there. You can write quite a bit. So it's not as bad—and teaching really has been relatively easy for the last fifteen years. You see, I don't teach from notes or with books, and I don't have slides to prepare. Since I have the objects, I take the students to the gallery, we stand before the objects, and I take the first object, and I start. We decide whatever we are going to—sculpture. Begin at the beginning of the gallery and go to the end. I mean, there's a lot of sculpture there, some three hundred sculptures on view. Now, that's a lot of sculptures to get familiar with. Right?

RIKALA:

It's a lot of hours.

PAL:

So I never have to spend any time preparing for my lectures. So teaching wasn't a problem for me in any sense of the word. Well, I try and keep the administration to a minimum. I go to meetings that I have to. Otherwise, I don't believe in going to meetings. A lot of people think it's very important to

go to meetings. They're part of the system, you see. I don't like all that, you see. And I devolve. I like decentralization a lot. So my colleagues seem to do most of the department work, which I don't have to worry about. So why should I? I don't like having my nose into everything, so to say. Sure, people do come to see me, but another thing: I do not waste time on telephones. I mean, I am known for being grumpy. And you may have even noted, I never appear to be too friendly on the phone. The only people I am friendly with, who can get a friendly tone out of my voice, is a potential donor or giver of money.

RIKALA:

Oh. [laughter] I see.

PAL:

You see? I have to, because I am dependent on them in terms of the— otherwise, just to sort of chitchat and waste time and spend half an hour— none of all that. So I am very businesslike, in fact to the point of being curt. So I don't get a lot of phone calls. You'll be surprised. If you spend a day in my department—now, let me tell you, today, the whole day, I didn't get a single phone call. No one called me.

RIKALA:

I called. [laughter]

PAL:

Yes, you called. That's right, you called, and—what?—that took all of one minute, or less.

RIKALA:

Yeah. [laughter] That was a—

PAL:

And that's it. That's it. Otherwise I never got a phone call. Yours is the only phone call I got. Now, you see, that left me a lot of time.

RIKALA:

But it also indicates a strongly sustained interest in the subject matter, and I think that's what I was getting at.

PAL:

Oh, sure, sure. Otherwise it's boring. What would I—? Twiddle my thumbs? What would I do there?

RIKALA:

Yeah, see, but that is exceptional. A lot of people lose patience and lose interest and feel like they know it all and—

PAL:

Well, now, they're lazy or something, I don't know. No, I don't think it's been a particular strain in terms of—I travel, I do take vacations, I lecture quite a bit around the country. I have also, for the last four years, served on the Internal Revenue [Service (IRS)] commissioner's art advisory panel in Washington [D.C.], so I've gone to Washington at least twice a year. But that panel might be disbanded now because of lack of gifts.

RIKALA:

Oh, really?

PAL:

You see, that's a committee that used to be a small committee twenty years ago. There was only one committee which did all the work. And as it became—I think the golden years of art-giving to museums were, say, from mid-'70 to about '86. Yeah, the ten years. People gave so much that the IRS had to expand the committee and break it down, and from one general committee they had to have a Western committee and an ancient committee, an oriental committee, you see. Because the number of gifts were just so much, and it became so complicated. So the purpose of this committee is to—the cases that came up before that—you see, a field agent would first review it, and if he feels that your gifts are unfairly appraised or not what they are, then the field agent sends it to Washington, before this committee. And it comes before us, and we have to review the objects and see if the evaluation taken is justified or not.

RIKALA:

So usually they would be greater than—

PAL:

Most times they are exaggerated, yes. Yeah, most times badly, unfortunately, we found. There was a lot of abuse, particularly, yeah, during this last ten years. An enormous amount of abuse. People just became greedy. And then, bang, came the tax cut. So that's now—I mean, in '89 we met once only. And we may not even meet in '90.

RIKALA:

That's very interesting.

PAL:

We don't know whether we'll meet.

RIKALA:

So it really is this global problem for the art museums.

PAL:

Not global, only American.

RIKALA:

No, but I mean global, or universal, in that—on the one hand, the incentives make it difficult to give art. On the other hand, the prices of art skyrocket.

PAL:

That's right.

RIKALA:

So it's a no-win situation. So what's going to happen to the art world? Can there be a crash in the art world the way there's a crash in the stock market, a devaluation?

PAL:

Some people think it will come. But I am afraid I'm not a—

RIKALA:

There's no way to make sense of it, is there?

PAL:

No, I can't predict, at least, because as long as people have money, and there's no reason why they shouldn't—you see, it's not like stocks where new companies come up, so stocks go expanding, right? And you issue more stocks. Companies issue more stocks. So stocks are not a diminishing commodity. But art is. In a sense, if there were two hundred Picassos available, certainly that Picasso wouldn't have sold for \$40 million. Right? But the fact that so few—I mean, in a sense, museums have created this problem, partly. Because all the museums are already sitting on top of most art.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

So there's less for individuals to buy. Less old masters and impressionists and all. And that's one reason why contemporary stuff is going up like fire. Because, I mean, how many impressionists can you find now to buy? You see? Or Rembrandts? How many—? When did you last see a Rembrandt on the market? I haven't heard of one for a long time.

RIKALA:

No. Indeed, the last Rembrandt story had to do with the possible forgeries. Whatever that—

PAL:

Well, there you are, so you see—

RIKALA:

Some four years ago.

PAL:

In a sense, these things are going to go up because people have a lot of cash, a lot of cash, and partly also because of the tax structure. But even without the

tax structure and pension funds and all sorts of things, art has become sort of like an investment. A lot of people see it as better than the stock market. How many stocks—? I mean, who knows what this person paid for this Picasso? Probably not more than a few thousand dollars, or maybe a hundred thousand, even. ^ It has been in this collection for a long time. So, I mean, look at this Pontormo that the [J. Paul] Getty [Museum] bought—right?—for \$36 million or something like that.

RIKALA:

Oh, gosh. No idea.

PAL:

Yeah. Now, there is a collector who said he would never sell it. And he did, you see. For instance, we have a problem on our hands right now. As you know, the museum has sued Hal [B.] Wallis's estate. Well, Hal Wallis was our trustee for many, many years, and he had a collection of impressionist paintings. And upon his death, he sort of asked his estate foundation or whatever—he left the paintings to the foundation but instructed the foundation to put the paintings on loan to us in perpetuity. They were in our gallery, the galleries, and we said—and even the trustees of the foundation—he died maybe four or five years ago—were perfectly amenable and reiterated it at the time. There was a press conference and all that: "Yes, this stuff is going to remain in LACMA. That's what Hal Wallis wanted, blah, blah." Then suddenly the market hit the roof, especially after the sale of the van Gogh for \$53 million. And last year, all of a sudden, the Hal Wallis Foundation came and pulled all the pictures off our walls and said they had decided to sell them because the pictures were too valuable and they wanted to use the money for hospitals and other things. So they took the pictures away and put them up for sale. Now, the day before the sale we were tipped off that there was a letter from Hal Wallis. That in addition to his will, there was a letter that he wrote as a codicil to the will a couple of days before he died, or a couple of weeks before he died, explicitly telling his foundation trustees that the pictures should remain in the museum.

RIKALA:

Oh, dear.

