MUSEUM CURATOR

Agnes Mongan

Interviewed by Taina Rikala de Noriega
and Richard Cándida Smith

Art History Oral Documentation Project

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles
and the
Getty Center for the History of
Art and the Humanities

CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: January 21, 1905, Somerville, Massachusetts.

Education: B.A., Bryn Mawr College, 1927; M.A., Smith College, 1929.

CAREER HISTORY:

Research assistant, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, 1929-37; keeper of drawings, 1937-47; curator of drawings, 1947-75; assistant director, 1951-64; associate director, 1964-69; director, 1969-71.

Art historian in residence, American Academy in Rome, 1950.

Visiting director, Timken Art Gallery, San Diego, 1971-72.

Kreeger-Wolf Distinguished Professor, Northwestern University, 1976.

Bingham Professor, University of Louisville, 1976.

Samuel H. Kress Professor in Residence, National Gallery of Art, 1977-78.

Waggoner Professor, University of Texas at Austin, 1977; professor of fine arts, 1981.

Professor of fine arts, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1979.

Visiting director, Metropolitan Museum and Art Centers, Coral Gables, Florida, 1980.

AFFILIATIONS:

Académie de Montauban.

American Academy of Arts and Sciences, fellow.

American Association of Art Museum Directors.

Art Bulletin, board of editors.

Arte Veneta, advisory board.

British Institute, board of directors.

Chapelbrook Foundation, trustee.

College Art Association of America, board of directors, 1949-54.

Committee for Restoration of Italian Art, vice chair.

Council for the Villa i Tatti, executive committee.

Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, board of trustees, 1940-60.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Council for the Arts.

Museum of Fine Arts, department of textiles, visiting committee.

Pan-American Society of New England, 1940-62.

Phi Beta Kappa, honorary member.

Pierpont Morgan Library, council of fellows.

Royal Academy of Art, Benjamin Franklin Fellow.

Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, advisory board, 1974.

Smith College, visiting committee to the art museum, 1970.

Somerville Historical Society, executive committee.

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, United States national commission, 1954-57.

White House Committee for Education in the Age of Science, 1961.

Women's Caucus for Art.

AWARDS AND HONORS:

L.H.D., Smith College, 1941.

Palms d'academie, 1949.

Fulbright scholarship, 1950.

L.H.D., Wheaton College, 1954.

L.H.D., University of Massachusetts, 1970.

Cavaliere ufficiale, 1971.

Honorary doctorate of fine arts, LaSalle College, 1973.

Honorary doctorate of fine arts, Colby College, 1973.

Honorary doctorate of fine arts, University of Notre Dame, 1980.

Honorary doctorate of fine arts, Boston College, 1985.

Medal for Achievement in the Arts, Signet, Harvard University, 1986.

Medal for Extraordinary Service, Harvard University, 1986.

Benemerenti Medal, 1987.

EXHIBITIONS:

Collection of Curtis O. Baer, 1958.

Andrew Wyeth: Dry Brush and Pencil Drawings, 1963.

Paul J. Sachs Memorial Exhibition, 1966.

Ingres Centennial Exhibition, 1967.

Collection of David Daniels, 1968.

Bicentennial Exhibition of Drawings of Tiepolo, 1970.

Memorial Exhibition of the Watercolors and Drawings of Benjamin Rowland Jr., 1973.

Margaret Fisher Exhibition (Busch-Reisinger Museum), 1973.

Presidents and Patriots: Memories of 18th-Century Harvard, 1974-76.

Harvard Honors Lafayette, 1975.

In Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of J. A. D. Ingres (Louisville

and Fort Worth, contributor to exhibition and catalog), 1983.

In Quest of Excellence (Miami, contributor to catalog), 1983.

The Fine Line (West Palm Beach, contributor to catalog), 1985.

Ingres and Delacroix (Tubingen and Brussels, contributor to catalog), 1986.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS:

Drawings in the Fogg Museum of Art. With Paul J. Sachs, 1940.

One Hundred Master Drawings, 1949.

Catalogue of the Frick Collection: French Paintings, 1950.

Great Drawings of All Time. Vol. III, 1962.

Andrew Wyeth: Dry Brush and Pencil Drawings, 1963.

Memorial Exhibition: Works of Art from the Collection of Paul J. Sachs, 1878-1965. With Mary Lee Bennett, 1965.

Ingres Centennial Exhibition, 1867-1967: Drawings, Watercolors, and Oil Sketches from American Collections. With Hans Naet, 1967.

Selections from the Drawing Collection of David Daniels. With Mary Lee Bennett, 1968.

Tiepolo Drawings, 1970.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWERS:

Taina Rikala de Noriega. B.A., Art History and Environmental Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz; M.Sc., Architecture, University College, London; Ph.D., Urban Planning, UCLA.

Richard Cándida Smith, Associate Director/Principal Editor, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., Theater Arts, UCLA; M.A., Ph.D., United States History, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Mongan's apartment, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Dates, length of sessions: October 26, 1991 (154 minutes); October 27, 1991 (161); April 6, 1993 (86).

Total number of recorded hours: 6.70

Persons present during interview: Tapes I-V, Mongan and Rikala; Tape VI, Mongan and Smith.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This is one in a series of interviews intended to examine the development of art history as a professional discipline and conducted under the joint auspices of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities and the UCLA Oral History Program.

The early tapes of the interview follow a roughly chronological order, beginning with Mongan's childhood and moving on through her education and her employment at the Fogg Art Museum. The later tapes are organized by subject. Major topics discussed include Paul J. Sachs and the development of the Fogg Museum, Bernard Berenson, the status of women at the Fogg and in the museum profession in general, and the basis for and importance of judgments of quality.

EDITING:

Rebecca Stone, editorial assistant, edited the interview. She checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names.

Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Mongan reviewed the transcript. She verified proper names and made a number of corrections and additions.

Teresa Barnett, principal editor, prepared the table of contents, biographical summary, and interview history. Stone compiled the index.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

OCTOBER 26, 1991

RIKALA: We usually begin with the most straightforward and simple questions, and that's where are you from and when were you born.

MONGAN: Well, I was born--it wasn't more than a mile from here--in 1905. So that I am eighty-six. I find it hard to believe that. I don't feel that way.

RIKALA: Could you tell me a bit about your family background?

MONGAN: My father [Charles Edward Mongan Sr.] was a local doctor. He had been trained as a gynecologist, but he wanted to be a family doctor, so after he came back-- Well, when he finished at Harvard [University] Medical School in '92, he went abroad for a year and studied advanced medicine in London. He studied at Guys Hospital in London. And then after months there, he moved over to Dublin and took advanced courses at Trinity College in Dublin and was an intern at the Rotunda [Hospital] in Dublin. Then he came home and was what he wanted to be, a family doctor. But he was also the founder of the New England Society of Gynecology, and at one point he was president of the Massachusetts Medical Society. He was one of the doctors sent to the national meetings. So he was a family doctor but a rather unusual one. He was also a parent. There were four of us and there were two years between each.

Not exactly two years but about two years, and Mother [Elizabeth O'Brien Mongan] used to say smilingly, "It was just what the doctor ordered." Her family lived not too far away.

RIKALA: Her family is the O'Briens.

MONGAN: She was born an O'Brien.

RIKALA: And they're from Charlestown [Massachusetts]?

MONGAN: She was born and brought up in Charlestown, but by the time she was grown up they were living in Cambridge [Massachusetts]. Father lived in Somerville [Massachusetts]. I was born in Somerville, which is right over there.

RIKALA: Very close by. How did your parents meet?

MONGAN: I don't know. I've never thought of asking that question. They were both Roman Catholics. Mother's family was originally from the south of Ireland and father's family from the north of Ireland, but both families had lots of teachers in them one way or another. Mother had a specialty. She was a schoolteacher whose specialty was teaching the children of Russian and Polish immigrants who were having difficulty learning English. She did that in a school in Boston's North End until she married Father. They were engaged for a long time, but they weren't married until Father felt that he could support her and a family, so they didn't marry until 1900. Father was born in 1860 and Mother was born in 1869. They were very old.

RIKALA: They were quite old and established and had careers.

MONGAN: Well, she gave up teaching when she married father.

RIKALA: How long had she been a teacher, do you know?

MONGAN: I never thought of it. But it meant that she knew a great deal of literature and stories, and she used to tell us stories. She read to us every night for years and years. Charlie [Charles Edward Mongan Jr.] and I, who were the older two, were read to for an hour. The younger two had to go to bed at the end of half an hour because this always came after supper.

She was one of eight sisters. Four married and four didn't. She had two brothers, and they went west the minute they finished college. They went to California and they never came back except for brief visits. One married a Viennese, and the other married a Swiss, at least by inheritance. The Viennese I guess was born in Vienna. The Swiss family had lived in California some time.

RIKALA: Were they in Northern or Southern California? Do you know the stories?

MONGAN: Well, Uncle John [O'Brien] was in San Francisco, and Uncle Florey [Florence O'Brien], as he was called, was in Chico. He owned and ran the Chico Enterprise, the local newspaper. He ended up the minister of education of the state of California. He was the one who married the Viennese.

RIKALA: Was your mother college educated to be a teacher?

MONGAN: No. She wanted to go to Radcliffe [College], and her family didn't think she should. She felt very badly about that, and she discovered a very, I think, extraordinary way of coping with it. She wanted a college education. She discovered that if she came to the Harvard summer school summer after summer she could take all the courses she really wanted to take, and did.

RIKALA: That's very admirable.

MONGAN: One sister became a pianist, one sister became a poetess. Four sisters married and four didn't, but they were known as an intellectual family and had been for some time. Mother's family came from that branch of the O'Briens that considered themselves nobles. They had always in the past been educated in England, but after the laws were passed against the Roman Catholics, they couldn't go to Oxford [University] or Cambridge [University], which had been their choices. So the eldest member of the family was sent either to the University of Paris or the University of Salamanca. One went to Salamanca, and I think that explains the fact that Uncle Florey was named Florence. He fell in love with a Spanish girl obviously, and she must have followed him back to Ireland, and they got married in Ireland. This was in the early eighteenth century. Well, in Mother's family there were

generations of teachers. That's what they did. Her older sister had arteriosclerosis when she was young, and she was quite crippled, but that didn't keep her from having a very lovely disposition and playing the piano beautifully. So that I was brought up with lots of music.

Father also loved music. He discovered when he was in Dublin that there was a Scot and a-- What was the other one? There were two other doctors studying who loved music as much as he did. They loved to sing, so they would sing together every night. So that when I was growing up, my sister and I played the piano for four hands. After Father came out of his medical end of the house, which was to the northwest--it had its own door and its own rooms and so forth, its own bathroom and its own office--he would come in and either listen to us play Mozart or Brahms, or he would sing to our music. So that we were brought up with storytelling and music.

RIKALA: And those have been important to you all your--

MONGAN: All my life. This was true for all of us. My sister [Elizabeth Mongan] is very different from me in taste and temperament, but she became the first curator of prints at the National Gallery [of Art], whereas I became the first curator of drawings at the Fogg [Art Museum].

RIKALA: Perhaps you can tell me a bit about the education of your brothers and your sister.

MONGAN: Well, my older brother was very much taken with figures, and he specialized in math and physics. I'll go back a little bit. One day Father called us together. It was early in the morning, and he said--the four of us sat in the living room--"I just wanted you to know I don't want you to think you're going to inherit money. I'm just a family doctor and there won't be any money. But I can do one thing: I can see that each one of you receives the very best education the country can offer. And that will be it." As he was going out the door, he stopped on the threshold, turned around, and came back and said, "Nope. After I finished at the Harvard Medical School, I had a year or two of study in Europe. Each one of you can have a year of advanced study in Europe, and that will be it."

Well, brother Charles, the eldest, came along. He went to MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]--that was where he wanted to go--and finished-- He was one month [short of] twenty. He was mostly through at nineteen. He stayed and got his master's degree in physics at MIT. Then he knew where he wanted to go. He wanted to go to the [Eidgenössische] Technische Hochschule in Zurich. So he went off to Europe for a year. We didn't suspect and he didn't suspect that he was going to stay eight, but that's how long it took him to get his doctorate in physics. His thesis was published

in German in Budapest. That was brother Charles. He was two years older than I am. Brother John [Anthony Mongan] was two years younger--

RIKALA: Than you.

MONGAN: Yes. He went to Harvard; that was where he wanted to go. The one who went to Harvard called MIT "the factory," and the one who went to MIT called Harvard "the country club." But this was just brotherly. John majored in economics, and when his senior year came, Father said, "Well, John, where do you want to go in Europe?" John said, "Europe's finished. I don't want to go to Europe. I want to see America." So he went out to the West Coast and he got himself a job herding sheep in eastern Oregon. When he had enough of that he went up to Alaska and got himself a job in a salmon canning factory. He slipped on a piece of wood and cut his leg. It became infected, and they had to take him down to San Francisco, because there wasn't anybody in Alaska in those days who could cope. He got over it, and he came back to Cambridge and went to the business school. The day he graduated from Harvard Business School he was offered a job with the American Radiator Standard Sanitary head office in Europe in Paris. He took the Haussmann Boulevard job and went to Paris and stayed twenty-three years!

RIKALA: So he ended up in Europe after all.

MONGAN: Well, he ended up in Europe. He was the assistant naval attaché in the embassy when the war ended. When the war broke out, the Second World War, he tried to enlist in the French army. They said they had enough people, they didn't need him. So he went around to check on the factories that belonged to American Radiator Standard Sanitary and boarded on the last ship out with passengers from the Mediterranean. He came home, and that afternoon he went over to the Boston navy yard and enlisted in the American navy. They sent him to British Guiana because he had four languages. They didn't know where British Guiana was, and they sent all the stuff that was to accompany him to British Guinea, so it took it six months to catch up with him. But British Guiana was an important place, because that's where the Germans were torpedoing the boats bringing the aluminum down the river. And I think he rather enjoyed British Guiana. He came home and was for some months the only non-Annapolis man on the top floor of the naval building in Washington.

Then he went back to his old job in Paris, because he loved it. He loved Paris. He was at the American embassy, and the ambassador, who was a political appointee, discovered that John could get milk or eggs or butter or whatever was almost nonexistent because of severe shortages. He knew exactly where to go in Paris and how to get whatever

was needed. Instead of using him as a naval attaché, he was using him in a way that did not please John, and John left the embassy and went back to his job on Boulevard Haussmann, where he stayed until he retired. He had married a Texan, and she didn't like Paris. They had a lovely house. You know Paris, or do you?

RIKALA: A little bit, not really.

MONGAN: Well, the Seine goes by a town called Le Vesinet, and they had a charming house with a garden at Le Vesinet. But even that did not please his wife, so they went back to Houston, where he now lives. She died last year. They didn't have children, but she had been married before and she had two daughters, and they are now looking out for him as though he were their father.

My younger sister [Elizabeth] went to the school that I went to here in Cambridge on Concord Avenue, the Cambridge School for Girls. They've done a publication about us both recently. When we went to the school, it was here on Concord Avenue. Then it moved to Weston [Massachusetts] and became the Cambridge School in Weston. It was just for girls when we were there; now it's for boys and girls. It was a Miss Haskell who ran it when we were there; it was called Miss Haskell's School. My sister's written quite a lot about Miss Haskell in an article I'll find for you. [tape recorder off]

RIKALA: Your sister is four years younger than you, is that right?

MONGAN: Well, she's nearly five years younger, four years and eleven months.

RIKALA: So it was an age difference which kept you close as sisters but also enough different to be--

MONGAN: She's very different temperamentally. That makes it very nice, because we both-- Two of Mother's sisters who didn't marry had a little house in Rockport [Massachusetts]. It was built in 1737, so it's small but solid. They had contacted all the nieces--we didn't know that--saying, "If I leave you the house, what will you do with it?" Apparently they had all said, "Sell it." When Aunt Jo questioned me, "Oh," I said, "I'll fix it up." Betty and I got it. And it is a charming house. It had only six rooms to begin with, and then two more were added in the early nineteenth century. We added a book room and four bathrooms, so that it's quite comfortable. It's still small looking, but it has more space than you think. It's about a hundred feet back from the street, and we have at least thirteen acres, twelve acres of woodland and one acre with a brook. We're both fond of it, and Betty loves it. She came up and looked at these Cambridge homes and decided she'd rather stay in Rockport. That's where she is. Professionally, Betty ended up as acting director of

the art museum in Smith College and teaching the history of engraving at Williams [College]. So on the weekends she would drive herself over to Williamstown [Massachusetts] to the Clark [Art] Institute, where she gave the course, and back to Northampton, where she lived.