PAL:

And they suppressed that letter. They never told us about that letter. And the museum also got fed up because here was another case, you know.

RIKALA:

Oh, sure.

PAL:

So the case is now going on. I mean, it's in litigation.

RIKALA:

That's very interesting.

PAL:

The Hal Wallis pictures altogether sold for I think \$30-odd million or more. Yeah. More. Or maybe—I am not exactly sure, but quite a good sum. And I think this happened just after [Armand] Hammer ditched us and pulled his stuff away. So the trustees just got fed up and sued the Hal Wallis Foundation. So who knows? Maybe we'll get—I think we do have a right to some of it, and those pictures would have really added quite a bit to our collection, because we don't have a strong impressionist collection. So it's very sad. But as I was saying, that in a sense, don't forget—and yet, museums are so avaricious. That's the other part, that I'm finding the museum business rather loathsome now, really, because it's more and more and more—and the bigger they are, the greedier they are. So therefore, when you compare with the National Gallery [of Art] or the Metropolitan [Museum of Art], the rest of us have no chance, because, naturally, these galleries are national institutions that people like to be associated with, so they give everything to them. And what do they need more art for? I mean, my God, I—a month ago, when I was in Washington, I decided to go through the National Gallery, some of their galleries in the old building. Whew! I mean, it was astonishing. I mean, room after room after room of masterpieces, masterpieces. You know, after some time you just didn't see anything. It was all a blur. And here I am an educated viewer. I'm not exactly a dumb guy, and I wondered what the plumber and the others did. And who is it for? And yet [J.] Carter Brown is always on the prowl and coming all the way from there to seduce the few collectors that we have. I

mean, they're shameless. They don't mind where they get it. It's like all is fair in love and war. It's like that in terms of the museum world. And my point is, what are they going to do with all this? And half of it rests in—I'll give you a classic example. There is a Russian artist, a nineteenth-century artist, who is basically forgotten now, but he was a very good artist, competent artist, who went to India in the 1870s and did some marvelous pictures of the Taj, among other things, and all. So after getting to know about him, we decided to have a work of his in the show. Well, we got nowhere with the Russians. I mean, they didn't even bother to respond to our letters. So you have no idea. By tracking down an obscure little catalog somewhere, I managed to find that one picture by him was in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts [MFA], a charming picture of a Mogul monument, and I was elated. I wrote to the MFA. First of all, they didn't even know that they—at first they wrote and said, no, they didn't have any work by this artist, okay? Then they said, yes, we do. And finally, I couldn't borrow it. And it has never been seen by anyone. It's been rotting in the storage of the Boston museum. Someone gave it to the Boston museum I think in the late nineteenth century or early part of this century. And then they said, "Well, no one's looked at it. It's not in that good a condition. It's too big. It will—" So I said to myself, "Now, look at it. Just think. Why did the person who gave it give it to this place?"

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

I mean, here is an institution, and they are not interested in it. Here this is probably the first time anyone's ever asked to borrow it, and they just couldn't get their act together to lend it.

RIKALA:

Yeah, that's a shame.

PAL:

You see? So I am now really becoming a little bit antimuseum in terms of the voracious appetite to collect and to acquire. And, as I said, it's partly because of that that that's where the art is ending up. So it's just not that people have

necessarily more money, but one reason there's so little art available in the market is because it's all in the museum.

RIKALA:

Yeah, yeah. What about contemporary Indian art? Is there contemporary Indian art?

PAL:

Oh, yeah. There's plenty of it, yeah. But I know very little about it in the sense that I—I really don't have much empathy for any contemporary art, I must say that. Because I can't quite relate to all of it. You know, some of it I find—some of it I like, but some of it is utter rubbish and I think ought not to be flattered by being called art. But apart from that, I mean, since we don't—you see, the American museums are so constituted that all contemporary art is usually considered to be part of the contemporary art department from all over the world. So I stay out of Indian contemporary art. Unfortunately, of course, our museum won't buy Indian contemporary art. They don't buy any contemporary art except American contemporary art. So I haven't seen them buy a single work of art by any Asian contemporary artist in the last twenty years. I think that's awful, but that's how parochial they are. You see, obviously they're making a value judgment in, say, our modern art department in totally rejecting, not even looking at, any contemporary art being created almost anywhere except in America. He [Maurice Tuchman] has virtually made a value judgment and said that nothing there is worth looking at. And I don't think you can do that. I just don't think you can do that without even looking. That's not fair. Besides, who's to judge, really, whether this stuff they're collecting is going to be of any—? In fact, a lot of the art that this museum bought in the sixties they have sold, you see, already. For them it's not good enough or something. It's not important enough. So they do make that judgment. And yet they buy contemporary art. And I'm not sure whether that's right or not. What if this artist comes—? A lot of it is whimsy and fashion.

RIKALA:

Yeah, exactly.

PAL:

A lot of it is. What if this artist suddenly becomes famous that you have just sold because you think he hasn't made it, then he becomes famous fifty years from now?

RIKALA:

Yeah, or even fifteen, as was the case with [David] Hockney.

PAL:

So then what are you going to do?

RIKALA:

Right, Hockney had such a sudden—

PAL:

Yes, I mean, Hockney, for instance.

RIKALA:

Yeah. He was always just a—

PAL:

Well, but, I mean, apart from Hockney—they're not selling Hockney. I'm just saying that, for instance, oh, I think lots of artists of the sixties that you wouldn't even—no one knows the names, you know. Now they have been all disposed of. Anyway, as I said, there are in fact a lot of contemporary artists in India who are producing artwork all over the country, but I must say that I have stayed away from it, really. That's what basically it is. Now, you see, there I can't juggle everything, also, in the sense that it's just too vast a subject, and I couldn't possibly really stay on top of it. So I decided to—if I am somewhere and I see a show—for instance, this latest issue of *Daedalus*—which, by the way, you might like to look at—this November issue, I think, of *Daedalus* is devoted entirely to India, in which there is a very interesting article by one of India's leading architects, Charles Gorrea, on Indian architecture. There's some very interesting observations, which you, I think, will find interesting.

RIKALA:

I've seen quite a few of his shows.

PAL:

Yeah. And there is an article on contemporary Indian painting, too, if you want. The whole issue is on India. You might look at the contemporary art there and see what you think of it, but I can't judge.

RIKALA:

Yeah, I will. That's good.

PAL:

But I have been approached by contemporary Indian artists, naturally, many, many times, thinking that I probably collect, or contemporary Indian art comes under my jurisdiction. But perhaps, thank God, it doesn't, because I'd have a tough time trying to decide or—

RIKALA:

But, of course, I mean, people will ask you out of curiosity.

1.24. TAPE NUMBER: XIV, Side One (November 27, 1989)

RIKALA:

I thought we'd start talking about the elections in India today, and—

PAL:

Oh, my God. Complete switch.

RIKALA:

Complete switch, yeah. Now, what is [Rajiv] Gandhi's position? You said that he—

PAL:

Well, from what I have heard on the news today, his party has lost. It doesn't have the majority to form a government, and so he has resigned. Now, once the counting is finished, they will see who has the majority seats, and that party will be asked to form a government in coalition with others. So I have no idea. They didn't give any details as to so far how many seats—although, the Congress [Party], Gandhi's party, will probably have the largest block of seats

in parliament, but not enough to form a government on their own. Whether some other parties will want to form a government with them or will want to go over to the opposition and form a government with the others, that's all still up in the air. So I don't think we can really discuss the outcome yet, at least, because we won't know the final results for another two days.