RIKALA: Do you have a sense of how you both became involved in prints and drawings? Does it relate back to your early education?

MONGAN: I was having breakfast alone with Father one morning. That was very unusual. All six of us generally had breakfast together. I'll tell you another story in a few minutes. My father said to me, "Well, Agnes, what do you want to do when you grow up?" I suppose he said it to make conversation, but it was a good question and I'll never forget it.

My parents were passionate collectors of prayer rugs. Mother knew a lot about textiles. They couldn't afford the big ones, but they could get the little ones. They would go to auctions and fairs and come home with a rug. I said to him, pointing at the little rug by the door, "I'd like to know something about that." Then I looked behind me. The sideboard with all the old silver was behind me, and I said, "I'd like to know something about that." The family silver was eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century silver. Then I looked out the door and across the corridor, and in

the living room there was one of those big convex mirrors with a heavy gold frame, with an eagle above it holding a laurel wreath. I said, "I'd like to know something about that."

He said, "You really would?"

And I said, "Yes, I really would."

"Oh," he said, "then you know you're going to have to have the very best education a young lady can have."

"I am?" I said.

"Yes," he said, "you are."

"Well," I said, "where do I go for that?"

And he thought for a few minutes and he said, "I think Bryn Mawr [College]. I think Bryn Mawr is the best place in the country for a young lady."

I'd never heard of it before, and I said, "All right. I'll go to Bryn Mawr."

And he said, "Fine." We stood up and we shook hands on it, and he said, "You do your part and I'll do mine."

It meant I had to change schools because the school I attended didn't prepare for Bryn Mawr.

RIKALA: How old were you when you had this conversation?

MONGAN: Oh, I think I was thirteen.

RIKALA: So you changed schools to the Cambridge School for Girls or--?

MONGAN: I changed to the Cambridge School for Girls. Well, I went to Bryn Mawr. I made it. In those days I think there were nineteen entrance exams. They did not use the college board examinations; they used their own. They were given at MIT in the architectural school, I remember that. And then I went to Bryn Mawr.

My parents were interested in what courses I would choose. After I had had that breakfast with Father, they sent for the Bryn Mawr catalog and we went over it together. They showed me the courses they thought that I would like to take, and they were English literature and history of art. When I got to Bryn Mawr, what I majored in was English literature and history of art. No question about it. It was what I wanted to do.

RIKALA: That's what you were most inclined to take. There were several faculty there at the time teaching the history of art. One was Georgiana Goddard King.

MONGAN: Goddard King. She became my model, certainly. How do you know about her?

RIKALA: Well, this is my job to know about these--

MONGAN: Oh, she was extraordinary, that lady.

RIKALA: You were her student obviously--she was your model, as you say--but were you close as friends?

MONGAN: No. She knew who I was, and I knew who she was. When

she died and they found a book among her papers that she was ready to publish that had never been published, the then president of Bryn Mawr sent it to me and said, "Get this published." So they also knew that I was interested in Georgiana Goddard King. The book is called Heart of Spain, and it's a lovely book. You've seen it?

RIKALA: I've looked at it in preparation for this. Yes, it is a very lovely book.

MONGAN: Well, she was an extraordinary lady.

RIKALA: What was her education? Do you know where she--?

MONGAN: I don't know where she went to college, but I know that she was a friend of Gertrude Stein and she was up-to-date on a lot of modern painting. She knew about Picasso and Matisse. In those days very few people did. She would talk to the class. I took all of her courses, not only Italian Renaissance, but right straight up to the modern.

RIKALA: So you had at a very early age a modern education.

MONGAN: Uh-huh.

RIKALA: Do you consider that was exceptional in the United States at the time?

MONGAN: It didn't occur to me that it was, but I now think it was.

RIKALA: What were her classes like? Did she use slides?

MONGAN: She used slides, yes. Unlike Charles Eliot Norton, she used slides. But she also sent us to exhibitions. If there was an exhibition in Philadelphia at the museum-- She said we should go, so I went, and so did the other students.

RIKALA: So you traveled--

MONGAN: Oh, well, Bryn Mawr's only twelve miles outside of Philadelphia.

RIKALA: But still, to go and be with the art was an important part of the training.

MONGAN: Yes, from the beginning. Also, she had us go to places like the-- Oh, what was the house that the museum inherited before they moved all the pictures into the museum? Things of that kind she'd have us do.

RIKALA: Did you write papers for the class?

MONGAN: Oh my, yes. That was part of it. I didn't discover until later that that was extraordinary for undergraduates.

RIKALA: It's very rigorous for undergraduate art.

MONGAN: Well, Bryn Mawr wasn't an easy place. It was a beautiful place. I mean, the campus was lovely and there were nice walks and all that kind of thing, but intellectually it was pretty stiff.

RIKALA: At Bryn Mawr did you live in one of the halls?

MONGAN: Merion Hall, yes.

RIKALA: Can you tell me a little bit about what that was like?

MONGAN: Well, there were students from all classes. I mean, they were from the freshman to the senior class in Merion. We were supposed to get to know people besides just the girls in our class. There was a dining room in each hall, and we were waited on. We didn't have to-- In those days there were people to make your beds and people to clean up. You were just to study and study steadily. That doesn't happen for any places anymore, does it?

RIKALA: No, not really. Maybe in England in some of the--

MONGAN: There was something I was going to tell you. Well, you got to know freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. There was a sophomore who used to come over often to Merion Hall from Pembroke Hall because she had friends in our hall. She apparently knew good food. If something were being served for dinner that she did not like, she'd get up and walk away from the table, and we would get the odor of good food coming from the kitchenette as we went by later. Now, she was a person of great personal distinction. She had the longest fur coat I'd ever seen, almost to the ground, a raccoon or squirrel. We had required courses at eight in the morning, because no matter what you were studying in those days, you had to take a course in psychology and a course in philosophy.

RIKALA: Psychology was required?

MONGAN: Uh-huh. And philosophy. She would come to the eight o'clock class in her nightgown--the only persons that knew it were the girls that knew her--with that ground-touching fur coat on. Her name was Katharine Hepburn.

RIKALA: Oh, I was going to ask you about that, because I've just been looking over her biography once I realized you two were there at the same time.

MONGAN: We weren't the same class, but we were there at the same time.

RIKALA: She recounts in the biography that at first she wasn't much interested in making friends at the school, because her family had been so strong that she was a bit either shy or a bit put off.

MONGAN: Yes, she was. Private.

RIKALA: Private, yes. But she does talk about Merion Hall.

MONGAN: Does she?

RIKALA: Yes, she does. I'll bring the book. I have it with me. I'll bring it by.

MONGAN: I'd love to see it.

RIKALA: It's quite interesting. What about your social life at this time? Obviously you were very busy studying and it's a rigorous school, but did you go out with fellows?

MONGAN: I can't remember any young men during my years there.

I had some beaux up here, but I didn't have any--

RIKALA: Not any there. By the time you were graduating, your sister was just entering. Or did she come--?

MONGAN: She was a freshman. I graduated in June and she entered that September, so there were eight continuous years of Mongans at Bryn Mawr.

RIKALA: Did you have advice for her when she went there?

MONGAN: Oh, no use in having advice for her. She's not going to take advice from me. That's part of the way we're different. She has her own way of living. For example, she's a tremendous smoker. I'm allergic, so that she never smokes in my presence. I hate it and she loves it, so--

RIKALA: So after you graduated, that was 1927.

MONGAN: Well, I came home in the summertime. That was when Father said, "What do you want to do?" And then he said, "Now, what do you want for your European year?" And I said, "Florence." How my parents--that's what I was about to say--found out about the group I joined I have never known and I never asked, but Father and Mother had heard about a Smith [College] group going to Florence. I think I had said to him only that I had wanted to go to Italy, and he heard about this Smith group going to Florence. I thought it sounded wonderful.