RIKALA:

Can India support a multiparty democracy? Is that the desired path?

PAL:

Well, no, it's certainly not the desired path, but it's the only path we have. I think they would have to see what sort of coalition they form. And after all, it's been working now for how many years in Israel, right? They have had coalition governments with, in fact, rotating prime ministers from the Likud and the Labor Party.

RIKALA:

Right.

PAL:

So again, that also is really conjectural until we know what the voting count is. And that we won't know for another two days, so—

RIKALA:

And what about just a change in image that—?

PAL:

Oh, I think that's all for the good. I think Rajiv Gandhi should have lost and has lost, so, I mean, whether he loses—I don't know whether he has lost his own constituency or not. He may win there personally and remain in parliament, which is okay, because I think he needs experience. And he certainly needs to be humbled, if not humiliated, in order to come back if he does remain in politics. I mean, the thing is that, you see, Rajiv Gandhi never proved himself to be a leader before he was thrust into this position.

RIKALA:

But he had no opportunities previously.

PAL:

That's right. He never did any politics, and he was not—he won the first election merely by riding on the coat-tail of sympathy for his mother's death, assassination. So he has had no experience. He doesn't know what it is to climb up from the bottom to the top. And that's always a problem when you come straight to the top and you are—and the little that I know him personally, and I do know him personally from Cambridge [University], where we were together for one year—

RIKALA:

Oh. Oh.

PAL:

He was an undergraduate, and I met him on many occasions there. He was a very quiet, shy, unassuming, rather dull, and, I would say, not very intelligent man. He was not a bright boy by any—in fact, he failed his exams after the first year, and he was sent down from Cambridge. He said bye-bye. So he didn't even take a degree. Then he went on to become a pilot. I can therefore personally vouch for the fact that I don't think he has or he ever had the capabilities of running a complex country of 800 million people, four times the population of America—all right?—with all the variety of ethnic and religiosity and languages and this and that. I mean, you practically need geniuses. You can't have an ordinary guy just go up and—and that's what happened. He just couldn't manage it. And he couldn't—

RIKALA:

But he wasn't—I mean, he's not altogether ordinary in that his family has the heritage of ruling.

PAL:

Oh, no, no. That's all—I don't think—

RIKALA:

You don't learn in-house?

PAL:

I don't think that has absolutely anything to do with it. I mean, where do you get this idea? I don't think—

RIKALA:

Well, I mean, that's what monarchs—

PAL:

Well, if that was the case, the best rulers in the world should have been kings.

RIKALA:

Yeah. No, and, of course, they're not.

PAL:

And they have been the worst. They screwed themselves up. Why are there so few kings left with any authority in the world? Because—no, no. That dynastic thing in—as a matter of fact, it has always failed in the history of the world. Very few dynasties have gone on ruling for more than three or four generations, right? And if they have, most of them—whole strings of these monarchs—I mean, just think, of the English monarchs. Ever since Elizabeth the Great, really, have you had—? I mean, luckily the prime ministers took over the power; the parliament took it over. So you've had brilliant men coming as prime ministers to rule the empire. If it were left to the kings, there'd have been a disaster, I think. Or anywhere else, for that matter. So that theory doesn't hold at all.

RIKALA:

Yeah. Well, we'll keep following, and we'll pick it up next time and see what happens to this, this new change in India. I thought we'd talk a little bit about some of the articles that you've passed on to me. I'd be interested in knowing how you got involved in this kind of journalism which has to do with politics. You have very strong views about world peace, which is interesting. I hope we can talk about—how did you decide to engage in journalism?

PAL:

Well, I don't know that I'm really a journalist per se, but I feel I have something more to say for the general reader than writing only on Indian art, which has a limited clientele, you might say, or readership. Well, I have always been

interested in, you might say, writing of all kinds: creative, journalistic, non-creative, whatever you might say. From very early days of my life, I was—at sixteen I was the editor of the school magazine [*Northpointer*] in my high school [Saint Joseph's College] for a year. I wrote my first short story ["The Runaway"] when I was eighteen, which was published in English in an Indian magazine, weekly magazine [*Sport and Pastimes*]. And I then wrote occasionally. As an undergraduate I also wrote for my college magazine [*Stephanian*]. I even edited the college magazine as an undergraduate. I used to write both fiction and poetry. Then, after I moved on to graduate school and increasingly became a serious student of art history, I naturally had less time to write light stuff. But I did. I did write. Again, I continued to write some short stories, which were also published. And then, when I went to Nepal to do my research (this was back in 1958, '59) for the first time a sort of an intellectual and, you might say—what's the word?—radical magazine in Calcutta asked me to write a couple of articles on—the editor asked me [to write] on sort of the India and Nepal relationship, which I did in Bengali. I wrote some popular articles on some new archaeological discoveries for them, and also on Nepalese religion, etc. So for several years I used to write for newspapers in India. Then I more or less stopped. When did I—? Well, after I moved to Los Angeles—remember, I think we've already spoken about the Norton Simon [Shivapuram] Nataraja, the dancing Shiva, the controversy. At that time, Henry Seldis, who was the art critic of the *L.A. Times*, asked me to write an article for them, which I did, which they published. Then about three years ago, I suppose, three or four years ago, I met Jack Miles, who became the new book editor of—no, no. I met Jack Miles about five years ago, six years ago. He was then at UC [University of California] Press, at UCLA. He then moved on to the *L.A. Times* to become its book editor and he asked me if I would be interested in reviewing books. So I did and so I do. I review two, three books a year for them. I enjoy doing that, writing again, not for the scholars, and writing—also, he sent me novels, he sent me books on India, he sent me books that were not on India, and sort of all sorts of books. And I sort of enjoyed that. I said, "Well, I like to write." These light pieces are very easy. In fact, they are sort of personal, and they're very easy to write, in a sense. I started realizing that I wanted to write also about art and other subjects for Indian papers. And the best Indian paper in English is the *Statesman*, published from both Calcutta and Delhi. I remember it was just after

Christopher Isherwood had died. And Christopher Isherwood, I think, had the potential of being one of the great writers of the English language and in English literature, but unfortunately he did not live up to his early expectations, you might say. But I always remained an admirer of his writing. As you know, he was very interested in India and in the nineteenth-century Bengali mystic and saint Ramakrishna and Vedanta and wrote a wonderful book on the life of Ramakrishna. It's, I think, one of the best books ever written on Ramakrishna. So I thought someone ought to write a tribute about his [Isherwood's] death. I had met him once or twice. Actually, once, really, although we had not talked much; he was rather shy. I knew about his activities at the Hollywood Vedanta center [Vedanta Society of Southern California] for a long time. So I wrote sort of a tribute about him and his writings and particularly about his Indian writings, which, by the way, I noticed that all official obituaries of his that I read—maybe three, four, at the time, that came out—they, of course, totally ignored his Indian writing.

RIKALA:

That's interesting. That's interesting.

PAL:

You see, I mean—

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

Well, it's everywhere. It's like this everywhere. I mean, today, for instance, just to give you an example, I tuned in the television news, national news, at six thirty. And for almost twenty minutes they went on and on and on about Prague. Now, in my opinion, it's already become old hat, these changes that are going on, I mean, beginning with East Germany. But now, that got almost twenty minutes of coverage, and then the plane crash in El Salvador, and then something else, and then they came on and mentioned the election in India. Now, here is the world's largest democracy going to vote, almost 500 million. That's two and a half times the entire population of the United States. Now, don't forget that in your election you don't even get 100 million going to the

polls. And here 500 million are going and voting, okay? And a very significant vote not only for India but really for that entire region and all that.

RIKALA:

Oh, yeah.

PAL:

Because if India's destabilized, you see, around that, I mean, there can be all sorts of problems.

RIKALA:

Oh, yeah.

PAL:

Right?

RIKALA:

Oh, yeah.

PAL:

But this is the importance given, you see, to events there. So similarly, it was not surprising to me. I have lived to learn—that's not just—you know, let me give you an example. My daughter [Shalmali Pal], who's going to UCLA, she wants to become a journalist, and she wants to write for—see, in order to write for the [*Daily Bruin*], she has to go and take some courses. Although I have read articles in [the] *Bruin*, and they're rubbish. I don't see why they go through all this charade. I mean, I think she's a naturally gifted writer. Anyway, so she's got this huge thing, guidelines, how to do and what is news and all. Apparently this is based on the Associated Press guidelines of what—so they have what is news. And as an example they give, for instance, if two hundred people in the San Francisco earthquake die, it's big news. But if twenty thousand die in India, it's of no consequence. Now, in black and white, I can show you. Now, this is the example they're giving. So you can imagine. I mean, unfortunately—and I think Vietnam was another instance—I really think you guys don't give a damn for anyone except the white people. That is obvious to me, because, you see, Czechoslovakia, the whole thing is like that because, again, it's a white country, European country.

RIKALA:

A very homogenous country, yeah.

PAL:

You see? I mean, do you ever hear of what's happening anywhere else in Asia? Nothing. Anyway.

RIKALA:

No, I agree. I agree.

PAL:

I wrote that article ["Tibet's Future after the Dalai Lama," August 24, 1989] and sent it off to the *Statesman*, and they published it. So that began sort of my relation, in a sense, with the *Statesman*. Now I write maybe half a dozen pieces a year for the *Statesman*. In fact, in the last three months, less than three months, I have had three major articles published in the *Statesman*. And op-ed-page articles. Not just in their—

RIKALA:

Wow.

PAL:

Also in their magazine section, like "Calendar" section. But top billing. [laughter] Not just—so I do that. And I have, again, I don't know—it's very peculiar. I can't explain to you why, but I have had an urge for the last two years also to go back to writing fiction again. I have so far had two or three short stories published in Bengali, so I think I'm going to continue to do that more. As a matter of fact, over the Thanksgiving weekend I finished another short story, which I will send off. And my short stories are being published in a major literary magazine in Calcutta, in Bengali, and that gives me a lot of satisfaction to sort of renew my contacts with my mother tongue and to continue to—you know, I hope I can contribute more, but the problem, of course, is time. I don't have time to do everything.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

I mean, I have to keep on my professional writing. I can't drop that, my books and catalogs. And right now I'm writing the fifth volume of the museum's collection catalogs.

RIKALA:

Oh, my.

PAL:

Which will be the first volume on painting.

RIKALA:

Oh, that's exciting.

PAL:

So that takes up my time. Saturdays and Sundays I now try and write, which I find very satisfying, this creative writing, sort of. Because you think of a little idea and a little plot and a character. That's about all you have, and you sit down, and it's amazing how it grows, how the whole thing evolves. You don't think of an end or anything in the beginning. It just forms itself. I have read that, but it's true. You think you are going to write this way, and then when you start actually writing, you say, "Oh no, it couldn't have happened like that. It can't happen like that." You create this whole situation, and it becomes—the other extraordinary thing, it becomes very real to you. I mean, even though—I mean, I've just written a little story about an Englishman who was an Indian civil servant during the British days in the thirties and forties in India. He came back to England, retired and came back, and then, oh, some time later, he committed suicide. Now, that bit is a fact. That's fact. That is not fiction. That is a fact. So I decided to weave a story and write why—although I don't know why he did it, but I put my imagination to work, whatever I thought he may have, and I spun this story, and I wrote it. When I finished it, I gave it to my wife [Chitralkha Bose Pal] to read it, just as a springboard to see, and she read it, and she said, "And who is this? Who is this about?" She thought the whole thing was—

RIKALA:

Was real?

PAL:

—was real, you see. So, you see, that means that—

RIKALA:

That's really wonderful.

PAL:

But believe me, all of it came while I was—I mean, it had nothing to do with me, but I made myself—what I constructed of the story was that I had gone to England as a student, and one day I got a call in the morning—it was Saturday morning. And now, for instance, why did I think of the story begins with the phone, with my landlady knocking on the door and saying, "Wake up, wake up. There's a phone call for you." And I woke up. And I say that, you know, in London it's awful to have to get up in the morning. Nothing can be worse, because it's damp and cold and—

RIKALA:

Cold and gray.

PAL:

Yeah, gray, and there's—you know. You get up, and it was dark, and I thought it was midnight, but then it was really a little after nine o'clock. But then it was early for me, because, you know, being a poor student, I would have probably slept till noon, because that way you save. You don't have to have breakfast, and you go out—

RIKALA:

[laughter] That's true.

PAL:

Well, I mean, it's true, you see, but I—it never happened with me, all this, but I assumed. Because I lived like a prince in England. I had a good scholarship in Cambridge [University], and there was no question. As a matter of fact, my breakfast used to rot on the sideboard. I used to get up late, and most of the time, by the time I came to the college, at the dining room, I mean, the fried

eggs on the hot platter that they keep, you see, had sort of become—you know how it becomes from the heat. yeah?

RIKALA:

[laughter] Like rubber, yeah.

PAL:

And the bacon had sort of—oh, it was awful. So [laughter] back to the story. I put on my nightgown and rush down two floors, because the phone is kept in the—you know, this, I assume, is how these places were, student digs, where students stayed. They didn't have phones in their rooms.

RIKALA:

Of course not.

PAL:

They had to run down and take it. So this guy called, and it was him, this Englishman, who said, "I'd like to see you tonight. I'm coming into town." And he had just come back from his first trip to India since independence. You see, he was a big district magistrate before independence—commissioner—and he came back. The first trip. He hadn't gone back to India at all, so this is now, here—I'm talking of the sixties, mid-sixties. So he said, "I want to tell you lots of things again." So this guy, the student, had a date with a German girlfriend, and he—now, that also, you know, suddenly I decided right there he had to drop that, or he took her out during the day, and then he went to meet this guy. And then this guy—you know, they talked about his trip to India and what happened, and then he sort of confided. It was a very cold and foggy night, the typical London fog, and he had—when this guy arrived at about six thirty or so, the Englishman had had a couple of drinks, already a few drinks, and they drank some more, and they chatted. And then they went to his favorite Indian restaurant, and they had the typical Indian vindaloo, and I write a little about the cuisine of the restaurant, saying that—

RIKALA:

Vindaloo is too spicy for the British.