They signed me up, and I was one of the five accepted.

Now, I think they would have accepted six, but we were a small group under Clarence Kennedy, who was a professor of Renaissance sculpture. His wife [Ruth Wedgwood Kennedy] was writing a book on Baldovinetti [Alesso Baldovinetti: A Critical and Historical Study], so she was a Renaissance-painter lady. We met outside the bronze doors of the Baptistery--the Pisano doors, not the Ghiberti doors--at nine o'clock on the morning of the fifteenth of September. We'd never seen each other before, the five girls and the Kennedys. The five girls were two from Bryn Mawr, two from Smith, and one from Mount Holyoke [College].

We had our classes all day. I mean, we were to be in the churches, the archives, or the galleries all day. Our classes were five to seven and nine to eleven at night, not every day of the week, but three days of the week sometimes. And the specialists who talked to us, the

Italians, talked to us either in the galleries or in their homes. Clarence Kennedy arranged for us to go to the dealers and whatever private collections he could get into. Weekends we went places like Pisa and Lucca and Pistoia and San Gimignano and Assisi and so forth.

It was really a marvelous experience because he had a very sharp eye. He was photographing the Marsuppini Tomb

at that time, and he was writing a book on Verrocchio. He'd begun to write his book, but he never finished it. He had got his doctorate at Harvard, but the Harvard professors didn't think much of him because he spent so much time on photography, making photographs, and they didn't consider in those days that photography was an art. I was fascinated to read the latest bulletin from Smith. They're having an exhibition in the fine arts museum of Clarence Kennedy's photographs. He has an international reputation now as a photographer.

RIKALA: But not at the time that he was making the--

MONGAN: He mounted them himself, he signed them himself, and he chose the color of the mats himself.

RIKALA: So it was work of integrity on his part. It was very mature.

MONGAN: Absolutely. Well, he had done something for us, with us, to us in Florence. Two girls would be locked into Santa Croce with him where he was making the photographs. The two students were given toothpicks. With toothpicks, distilled water, and cotton batting, we were to clean out the dirt from the interstices of the sculptured ivy surrounding the tomb. Well, there wasn't any better way to get to know what a quattrocento tomb looked like than that. Someday if you're in a-- Well, the Fogg has one, Smith has one somewhere. Then look at his photographs of the tombs. We didn't know what

was happening to us. We just thought he was making use of us. But we did like what the result was. The day we went to Pisa we left at six in the morning. And we weren't allowed to stop. We weren't allowed to go to bed until after supper we'd gone over everything we'd seen that day, with the result that up till about two years ago I could have taken you room by room through the Museo Civico in Pisa. It stuck.

RIKALA: What a way to learn things on the spot.

MONGAN: On the spot with them and looking at even the most minor-- Well, we stayed in Florence until Christmastime. My brother [Charles] was then in Switzerland. He came down from Switzerland and took me to Rome, where we went together for Christmas. I don't know where the other girls went, but on the second of January, we fetched up outside the doors, the west doors of the Louvre, with our equipment. Our equipment was a small stepladder, a binocular microscope, and a headlight. We were looking at the trecento and quattrocento pictures in the Louvre in that long gallery, as that's where they were in those days. The guards were on duty. They thought, "These American girls are crazy, going up on a little ladder with an automobile light to look at a picture." We got to know intimately the touch of the artist and the state of the object. Whether it had been repainted, what kind of varnish it had on it, how the tempera had lasted. All that kind of thing.

RIKALA: This type of training must have been very unusual.

MONGAN: It was unique.

RIKALA: And it was all Kennedy's doing?

MONGAN: Absolutely. Smith College has had an undergraduate group in Italy year after year after year, but we were the first graduate group. And we were the only graduate group, because the professors left in Northampton were so cross and I suppose so jealous that they made any number of complaints to the president. He came over to see what we were doing and was very impressed, although he didn't say so, but he enjoyed it and found no fault with Clarence Kennedy and no fault with us, so that he quieted-- Well, the ones who were agitating in Northampton for action didn't get it. Our group was able to finish.

We went for two weeks to London; that would have been in April. Then we went back to Paris. As summer came along, we went to Berlin, and from Berlin to Dresden and from Dresden to Prague and from Prague to Munich and from Munich to Vienna and from Vienna to Venice and down again to Florence, where we had June and July. Kennedy went out and rounded up six Italian professors or English professors living in Italy to be on our examining board. And we each had a subject. Mine was the Italian paintings in the Musée Jacquemart-André on

the Boulevard Haussmann in Paris, the Italian pictures, the Italian Renaissance pictures. The Italians who were to give us the exam refused to come into town because it had been over ninety for two weeks, because this was midsummer. Kennedy had a brilliant idea. He hired a bus and transported them and separately us up to [Villa] Vallombrosa, and we had the exams in the Albergo Giaforesta at Vallombrosa.

Now, BB, Mr. [Bernard] Berenson, wasn't in Florence that winter; he was traveling in the Near East. So we never got to visit [Villa] i Tatti. I got in two years later. I have a story about that. In the meantime we had seen Renaissance Italian painting and sculpture in Paris and we had seen it in Florence and we saw it in Vienna, both at dealers and at as many private collections as he could get us into. That year was the last year for at least half a dozen great collections in Germany that were then scattered.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

OCTOBER 26, 1991

MONGAN: I don't think there was any other American group that did anything like this. I don't know if there were any Europeans. Certainly this was the only American group.

RIKALA: What's striking in listening to you explain it is how completely comprehensive it is and also how it's both societal and cultural. So you lived there and you worked there and you learned and you met the collectors and you met the dealers. It was just the most full education that one could anticipate.

MONGAN: I've not thought of it from that angle, but you're quite right.

RIKALA: Yes, it was completely comprehensive, not any little bit missing. Because you described that you worked on some of the pieces cleaning them. Did you look at Kennedy's photographs at that time, too?

MONGAN: No.

RIKALA: No. So that was distinct.

MONGAN: Well, I can remember when we got to Berlin, the director, [Wilhelm von] Bode, came out himself to see us. He was of a certain age, and he was still director of the kunsthistorisches museum [Staatliche Museen]. He came out to see us because

he'd heard of these Americans and what they were doing. He looked at me on my ladder and said to me did I think the picture was worth standing on that to look at it. What was I looking at? I was looking at something like-- I think it was a Signorelli. It was some man whose name one wouldn't ordinarily know well. But I knew who Bode was, and I was pretty impressed that he came out of his office and literally introduced himself to us. RIKALA: How did your exams go, then?

MONGAN: Well, I passed, and I sent word to Smith that I wanted my degree sent to me, please. The answer to that was they weren't at all sure they wanted to send a degree to a young lady they'd never seen on their campus, and besides, I'd had no drawing and painting at Bryn Mawr, so I wasn't eligible to get the degree until I'd had drawing and painting. I'd had no instruction in drawing and painting at Bryn Mawr. It was not even considered necessary for a student of the history of art. So when I came home I came over to the Fogg, which was about half a mile away, and signed up to take Arthur Pope's course in drawing, Paul [J.] Sachs's course on the way to run museums, and Edward [Waldo] Forbes's course on the history of techniques, what we called "the egg and plaster course," because you had to begin making your own tempera and mixing it with the egg yolk and making your own fresco, putting the plaster on the wall. And then doing a Titian,

with his use of the brush and the colors, and then learning how to make an engraving. So it was quite a year and we loved it.

RIKALA: Was it all five of you? The same women?

MONGAN: No, no, I was the only one. No. One of the Smith girls had signed up because-- I don't know what she was missing. She was missing something, too. Phyllis Bache. Phyllis turns out to have been one of the most remarkable people in the history of my life. She had the longest eyelashes I think I've ever seen. She was not pretty, but she was not ugly. When I got to Florence the first time, brother Charles had escorted me. Naturally, I'd gone to Europe on a ship. That's what one did. Brother Charles met me in Bremen and took me through Germany and down to Florence and found a nice little inexpensive hotel for me near Santa Croce. Phyllis came to that first class batting her eyes with those long lashes, saying she'd found a marvelous place to live. "Ah, so divine." She had a French window that looked out on the Arno and she was above the Ponte Vecchio. She just loved it. Well, next time she came to class she'd found something she liked better. She was going to move out. Well, I moved in and it became my home in Florence.