PAL:

Nowhere else in the world do you get this kind—it's nothing to do with tandoori. These are these other London restaurants. Not tandoori. The old India-Pakistani restaurants, Bangladeshi, all—you know. So I write about that. Then he tells him what happened, that he has been living with this guilt complex ever since, in 1946, he had left India, because he had to order a shooting at a mass of demonstrators. And some twenty-eight people were killed. And he loved India, and he loved Indians, and this, sort of, he just could not—you know, he could not wash his sin away, like Pontius Pilate. So he resigned from the service, took early retirement, and came back. And that's why he couldn't go back to India, because he just felt that he had—

RIKALA:

The shame and the guilt.

PAL:

Because he was basically not the imperial type. He was rather a meek man who—now, all this developed. You see, I—

RIKALA:

[laughter] Go on.

PAL:

It had nothing to do with the real thing and all this, so—

RIKALA:

Your imagination is wonderful.

PAL:

So what happened, also, he was not going to go back to the place where all this had happened. He went back to India, and he went to Delhi particularly, because he was writing a book on—he was a historian, and he was writing a book on history, modern Indian. He wanted to do some research in Delhi. And all this was unplanned, mind you. As I was writing, the character started evolving. He went to Delhi. And then, sort of, I suddenly decided, well, in Delhi he said, "Well, I'll go quietly to that town to look at it and come back." So he took the train and went to that town to slip away. He went to town, and he got up on a cycle rickshaw—you know these cycle rickshaws—and said, "Take

me around the town." And the rickshaw wallah took him around town and then, of course, took him to this enormous memorial that the town had built to the twenty-eight people who had died in the '46 massacre. You see? So he went and stood next to it. He stood, and he was looking at this monument and stood there stunned, you see, when suddenly he felt—now, you see, that's how I first ended it. I mean, that's how I said, you know, he stood there, and, again, instead of getting rid of his guilt complex by going to India, it really brought everything back. He came back to London, and then the story would have continued, but they had finished their dinner. So he wanted to get it off his chest. See, here was this young Indian boy whose father he knew—you see, that was the connection.

RIKALA:

Yeah, I was going to ask you that.

PAL:

That I have said in the beginning, whose father he knew in India in the forties. This boy had now come for his own higher studies, and naturally he had been introduced to this guy, had renewed their acquaintance. So they come back to his flat, London flat, where he has a pied-a-terre, and the guy is by then sloshed. But he says he's going to stay there the night, sort of. So this guy sees to it that he goes inside the house, and he goes off to his own place. And then Monday morning he gets a call from the Englishman's son saying that, "I'm sorry to inform you, but my father died on Saturday evening while driving back home, probably because of the fog, police think. But they will come and interview you." And so, of course, I know immediately that he knew—he wanted to kill himself and that's how he did it. He decided to go back in that fog. I don't say all this, but leave it to the reader that—my last line is something like, "The police came and saw me, and I gave them sort of a vague idea of our conversation, but I did not really—." Because he really then realized that this guy was like a confession, his last evening, to him. So he doesn't tell. And he said, "Because I think it's best that the death remains shrouded in the London fog," you see?

RIKALA:

Oh, very nice.

PAL:

But then, when I was doing the second—I don't know whether this should be recorded or not, but anyway—

RIKALA:

Oh, no, yeah. I was going ask you about the creative writing.

PAL:

When I went to redo that, rewrite it and do the second draft, now, let me tell you, I had no idea—I decided to make it a little more dramatic, sort of, by—and it's a very natural—it's not an unnatural touch, as you will see. See, while he is standing at that monument, a young man comes and stands next to him and is silent for a time, and then this Englishman sort of looks up and looks at the young man and smiles at him, you know, as you do. And the young man naturally says, "Oh, are you American?" Because most tourists are now sort of—you know, everyone thinks every white person is sort of—the first question, "Are you American?" So the Englishman says no. His name is Robert. Mr. Robert says, "No, I am British." So he says, "Well, you know, this is not only a national memorial, but this is also a personal memorial for me, so I come here every day." So the British man says, "Why?" And the young man says, "Because one of the twenty-eight dead was my father, and I was only two years old." And that sort of really is the punch line. I said, that makes it more forceful. That he just couldn't—he was already too weak, and he—it was like you're going to the confessional, confessing your sin, and then the father turning round and sort of telling you, "No, buddy, you are not going to be redeemed."

RIKALA:

Right. Your sin is more complicated than that.

PAL:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Now, you see, all that—I think it's rather a nice story.

RIKALA:

Yeah, it's a very complete thought.

PAL:

Yet it all came, all came while I was writing it, so—

RIKALA:

Well, imagination is wonderful that way, isn't it? You can just—

PAL:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RIKALA:

You can just sit there and come up with it.

PAL:

Who knows? I might make you the heroine of a story one day.

RIKALA:

Oh, that would be lovely. I'll be pleased.

PAL:

[laughter] And you'll never know.

RIKALA:

I'll be pleased with that. Yeah.

PAL:

Anyway, so there you are. You know, I find it wonderfully relaxing also, so I hope I can do more.

RIKALA:

Any stories like that in the English language?

PAL:

Well, I have just had a very interesting story published in the English language in a San Francisco—it's called *India Currents*.

RIKALA:

I know it.

PAL:

You know *India Currents*?

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

This monthly sort of—

RIKALA:

It's a magazine format.

PAL:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, they just published a short story of mine in English last month. November issue. It's called "The Emperor's Defeat."

RIKALA:

Well, that is really interesting. It's really wonderful. Like I said, the imagination is so rich, given the opportunity.

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

Do you remember telling stories when you were younger?

PAL:

No, no. Not really.

RIKALA:

You are gifted in verbal—

PAL:

Yes, I can sort of build up to a climax. You know, I can. Yeah, I do. I never made up stories to tell, but I think I can tell a story well.

RIKALA:

That's an important—

PAL:

I mean, a raconteur, you know, and—

RIKALA:

Yeah, yeah. Exactly.

PAL:

And hold someone's interest. So that's the technique, I suppose, in telling stories.

RIKALA:

Yeah, I mean, it's a whole—it's interesting communicating in whatever fashion that's writing. Let's go back to some of these—

PAL:

Yes. Let's go back to more concrete things. Whatever questions you have.

RIKALA:

Well, I'm interested in—you know, I pick up things—

PAL:

But, you know, there is a relationship, by the way, because I've always said—I always say this to students also—that first of all, I think if you want to be a good art historian—in fact, if you want to be a historian, you have to love telling stories or being able to tell a story well or read stories. You have to. But to be an art historian particularly, and more than perhaps even being a general historian. But in both, really, if you think that it's not only the rational, logical mind, it's also a sleuth in you. Right? Research is basically—especially if you're going to look at books and cull evidence—we even say evidence. We use the same word. So it's detective work, basically.

RIKALA:

Oh, yeah.

PAL:

Right? To start looking. And just like a good detective, a lot of things fall into place, or luck favors, as you know, really.

RIKALA:

And it almost always starts with an intuition, a hunch, to pursue your initial research, anyway.

PAL:

Absolutely, yeah. Exactly the same thing. So it started logical for me to want to write stories, having all my life written about art history.

RIKALA:

And the art history, writing about images or sculpture or buildings or anything like that, your descriptive faculties are so—you're always trying to find ways of describing things and creating images for other people.

PAL:

Well, artists—take this bronze, for instance. You see, it's not like the Sherlock Holmes or Agatha Christie. Art history—well, it is. You just think of it, this is your corpse, this is your dead body, right? What it is basically is you have to find out who created it, or who murdered it, and when and how.

RIKALA:

Under what circumstances.

PAL:

And that's what basically art history is. So its buildup is very much the same, from clues that are just contained in this bronze. And then you have to take them out and relate them, and then put it in the general picture and see that everything fits in logically, and there you have your final solution.

RIKALA:

And probably the historian's prime happiness in life is finding a story that someone else hasn't already told, the pursuit of that. Obviously, some historians only live for that, and others do a lot of other work in between, but it is a really exciting thing when you stumble across a piece of evidence that seemingly has been sitting there unnoticed.

PAL:

Exactly, yeah.

RIKALA:

That's wonderful. And you get thrilled for each other, too, and that's exciting. Yeah, history's a wonderful profession in that way.

1.25. TAPE NUMBER: XIV, Side Two (November 27, 1989)

PAL:

In fact, I think the guy who died may have died out of a basic insecurity—the guy in real life, my model—sort of in himself, which had nothing to do with the incident I described. Anyway, I—

RIKALA:

Well, but one more question. Has this fact of his life and his death sat in your mind somewhere for a long time?

PAL:

Oh, yeah, yeah.

RIKALA:

Or did you just stumble across it recently?

PAL:

No, no, no. It's been there for years. Several years.

RIKALA:

That's the other thing that's really interesting.

PAL:

Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, things carry. I mean, I've been carrying many other germs of stories like that for years and years, and I'll get to them. I'll get to them.

RIKALA:

Yeah, that's—

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

So, talking about the *Statesman*, one of your articles was about Tibet's future after the Dalai Lama [XIV, Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho].

PAL:

Oh, yes, yes.

RIKALA:

And some of your points—there are so many interesting points in this, and even this is just a two-hundred-word article. I'm interested in knowing where your political views about Tibet stem from. Just the interest.

PAL:

Ah, sure. That's interesting, because it's a big part, I think, of my life. Because, first of all, I am known as someone who has contributed considerably to the history of Tibetan art. I did the first exhibition of Tibetan art [*The Art of Tibet*] in the West [Asia House Gallery, New York City] back in 1969, when Tibet was totally an unknown word, almost, you might say. And I have had friends, Tibetan friends from school—high school days—very close friends. Because I know Tibetan culture and Tibetan society and the Tibetans well, both professionally and personally, I have been very, very unhappy. In fact, I think, from my own country having lost its independence before '47 and having been brought up in a colony, I can feel much more than any of you can, I think, what the Tibetans are feeling under China. I think there's absolutely no legal or moral grounds for the Chinese to occupy Tibet, which is what they're doing. So I feel very strongly about it. I think it's one of the great stories of betrayal, great betrayal, by the entire Western world, the so-called champions of democracy. And it pains me even more now to see how they are going about giving coverage to what's happening in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and all these places. But, I mean, for instance, Tibet is still under martial law, ever since April, I think. I mean, the worst form of genocide is going on there. Far worse than—I mean, after all, there was no genocide in East Germany. I mean, these

Germans were ruling themselves. It's just a party. But the Tibetan culture is, under our eyes, being obliterated by the Chinese. And nothing, nothing, not a word is said about that by the U.S. government. And here they talk of being the great leaders, you know, the righteous leaders of the free world. I mean, I think it's utter baloney. I mean, they are just afraid of China. I think [President George H. W.] Bush is. Bush and the American government are terrified of China. And also, I think the American business interest sees China as an enormous market, so Tibet is—and maybe their conscience doesn't hurt, because—you know, I can't quite accept the fact—even though I'm living here, I have to tell you I can't quite accept the fact that all of us, all Americans—white, black, or us Asians—are all intruders on this continent. That it belonged originally to a people who were obliterated by the white man, and America founded. So the American story of its foundation, in my opinion, is not a very proud one. You'd think that they would, having—what have they done? They've wiped out this entire civilization of the American Indians, and remnants of it you can only now see in reservations, where, in fact, you don't see the original Indians, but you see their tragic, tragic, and sad descendants, drunken sots, useless, you know. Or you have to go to a museum to see Amerindian culture. And ultimately, that's what you'll have to do to see what the Tibetan is. Now you have to go to museums and other places. And we are not doing anything to stop it.

RIKALA:

What's China's motivation for oppressing Tibet?

PAL:

Oh, you know, they're not oppressing; they just want the land. It's a very rich land, a huge land, and China's population has to expand. But even then, you see, the Chinese have to be given double their salary—mainland Chinese—to go and work in Tibet. All sorts of incentives. They don't want to. The ordinary Chinese doesn't want to go to Tibet. See? But, you know, nothing, nothing is being done about it at all. And as I wrote in the article, as you read, I mean, for instance, look at the reception what's-his-name, the Polish guy, got here.

RIKALA:

Lech Walesa.

PAL:

Yeah, Lech Walesa. Walesa has, but so has the Dalai Lama now gotten the Nobel Peace Prize and everything, and he comes here. I mean, does Bush ever bother to see him?

RIKALA:

Well, that's an interesting point you make, that—

PAL:

No!

RIKALA:

—no American president has ever met with the Dalai Lama.

PAL:

Yeah! I mean, they don't even meet, they are so afraid of the Chinese leadership objecting. Now, in that case, you tell me how are you the leader of a free country if you can't do what you want and you are afraid of what the Chinese will think? And that's precisely what the—every American president, including this great [Ronald W.] Reagan of yours and his bravado—but he's a coward, basically.

RIKALA:

Oh, sure.

PAL:

I would have said the man had courage if he had met with the Dalai Lama. At least meet with the man. I mean, he was the head of state. And apart from being head of state, he is a great religious leader, and he is absolutely an avowed man of peace. He even doesn't mind his country losing some of its freedom provided there is peace. He wants the whole zone to be declared a peace zone. And he has antagonized his own people by saying that he's willing to give up some of Tibet's freedom in order to gain some sort of peaceful solution to the problem. So I think there is no question about it. He doesn't preach. He simply practices what he preaches. And I think that's why, I think

very deservedly—and if you think of such belligerent warmongers like [Henry A.] Kissinger having gotten the Nobel Peace Prize—

RIKALA:

Yeah, I mean, that was—

PAL:

It's utterly outrageous, you know.

RIKALA:

Yeah, that was an excellent counterpoint that you—

PAL:

Yeah. So anyway, here you are. I feel very, very strongly about Tibet, because I think a grave injustice, grave injustice has been done there. And I have to tell you that I blame partly America and Western European countries for letting Tibet down.

RIKALA:

Yeah. Yeah, well, I agree. Again, it's not anything you can find in the newspapers or in the—you never hear it on the news. I mean, last spring there were a few events on the news.