We got to Paris and I found a cheap little hotel on the Left Bank. When I went to class, I could walk to it. Batting

those eyes, she told me that she had found a wonderful French family to live with. The house where Degas used to come for supper every Tuesday night. Of course it was between Blanche and Pigalle, so that it was right up near the Moulin Rouge. They were lovely people to live with. When Phyllis came to class the next time, she had found something she liked better and she was moving out. I moved in, and they became my French family. They had two grand pianos in the drawing room, and when they heard that I had been played to sleep very often as a youngster, they played me to sleep. The food was delicious. And they were Huguenots but they saw to it that I went to mass at a church that had the best music, week after week. Well, she was a Haviland, he was of Swiss origin, but they were very distinguished, quietly, because they didn't have much money. But I loved it. My little room was one of those French little rooms right next to the drawing room, where the two grand pianos were. When I came back to Cambridge, I went to see Edward Forbes to tell him that I was going to take part of my graduate student time in Pope's course, but I'd have some free time. Could I be of any help as a volunteer? He said volunteers hadn't worked out, especially part-time volunteers, so there really wasn't anything to offer me. Phyllis went to see Paul Sachs, who had the office next door to Mr. Forbes. He was associate director. And he said, "How

would you like to make a list of my drawings?" She said, "I'd love to." So she got the job and I didn't get any job. Well, about a week later she came into the Fogg saying, oh, she was going to do something else and she was going to give up her job making that list of drawings, and I went right straight up to Shady Hill to Paul Sachs's house and said I wanted that job. And he gave it to me. There's the story of my life.

I went home and told Father that I had a job and that I got it through Paul Sachs at Shady Hill. Shady Hill was the name of the old house before the school moved over here. Father said, "Well, he interviewed you?" And I said, "Yes." "In the small study or in the large drawing room?" I said, "In the large drawing room." "In the east end or the west end?" And I said, "The east end." He said, "That's where Charles Eliot Norton interviewed me for my first job." He went into teaching in order to earn enough money to go through the medical school, and it was Charles Eliot Norton who got him the teaching job. My father knew Norton's daughters because they were almost near neighbors. They weren't quite neighbors, but he used to go sledding on the hill where their house was. They knew who he was. He knew Charles Eliot Norton to talk to, though he'd never taken any courses or things at Harvard. Well, he went to Harvard Medical School. Many people are

astonished to hear that he knew Charles Eliot Norton, who was the first professor of fine arts in the country.

RIKALA: And so what did your father teach then?

MONGAN: He taught in a pubic school in western Massachusetts up at Palmer, near where Mr. Norton had a summer house. Saved his money and in due course went to the medical school.

RIKALA: Do you remember that meeting with Paul Sachs when you went in and offered your services to catalog the drawings?

MONGAN: I don't remember much of it except that he looked at me and said what did I want to do, and I said, "Well, I thought I would like to take over that job that I heard Phyllis Bache was doing, making a list of drawings." He said, "Oh, all right." It was very brief and very--

RIKALA: Very straightforward. Had you known anything about him before?

MONGAN: I knew the three daughters slightly because they had a tennis court at the foot of the hill and we used to watch the tennis. I didn't play it in those days, but I knew who they were. I had an idea who he was.

RIKALA: Can you describe what the courses were like that you were taking? What was Pope's class?

MONGAN: Pope's class is exactly what he has written in that book about drawing. Oh, we did a figure drawing, we did a landscape drawing, we did things of that kind. We used a

pencil or we used graphite of various degrees of strength or we used charcoal or we used crayon. And we learned the difference between crayon and charcoal. We learned what happens with a silver point. All that, which was all to the good. But I learned it thoroughly from the beginning. I'm trying to remember whether it was in Pope's course or in Forbes's own course that we had to learn Cennino Cennini chapter by chapter, exactly how you ground the stuff to make your-- What's the white called?

RIKALA: The gesso.

MONGAN: The gesso. I still have a little saint on a small wooden panel. The gesso is on it and the gold is on it and some of the tempera's on it, and I never finished it. But it shows exactly what the technique is. If you learn it that way, nobody's going to fool you.

RIKALA: After traveling all through Europe and having your classes on the spot with the artwork, what was it like now being in a classroom situation?

MONGAN: Well, the classes were very small. I think there were six in the egg and plaster course, which was just as well when it came to doing our art frescos, because there

wasn't too much space. People like Henry McIlhenny or Johnny [John] Walker, they also took these courses when they came

along, so that will explain why Henry McIlhenny knew so much about the things in his beautiful collection and why Johnny Walker was so familiar with the Italian pictures in the National Gallery.

RIKALA: And who were some of the others who were your fellow students? There was Charles Kuhn.

MONGAN: Cockie Kuhn wasn't in my class.

RIKALA: He wasn't?

MONGAN: No, but I knew who he was. I think he was studying abroad. He wasn't around that year. I came to know him very well. His wife had been my classmate in school. Hetty [Kuhn]. She went to Smith, and I went to Bryn Mawr.

RIKALA: Do you recall other students, though?

MONGAN: Yes, there was Marion Becker, who became Mrs. Philip Eiseman. She married a well-known lawyer and lived on Brattle Street. It was a very distinguished Jewish family, too. I haven't thought of some of these things since--

RIKALA: That's okay, we can move on. And in Paul Sachs's course, the museum course--

MONGAN: Oh, that was wonderful.

RIKALA: That was run entirely differently obviously.

MONGAN: Entirely differently. Well, he would pick up an object in class and look at it and then pass it around. Sometimes it would be an early ivory. Sometimes it would be an oriental

bronze. Sometimes it would be an illustrated manuscript page. He would say, "Now, what do you think of it? What does it say to you? Do you like it? How do you like it? Why do you like it?" And you'd have to begin thinking to yourself, "Well, why do I like it?" And you would have to say something. So that all of us became used not only to seeing but to holding and being intimate with an objet d'art. I don't think there's any better way for young people to begin.

I can still remember: He had a quattrocento stucco bust--late quattrocento--and he said, "What do you think of it?" And we looked at it and looked at it, and he said to me, "Well, you've been in Italy. What do you think of it? Is it a fake or is it real? Is it the way it should be?" I said, "Well, I think it's all right, but there's a little something about it that bothers me." He said, "There is?" I said, "Yes, but I don't know what it is." He went into the closet and he came out with a base that fitted it, that was a sculptured garland with a bow. And that made the whole thing come together.

RIKALA: So you'd learned to be intuitive about art from your trip. You'd learned it from the inside out.

MONGAN: That's right. And this is an excellent way to learn the difference between a copy or a fake and the real thing. Fakes show up to our group in a way they don't to others.

Tom [Thomas C.] Howe was one of my classmates. Tom Howe became the director of the San Francisco art museum, the [California Palace of the] Legion of Honor in San Francisco. There was one point when the director of the National Gallery, the director of the Chicago art institute [Art Institute of Chicago], the director of the Metropolitan [Museum of Art], and the director in San Francisco had all been museum trained under Paul Sachs. Other people began doing it later, but at the point we took it, it was the only course of its kind, in '28, '29.

RIKALA: So you were taking his course and you were working. How many hours did you work a week, and how did you fit in that cataloging?

MONGAN: I was supposed to work 50 percent for PJ [Paul Sachs] and 50 percent for my courses, and I was paid $50 a month.

RIKALA: Very easy bookkeeping. Did you have your own little office and space? What was your situation?

MONGAN: Yes, I had my own office. It was in the Fogg Museum. It was upstairs on the side wall of a room where they kept photographs and sculpture, all kinds of objects that were not on exhibition. In short, I was stored away in the storeroom. And he said, "I don't need to see you. If you have a question you can't answer, you can come and see me--I'll help you--but you just go to work on it." I

found there were drawings in the basement and there were drawings in the closet of the print room and there were drawings off the painting storage rooms. There were drawings all over the place, and nobody had ever put together a complete list of them.

RIKALA: They'd been collected by the museum, or collected by Sachs particularly?