PAL:

But I think the Tibetans themselves, except those that—I think this Tibetan government in exile that moves with the Dalai Lama—and, of course, when I say Western countries, [I am] including all free countries. I shouldn't say Western Europe. I include India and Japan and all these countries. You know, Japan is a Buddhist country. I haven't heard Japan say one word for the Dalai Lama. Because Japan ultimately is an imperialist country, you know? They probably think the whole of China, including Tibet, should be part of Japan.

RIKALA:

And India, yeah.

PAL:

So it's a conspiracy of silence. And now, of course, they are trying to do here a little bit and there a little bit, so they've given it a small—they're throwing crumbs, by giving a little Nobel Prize. Unless they speak out and forcefully—but they won't. Look at the pictures we saw on television day after day of the slaughter of the students in Tiananmen Square in China and look at Bush's weak—in fact, hardly any reaction.

RIKALA:

Well, Bush seems to be particularly ambivalent towards China since he was the ambassador there. He seems to have some—

PAL:

He must have been totally indoctrinated by those guys, I have a feeling. You know, they send all these electrical pulses. They must have. Because I can't believe someone can be so—at least [Richard M.] Nixon had the guts to go there and tell them that I don't agree with you, what you did.

RIKALA:

Yeah. Exactly.

PAL:

He denounced it much more forcefully than Bush has ever done.

RIKALA:

Exactly.

PAL:

But again, I think the Tibetans themselves, though I don't know what the problem is, the Tibetans are trying to capture the Western imagination by selling the only product they have to sell: that is their mystical brand of Buddhism.

RIKALA:

Yeah, yeah.

PAL:

And in a sense, that article is slightly against that. You see, I have said that that won't get them far.

RIKALA:

No, because for one thing it only reaches a very few people who can afford it.

PAL:

In fact, no, it's not a question of affording it. It really ultimately, you see, will put off people, because you know how the basic American thing is, "Well, these peculiar foreign religions, anyone who meddles with them are either hippies or liberals and—"

RIKALA:

Well, what I mean by "afford it" is the people who can afford to take a pilgrimage to go to Tibet to see it and experience it and all that. Everybody else is basically unaware.

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

Or, I mean, can't in any way participate.

PAL:

So I don't think—I think this kind of stuff is—I was very concerned about this. What has happened is that the Dalai Lama is the only leader that the Tibetans have. There's absolutely no one anywhere near him. And since he is a religious person and they are capitalizing on his religiosity rather than his political leadership, what happens when he dies? They can't create another Dalai Lama. The system won't allow it. There is no way. It will take another twenty years before—they have to find the Dalai Lama, they have to—he has to be less than one year old. Right? He can't be a leader. So where are the others?

RIKALA:

So what's going to happen in the interim?

PAL:

Yeah. There is no other. You don't know a single name. None of us knows a single name. And to be honest with you, when he was here for the Kalachakra initiation in July, I had his whole advisers and inner cabinet here for dinner, right here in this room. They were all here for dinner, so I met them all. And what can I tell you? I mean, they are basically people no smarter than Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. And what is even worse is they are totally overawed by him. You see, to them Dalai Lama is the god.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

And they treat him like a god. You should see. It's a totally different way of looking at a leader. Nothing like it. No one looks at a U.S. president or stands before him the way the Tibetans still treat their god-king, sort of. You see?

RIKALA:

So they're caught in their own mysticism.

PAL:

They are caught in their own thing. And unless they get out of it—and they have to get him out of it, I think, in his own time. While he is there, they should identify someone, one or two or maybe a group, send them out more, and not simply go on exploiting the Dalai Lama's personal charisma and his religious preaching for their political purpose. Because that will all end the minute the Dalai Lama goes, and that's it. I suspect that is the end of Tibet unless Tibetans in Tibet can rise up against China, and I don't think they can. The Tibetans by themselves cannot. China is too vast, too vast. So my only hope now is that if Eastern Europe completely de-communizes itself and Romania falls and finally Russia also goes that same way, then China will be totally isolated, and things might look up there, and a democratic revolution may take place. Now, I'm not so sure whether that will help the Tibetans or not, unless there is stronger support for Tibet in the free world. Because it does not matter whether a Chinese is a communist or a Chinese is a democrat, he is an imperialist. Whereas—you think a non-communist China tomorrow will give up its claim on Hong Kong, for instance, in 1997?

RIKALA:

No.

PAL:

Right. Will it give up its claim on Inner Mongolia? No. So it won't give up its claim on Tibet, either.

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

I know that for a fact. If you go to Taiwan and talk to the Nationalist Chinese about Tibet, they'll clamp up. They'll say, yes, Tibet is part of China.

RIKALA:

So the Dalai Lama as a person, as an individual, do you think he sees this dilemma, this political, religious dilemma?

PAL:

Oh, I'm sure he sees it, but, you see, he has been forbidden to talk politics by both the Indian government and the Chinese government.

RIKALA:

So he has no one to talk to.

PAL:

No, unfortunately, he can't talk politics directly. The minute he talks politics directly, India can throw him out of India. And then where will he go.

RIKALA:

How terrible. A frustrating position to be in.

PAL:

Yeah. No, that's the agreement between China and India. And India, of course, is also afraid of China. China has said, fine, you can give him asylum, and he can stay there, but he cannot meddle in politics.

RIKALA:

It's such a complicated situation.

PAL:

So I am afraid I don't feel reason to be very optimistic about Tibet's future.

RIKALA:

The other article I was especially intrigued by [An Undeserving Feather in Yasir Arafat's Cap," *L.A. India*, October 13, 1898] is about Yasir Arafat and the [Jawaharlal Nehru] Award [for International Understanding].

PAL:

I know. The peace award to Yasir Arafat.

RIKALA:

The peace award. See, again, this thread of world peace comes up in your writing. And this is particularly interesting. Again, the coverage on the Arafat award, winning the award, was. brief. I mean, I don't think I would have even—

PAL:

Did you notice it anywhere? Where?

RIKALA:

I heard it on the news. And the only reason I—

PAL:

Oh, you did? You see why it is very funny. It—

RIKALA:

But see, the only reason I realized that I'd heard about it was after I'd read your article that was a critical kind of—

PAL:

You know, the funny part of this was that it was not reported anywhere. Now, whether that was a conspiracy of silence, again, by all the newspapers and

media here, or they, again, just simply feel, well, you know, really who the hell cares about—

RIKALA:

Or you just can't say anything good about—

PAL:

But it's a big award, and very eminent people have gotten it, deserving people. And it again gives a tremendous—. [tape recorder off] I'm not against the Arab cause or anything, but I think you have to admit—and I'm, on principle, totally against—I don't care what the cause and how difficult and how just is your demand, I don't think you have any right to use violent means to achieve it, except, perhaps, if you are dealing with someone like Hitler. I mean, that's different than simply becoming a terrorist for the sake of political freedom. I don't think it's justifiable. I mean, if you're going to make exception all the time to what is justifiable in terms of exerting violence, then everything is justified.

RIKALA:

That's exactly the problem today.

PAL:

Yeah, right. Then, fine, then go ahead. But otherwise, I mean, this man has resorted to continuous violence, and I don't think his statement simply in the last year or so of wanting peace is sufficient to granting this award. I'm just very much against it.