MONGAN: There was his collection and there were several other bequests and gifts which formed the collection. And in the 1880s and '90s there were several people who left interesting collections to Harvard. The museum was apt to show paintings, but they usually just filed away the drawings in those days. I don't think anybody knows this, but you might as well say it.

RIKALA: So they would put them in the closet. They would put them in drawers.

MONGAN: I'd put them in drawers or in folders and lay them where some of the big prints were. They weren't paying any attention to them at all. *[There were English drawings and American drawings and Dutch and Flemish.]

RIKALA: Had you seen drawing collections taken care of in Europe?

MONGAN: Oh, yes.

RIKALA: So you knew what they should be doing.

MONGAN: I went to see them. It was particularly in Vienna we'd been to private collections with drawings.

RIKALA: So you were a great asset to the museum in that sense.

MONGAN: I'd not thought of it in that way, but I guess, well, I was fairly unique. Anyway, PJ was pleased. I think he was pleased for another reason. I was just the age of his daughters, and he had wanted one of them to go into fine arts. None of the three did, but I was a friend of the three and I was doing it.

RIKALA: Yes, so he could look upon you in a more familiar way in that sense.

MONGAN: Yes.

RIKALA: And so you had the good opportunity as a student to see more of him.

MONGAN: Yeah.

RIKALA: And that must have been--

MONGAN: Always extraordinary, because he was so enthusiastic when he was moved. If the thing really hit him, it really hit him, and he would become so excited. Oh, and you'd have to catch a little of it. But he knew immediately if it were a fake, if it were a copy. He would [inaudible] the drawing. If it was a person who brought it in from outside he'd be more remote, but he'd be very polite. He wasn't going to

hurt anybody's feelings unnecessarily. But, you know, he had a foul temper. And he discovered very early-- Well, I told him that it made me sick to see anybody lose their temper. He had lost it one day, not at me, but at somebody else. He never lost his temper in my presence again in his whole life. *[I disappeared. He asked why. I told him that it made me physically sick to see anyone lose control.]

RIKALA: It moved you so deeply to see him angry. That upset you?

MONGAN: Terribly. It upsets me to see anybody angry, but I couldn't bear it to see him angry because he was such a nice man otherwise.

RIKALA: So in having taken these courses in addition to your year away abroad, that qualified you for the master's degree?

MONGAN: Yes, because I never wrote a thesis.

RIKALA: You never wrote a thesis?

MONGAN: Well, I wrote my M.A. paper on the Italian pictures in the collection on the Boulevard Haussmann in the Musée Jacquemart-André that belongs to the Collège de France.

RIKALA: Did you have to take exams at that point again at all to complete that degree?

MONGAN: No, because they had the exams I had taken in Florence

sent to Smith. I know that it was in my favor. When I heard that Smith was not going to send me my degree, I was already back in Cambridge. I was crossing the yard [Harvard Yard] one day when I ran into the dean of the graduate school, who was an archaeologist as well, Dean [George Henry] Chase. And he looked at me and said, "Agnes, you look pretty unhappy. What's happened?" I said, "Well, Smith won't give me my degree that I've worked for." He said, "Why not?" "Oh," I said, "because I've had no drawing and painting and they didn't teach it at Bryn Mawr." He said, "But the man who teaches it at Smith was trained at the Fogg, and you're now on the staff of the Fogg. Why don't you just go in and take the course from Arthur Pope"--that's how I got into the Pope course--"and send your papers up to Smith to be graded?" Which I did, and that's the reason I got the degree.

RIKALA: That's how it worked out. Well, that's very good. That's much more straightforward and more particular then to what you were doing. Could you describe a bit just Pope's personality while we're thinking about him a bit? What was he like?

MONGAN: I wouldn't say he was warm, but he was friendly. He had just been writing his books on the history of drawing. He had several followers who were passionately his followers.

He was interested in drawing as one can perform it. Paul Sachs was interested in what came out, the real work. But Arthur Pope was also interested in how it was done.

RIKALA: How it was made and the craft of the drawing?

MONGAN: The craft of the drawing. That's it exactly. And he wrote a book about this. For a long time it was a book that many colleges prescribed. I don't know whether you have one in California or not. You might look it up.

RIKALA: I'll have to look for it. I don't know it offhand, I must admit. And then Forbes taught a class.

MONGAN: Oh, Forbes. Now, Forbes and Sachs could not have been more different, but they got on beautifully.

RIKALA: And it's Forbes who brought Sachs to--

MONGAN: It was Forbes who brought Sachs to the Fogg. Sachs had been on the visiting committee for the fine arts, and I guess Forbes realized what he was like. He must have seen PJ's enthusiasm for works of art when he came up for meetings of the visiting committee. Forbes went down to New York and interviewed Sachs and said wouldn't he like to come to Cambridge as associate director. And PJ was absolutely thrilled. His father [Samuel Sachs] was not. His father had hoped that he'd stay and become the chief man at Goldman Sachs, because his father was head of Goldman, Sachs [and Company] and his

mother [Louise Sachs] was born a Goldman. So there they were, an important banking firm in New York, and here was the young man coming up to Cambridge to attach himself to an art museum, which is what he did, and he was thrilled to do it. And when he came he discovered that Charles Eliot Norton's house was available, and nothing could have pleased him more. From the time he arrived in 1915, he moved into that house.

Now, he was abroad with the First World War. He couldn't enlist in the army because he was just a hair short of five feet, I believe, and so he became the driver of an ambulance and was stationed in Rouen and drove the ambulance during the last years of the war. So that he was in Paris when the famous Degas sales took place--and he used to tell us about them--at auction. What was the name of that auction house? The French one? Oh, I'll find it later. [Georges Petit Gallery]

Well, he came back to Cambridge and just loved living in that house. He hadn't been there very long when he and Mrs. Sachs decided that they should have a dinner and they should invite the faculty, the fine arts faculty, to the dinner, which they did. PJ was coming down the stairs of that front hall when the front doorbell rang. The maid answered it and in came, to his surprise, the lady who owned Fenway Court,

the great collector, Mrs. Gardner. Isabella Stewart Gardner. He came down and shook her by the hand, and she said, "I heard you were having a dinner, and I've brought myself." And he said, "I'm delighted to see you. Do come in." She had heard that the fine arts faculty was getting together for a dinner, something they'd never done before, and it was in this wonderful house, and so she was coming. And she came. Well, Mrs. Sachs quickly went into the kitchen to say that this lady was coming.

Between the main course and dessert Mrs. Gardner, who of course was put at his right hand, leaned over and said to Professor Sachs, "This is the hand of friendship I offer you now, but if this had been the Renaissance there would have been a dagger in this hand for you." He said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Well, I've wanted that picture for decades, and you outbid me in the auction yesterday." She was referring to the Saint Michael, the early Spanish picture in the long room at Fenway Court. He said, "I didn't dream you wanted it." And he sent it over the next morning. Almost nobody knows this story. I've never seen it printed or referred to.

RIKALA: How lovely. So this dinner with the faculty was both to introduce himself and to--

MONGAN: Get to know them. She wanted to know them all, and that was her way of doing it.

RIKALA: And that was her way of then becoming--how should I say?--involved and committed both.

MONGAN: Well, when Charles Eliot Norton had begun giving his famous lectures at twelve o'clock in Sanders Theater, she used to come in and sit in the front row. That is known.

RIKALA: Did she and Sachs develop a very good friendship over the years?

MONGAN: I would say he was not one of her favorites, but he knew her and they were friendly. She knew BB better, and Berenson of course owed a great deal to her. And Paul Sachs had known Berenson. They were old friends.

RIKALA: They'd known each other from Harvard?

MONGAN: They were friends, and I don't know--

RIKALA: Contemporaries at school or not?

MONGAN: They must have been nearly the same age, but I thought that PJ was-- BB was born in '67, in 1867. I don't know what year Paul Sachs was born. How interesting. I should look up his dates. I think he was Harvard class of 1900.

RIKALA: I'm interested to know also, as a student and working at the museum, what were your impressions at that time of both Harvard and just the society around you?

MONGAN: Well, I knew that a woman had no place. I was paid half what my opposite male colleague would have been paid.

RIKALA: And you were aware of that at the time?

MONGAN: No, I wasn't aware of it at the time, but I did think it was pretty miserable. I mean, $50 a month isn't very much, even for half-time.

RIKALA: No.

MONGAN: Even then $50 a month wasn't very much. And what was I--?

RIKALA: Just what was society--?

MONGAN: I had several very good friends. I made new friends very quickly and people who were in the fine arts. Well, that's how I came to know Eddie [Edward M. M.] Warburg and Johnny Walker and Lincoln Kirstein, because they were around as students. They were undergraduates and I was a graduate student and also part of PJ's world already. But they were so different from any young men I'd known before. Of course all three were rich. I didn't know that for a bit. Lincoln's fortune came from-- His father [Louis E. Kirstein] was the head man at [William] Filene's [Sons Company]. Eddie Warburg's father [Felix M. Warburg] was head of Warburg and Schiff. They were bankers in Wall Street. And PJ had often persuaded the elder Mr. Warburg to give money. He'd given quite a lot to the Fogg and to other good causes. Who was the third one?

RIKALA: Warburg, Kirstein, and--

MONGAN: Oh, Johnny Walker. Johnny Walker's mother [Rebekah Friend Walker] lived in Pittsburgh. She was a widow, but his father [Hay Walker] had left enough money so that John could do what he wanted. He traveled a good deal. I don't think he bought many works of art. The other two did. The other two were interested enough to be buying contemporary works of art. I don't think Johnny ever got that far.

RIKALA: I asked this question before about Bryn Mawr, but I'll ask now. Did you have boyfriends and fellows that you were seeing at this time?

MONGAN: No.

RIKALA: What were you like at this time? Just devoted to your school and working?

MONGAN: Yeah.

RIKALA: And where were you living?

MONGAN: The house that I had lived in from infancy and that I was brought up in. Father had a house built by a famous architect whose name I've now forgotten. It was his last domestic building. He generally made town halls or hospitals or banks. But our house he designed. And it was built on Central Street in Somerville and it has four little fat stucco columns. It's a stucco house. It's the only stucco house,

I think, in Somerville. Father had lived in a house two or three doors down until the house was ready. That's where we were all brought up, in that house. The northwest end was his professional office. It had a special entrance. It contained his office and telephone, waiting room, bathroom, and so forth.

Of course we went away somewhere every summer, for Father thought we should know the country as well as we could. The parents took us up to northern New Hampshire one time so that we would see what a mountain looked like and where one found the fish one went fishing for, the trout. And they took us once to northern Maine so that we would see-- Well, as far as Mount Desert. Later on we had a house in Maine every summer, but in those years--the early years--we hadn't yet got to Maine. We had one or two summers on Cape Cod, and then we had several summers on Cape Anne. Then we had the house for about ten years in Maine, and that's where-- Mother knew an awful lot not only about books but about plants and flowers. In one of our first years in Maine she said, "Now, this year you're going to do the trees," which meant that we went looking at how trees grew and gathering different samples of leaves of trees, and we'd put the leaf in a booklet with a description of the tree. The next year we did the wild flowers. The next

year we did the mushrooms. We found thirty-five different varieties of mushrooms. The ones we kept and ate were the chanterelle. We loved chanterelles. I see that you know them too. Most American kids don't know them at all.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

OCTOBER 26, 1991

RIKALA: In looking over the alumni newsletter of the Cambridge School, I noticed that your sister [Elizabeth Mongan] didn't have a year abroad in the way that you did. And she graduated right at the--

MONGAN: She graduated from Bryn Mawr [College].

RIKALA: It would be '30 or '31.

MONGAN: 'Thirty-one.

RIKALA: So that's at the depth of the Depression, effectively.

MONGAN: So she went to Florence, but as one of the schoolteachers in a school for girls, an American school for girls. I've forgotten the name of it. But by that time she knew BB [Bernard Berenson], because we both went to see him for the first time in '29, and that was after '29 because she was in the class of '31. She got to know him very well and went there I guess more often than I did.

RIKALA: Did you go specifically to see him in '29?

MONGAN: No. We'd been in Venice and then we went to Padua and then we went to Florence. I had a great many letters of introduction from Paul [J.] Sachs and one to Mr. Berenson. As I told you, he wasn't there in '27-'28; he was in the Near East and in North Africa. So I wrote to him, sent it

to [Villa] i Tatti, and the answer came back from [Villa] Vallombrosa, wouldn't we come up for lunch? Which we did. From that moment we were good friends. We were late that day because our car broke down. I had a little Italian car, and as we almost got to Vallombrosa the car broke down. We were sitting on the side of the road wondering what on earth we were going to do when a truck came by with young Italians in it. They asked what was the matter, and we told them that it wouldn't go. They parked the truck and got out and fiddled with the car until they made it go, and then they went with us to BB's house.

RIKALA: To make sure that you got there.

MONGAN: To make sure that we got there. I knew that BB couldn't stand people that were late for appointments. I'd already been informed of that. I thought, "Egads, what are we going to do?" We went in and told him why we were late. He was already at the dining table, but there was an empty place at his right hand and an empty place across the table. I sat at his right and Betty [Elizabeth Mongan] sat across the way, and from the first minute he was just as charming as he could be, and we became friends until he died.

RIKALA: You must have been reading his writings as a student.

MONGAN: Oh, Miss Georgiana Goddard King had us not only read

them, we practically had to memorize them. I could have done you paragraphs of BB. We used to play games. Who was thrice wounded and what conditions? Whose wings were whiter than the driven snow? That's the angel of the annunciation in the Simone Martini [Annunciation] in the Uffizi [Gallery]. Things of that kind we learned by heart.

RIKALA: What was the villa like at that time?

MONGAN: Well, Vallombrosa wasn't a big villa. I didn't get to see I Tatti until later, but Betty did. The villa at I Tatti is beautiful, and the garden is magnificent. Well, you've seen pictures of that, or have you?

RIKALA: Yes, I have, but we can look through some more perhaps. Did your sister Betty already know then that she too would pursue a career in art history?

MONGAN: Oh, yes. She was all set to do it. I don't know that she was set to do engravings, but she'd had a course in engravings with Mr. Sachs, so that she was better informed about them than I was. And when Lessing Rosenwald appealed to Paul Sachs saying that he wanted an assistant to take charge of his collection, Sachs recommended Betty to Rosenwald. At that point he was still on the sixth floor of Sears, Roebuck [and Company], the great department store that Mr. Rosenwald was the head of. [tape recorder off] She went to be his private

curator. There's nothing in that collection that she hadn't recommended. So then, when the Rosenwald collection became the foundation of the print and drawing collection of our National Gallery [of Art], she became the first curator of that department. He gave his collection of early rare books to the Library of Congress. She was at the National Gallery for a number of years. And then she went-- Where did she go? She'd already had a year in London before she went and joined Lessing Rosenwald.

RIKALA: She worked-- Is it the Lyman Allyn Art Museum [in New London, Connecticut]?

MONGAN: Yes.

RIKALA: Lyman Allyn. And that was very soon after her--

MONGAN: That was after her graduate year. Because she had a graduate year at the Fogg [Art Museum], as I did, but later.

RIKALA: And did she also take the museum course?

MONGAN: Yes.

RIKALA: So you paved the way for her.

MONGAN: I suppose in a sense.

RIKALA: Did the two of you travel a lot together during those years?

MONGAN: No.

RIKALA: You just happened to be traveling.

MONGAN: I took the course in drawing under Arthur Pope in 1928-29. When she got there, Betty took a course in engraving with Paul Sachs.

RIKALA: So he had taken over the teaching of engravings?

MONGAN: Arthur Pope never taught engraving. He taught drawing.

RIKALA: I'm curious to know in these initial years at the Fogg how you felt you participated and what you were giving. Yes, you were doing something with the drawings, but--

MONGAN: He [Paul Sachs] took the museum course traveling every year. He took it to Washington, he took it to New York, he took it to certain private collectors. I felt I knew how to manage those things. Some of the class didn't know much, but I would tell them about collecting, which I knew from my European experience. I could tell them about some of the dealers, because when I had known all the dealers in Florence, Paris, London, and Berlin-- Well, you know, it counted up to something. And no one else had taken a museum course anything like my year with Clarence Kennedy.