RIKALA:

Yeah, because it's just been talk on his part. I mean, it's not in any way a peaceful activism.

PAL:

That's right. He may be the most moderate Arab leader Palestinians will ever have, but I think the real heroes are basically the West Bankers, who I think have showed tremendous restraint against—I think that whole village that did not pay tax. Do you know what the name is of this little town in—? Yeah?

RIKALA:

Yeah.

PAL:

And did not for what? And then Israelis simply went and took every bed and furniture from every house, and still the Palestinians kept quiet. That is the most heroic example of passive resistance I've seen since Mahatma [Mohandas K.] Gandhi's.

RIKALA:

Yeah. An incredible show of restraint on their part.

PAL:

And ultimately Israel backed down. There was not a drop of blood shed. They didn't throw a stone, nothing. They just said, "Fine. Take everything and go." They should have been given the peace prize, that whole town, instead of Yasir Arafat.

RIKALA:

This article is particularly interesting because of the way you've used personalities to show extremes. So you put Kissinger on one side as an extreme example and Jimmy [James E.] Carter on the other side.

PAL:

Now, you see, I think that if any three deserved it, I think that way, for making that bold step—it was really Jimmy Carter who brought them together.

RIKALA:

It was his idea.

PAL:

Can you imagine Reagan or anyone doing it? And everyone ignored Jimmy. Jimmy Carter, I think, should have been given the Nobel Prize before anyone else. And [Anwar] Sadat was the other hero. You see, I cannot forgive [Menachem] Begin his early acts of terrorism.

RIKALA:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that was very well put. This was key.

PAL:

Yeah, well, I sent that article to the *L.A. Times*, and they were not interested.

RIKALA:

Really? It's very critical.

PAL:

Yeah, but I think there again, they simply didn't want to give this recognition to the prize. To them it's not an important prize of international stature.

RIKALA:

Really?

PAL:

Well, I mean, except for the Nobel—do you know, in fact, there is a very, very, important prize given, the [Ramon] Magsaysay Award? Have you heard of it? You see, there you are. It's named after [Ramon] Magsaysay. He was, I think, president of the Philippines or something. Anyway, it's a big prize given in Asia for all sorts of real positive things, like the green revolution in food, things that fundamentally affect the lives of millions.

RIKALA:

Right, on a scale of millions.

PAL:

Like the Nobel Prize for medicine. Even more than that. I mean, some of that is often theoretical, but this is all very practical. But, you see, you never hear who gets it and why reported here. So I think that's it.

RIKALA:

It's very difficult. It's very difficult. Another article, in the *Saturday Statesman Review*, was about the three-hundred-year celebration of Calcutta ["Thoughtless and Unproductive Celebrations," September 2, 1989].

PAL:

Oh, yes. Calcutta. That's a joke.

RIKALA:

It's interesting. And again, the interest for me was not having realized that Calcutta is an old—

PAL:

Three hundred years old.

RIKALA:

Three hundred years old. I mean, of course it's an old city, but that it's—again, with the fact that we're so clueless was—

PAL:

Yeah. I know. They're not interested. I mean, again, I don't think the *L.A. Times* will do an article.

RIKALA:

And when you compare it to the hoopla over the French Revolution—

PAL:

I know.

RIKALA:

I mean, here we had an exhibition at UCLA, many exhibitions at UCLA.

PAL:

That's right, yeah.

RIKALA:

And Los Angeles, Paris, we're suddenly sister cities, and here we were celebrating Bastille Day, on and on and on and on and on and on.

PAL:

Yeah.

RIKALA:

I mean, at some point there's a long stretch of the imagination to associate—

PAL:

Well, I'll tell you one thing. I find this whole business of Calcutta's tercentenary to be a joke, which is basically what I've said.

RIKALA:

It's your point, yeah.

PAL:

I don't understand why this—you know, Calcutta has a Marxist government. The state government is Marxist, basically. And why they should become the bearer, sort of, of the flag and run with it and make this a big, big—I mean, what their game is, they're trying perhaps to gain some sort of popularity. Because first of all, you really can't—you know, Job Charnock was running away from Hooghly, from the Portuguese, down the river, and he stopped at this village called Sutanati for the night and came ashore. And Sutanuti, the main reason why the Portuguese and English, everyone, were after Bengal was Bengal has been one of the great producers of both cotton and silk in the world. So to get the lucrative textiles there. Sutanuti was, in fact, sort of a market, weekly market, for cotton thread. So he decided to stay there for some time, and he stayed on, and he started building this and that. And really, Calcutta was the next village, okay? So he didn't choose Calcutta, number one, when it became a city, ultimately. And we don't know when, really—at least fifty years after he left, because it wasn't until—he landed there in 1690. But it wasn't really till about 1730 that the British even built a fort there. But why, in Sutanuti, the guy who selected Calcutta as the name of the city should really be considered the progenitor of the city, the father of the city, rather than Job Charnock—anyway, apart from that, Calcutta was already there. It's mentioned in 1572, I think, in the 1570s, in Mogul history, you see, as a place. So this whole thing is trumped up. It's nothing like the two hundredth anniversary of the constitution or the French Revolution. It's nothing as specific as that.

RIKALA:

It's not event oriented in history.

PAL:

No, it's not event oriented. I mean, it's like saying that—I mean, if you had to celebrate the—I don't know, we had our two hundredth anniversary of this city [Los Angeles], I remember, but—was it one hundredth or two hundredth?

RIKALA:

Two hundredth.

PAL:

Two hundredth.

RIKALA:

Well, there's been a pueblo for two hundred years in downtown here, so they can trace downtown L.A. history.

PAL:

Yeah, but what is—

RIKALA:

But in terms of city, founded city, I mean—

PAL:

That's right. Yeah, that's the whole point. It's as phony as Los Angeles, really, saying it's a two-hundred-year-old city. You know, a little settlement like that does not a city make.

RIKALA:

Or a church, no.

PAL:

Yeah, or a church, yeah. Anyway, so it's very similar. It's even worse than that. My whole point is that the city, as you know and as everyone knows—you may not have seen it, but you've heard—it's one of the most decrepit, disgusting cities in the world. It is horrendously bad in terms of civic amenities and everything. The dirtiest city, filthy, poverty. It's unbearable. If I read you the letter I got from my sister [Arundhati Pal Ray] from Calcutta today about

the centennial and this, I mean, she is almost in tears. She said, "We read in the papers that after this major earthquake it took less than three days to restore telephone connections with San Francisco." And she said, "And in this city that is celebrating its tercentennial, after waiting for three weeks and begging them to come and repair my telephone, I had to finally spend six hours with the mechanics to make sure that they did the repairs." You see? Why? Who are you fooling doing this? Take care of what we consider to be basic amenities of the city.

RIKALA:

Yeah. No, your point is very well taken in this article. And again, the way you describe the character of Calcutta, the way it's determined by the past and the present and Indian society, I was thinking that people just aren't aware enough of what's going on.

PAL:

No.

RIKALA:

Because this is a major city.

PAL:

Sure.

RIKALA:

So these were all extraordinarily vivid and eye-opening articles, and I'm pleased that you passed them on to me. Those were really interesting for me. As far as tonight's talk goes, perhaps we should wrap up here and leave the art history for another time.

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