RIKALA: So you were able to--

MONGAN: Help the students in the museum course, yes.

RIKALA: You helped from having learned things, but also from your firsthand experience.

MONGAN: Yes, and I had learned through the activity of taking part in them.

RIKALA: Did you know pretty soon that you, too, wanted to teach, coming from a teaching family?

MONGAN: No, I didn't know that at all. I was just so absorbed in what I was doing and getting into art history so deeply that I couldn't take anything else.

RIKALA: What was your regular, average day at the museum?

MONGAN: Well, that first year, when I was half-time as a student and half-time as a member of the staff, I suppose the mornings were given up to my activities as a student and the afternoons to working. Then things became confused. It didn't take very long, sort of-- I didn't know whether what I was doing, working on the drawings, was not part of what I was learning from the museum course.

RIKALA: Yes, in a sense you had this extraordinary ability to take your work home with you and take your school to work with you, and certainly that was--

MONGAN: My parents were wonderfully helpful. Mother [Elizabeth O'Brien Mongan] said to me that she would be happy to have me bring people home, but if I were bringing more than three I should tell her. She didn't know how to cook because she had never had to. Her family had, until she was

nearly grown-up, plenty of servants. And then Grandpa lost his money. But the girls were coming along so that among those eight there were enough to look after the house. And-- What got me onto this?

RIKALA: About bringing people home to your house.

MONGAN: Oh. One day I called up Mother and said I was going to bring somebody home. She said that it was all right. And I brought Annemarie Henle Pope home with me, and at that point she was Annemarie Henle, freshly arrived from Germany. As we walked along the porch to the front door, Father [Charles Edward Mongan Sr.] appeared from his last hospital rounds. And I said, "Father, I would like to have you meet Annemarie Henle." He smiled and looked and said, "You're not?" She said, "Yes, I am." He said, "You don't realize that her father is a very distinguished doctor who teaches at the University of Heidelberg, and part of our interior is named Henle's loops." I've never forgotten that. And then on another occasion--

RIKALA: And how did you know her at school?

MONGAN: She had come to take the museum course with Professor Sachs and taken some other-- She already had her doctorate--no, I don't think she did. But she had done a good deal of graduate work in Germany before she came to this country. Of course she stayed, because she was the one who ran the visiting

exhibitions for-- Her whole life was given up to forming exhibitions that would then travel around to American museums. They traveled not only in American museums but in European ones. You know that organization. She's now retired, but she's a consultant to Art Services International.

Another time I called up Mother and said-- I was invited at almost the end of the war by Jean Seznec to come over to tea. He was living at the Commander. Seznec had been in the French art center [French Institute] in Florence. He was a very distinguished French scholar. He had been teaching at Oxford [University]. He brought his wife over to this country when he was invited to be a professor at Harvard [University]. I'd never met him before he arrived, but I liked him--liked them both. When he called me up he said, "I've invited some French officers for tea. Won't you come?" I said, "I'd love to." So I appeared. His wife Charlotte was in the closet having hysterics. I said, "What's going on?" He said, "Well, we invited them for tea, but they think they're invited for supper. We can't possibly give them supper, and she doesn't know what to do." I said, "That's all right. Let me call home."

So I called up mother and said, "Mother, we're going to have an extraordinary number of people for supper." She

said, "Yes, dear, how many? What do you mean, extraordinary?" "Well," I said, "there are nine, and I guess we'll be at least eighteen." I well remember she took a deep breath. "Yes, dear. Give me an hour." So I said I would, and we picked up nine Radcliffe [College] girls, or eight Radcliffe girls, and we drove over to my house.

When we went in, there was-- My mother always put a long dress on for dinner. It wasn't an evening dress, but she had a number of long dresses that she put on in the evening. And our French poodle was seated beside her, and there they were in the front hall waiting the arrival of the French officers. The French officers had never been in an American house before--in fact, they'd never been in an American city before--and they were enchanted. Well, when we went in for supper I didn't know what we were going to have. Mother had put in all the extra leaves of the table, and she and the waitress--the "second maid" as we called her--had put together a-- What do you call that sort of fluid cheese? Welsh rarebit. Two big Welsh rarebits in the two dishes with the little lights under them, two-- What do you call those things? Well, you know what I'm talking about. They both were copper and they both were generous and they both had a little light under them. And a great big bowl of salad and some Italian bread

and cheese.

RIKALA: A chafing dish. Was it a chafing dish?

MONGAN: Chafing dish. Two big chafing dishes. Exactly. Was it ice cream or fruit for dessert? I've forgotten what the dessert was. But anyway, when the French came in and we'd all talked a little bit, then we went in to have supper. And there was no table set. You just took your plate and filled it up at the table and then went and sat where you wanted in the dining room, in the hallway, or in the living room. And I suddenly remembered that I had a whole series of Trenet records, so I went upstairs and got the Trenet records. I took down a phonograph from the second floor to the first floor, and we took up the rugs in the living room, the hallway, and the dining room, and we danced.

Many of the Frenchmen were quite handsome, and of course they came in with those long capes. They had an elegant time and they stayed until midnight. When they left our house and the last one went out the door, Father turned to me and smiled. He said, "Now, that was a nice party. When do we have the next one?" So, you see, I didn't worry.

RIKALA: How wonderful. How wonderful.

MONGAN: One of them was a [Pierre] Puvis de Chauvannes grandson. I don't know who the others were, but they were all obviously

bien élevé and delightful. They all had a little bit of English. The Radcliffe girls were charmed of course. I'm trying to think of other things that happened.

RIKALA: How long did you continue living in your family house?

MONGAN: Until 1955. When Father died, Mother lived there for another year alone. He died in '52, so I guess it would have been '53 or '54 that we moved out of there, because the two servants and the whole house were more than mother could then manage. She was in her late eighties. When he died in 1952 he was ninety-two. Of course he'd been born in 1860, that's right. She was born in 1869, so she was nearly a decade younger.

RIKALA: What a lovely relationship to be able to be this close to your family.

MONGAN: I thought it was just normal. I've discovered since that it wasn't. Well, you see, they were so old that most of their friends, the company that they liked, lively and talkative and interesting, had gone. And my friends were apt to be-- Well, one was the director of a German museum, one was the director of a Venetian museum, one was the director of-- Well, that's what came. And my parents loved it.

RIKALA: Did your father continue practicing his medicine long into his late years?

MONGAN: Well, one night I had a dinner party. I was seated at the place that was over the little button that you step on to call the maid, and she came in. Well, she was a French Canadian at that point. Generally they were Irish, but this one was a French Canadian. I heard her say something to Father, and he just smiled and said, "All right." We were towards the end of the meal, and so we finished our dessert and went into the living room to have our coffee. Father patted the sofa and said, "Come and sit beside me, Agnes. You heard Marie say that so-and-so wants me to go and see them." He was a patient who lived in Medford. I said, "Yes, I did." "Then you think I should go, don't you?" I said, "Yes, I do." He said, "All right. I'll go." He got up and he went over to his end of the house and got his stethoscope and his bag and so forth and went out the door.

In about an hour he came back and sat down on the sofa again and patted it and said, "Agnes, come here. I want to say something else to you." So I sat beside him, and he said, "I just want to tell you something. I brought so-and-so"--the man who requested him--"into this world and his wife. I brought his father and his mother into this world, and his grandparents on both sides have been my patients. The kind of pain young Jim says he has

doesn't run in that family. I was right. There's something going on in school tomorrow he doesn't want to go to, so he was putting on an act." He didn't even need to go to see them to know that.

RIKALA: What a remarkable doctor.

MONGAN: Well, that's what family doctors were like in the old days. Today, according to where your pain is you'd be sent to one specialist or another, wouldn't you?

RIKALA: So your brothers and your sister, did they too have the kind of relationship that you had with the home?

MONGAN: Oh, I think so.

RIKALA: So you were all--

MONGAN: We were all about equal.

RIKALA: Yeah, and satelliting back and forth to the house? And your sister [Elizabeth Mongan]? What about her? Did she move?

MONGAN: Well, she moved to Philadelphia to be with Lessing, and then she moved to Washington, and she was there for some years. When she ended her career, she was the acting director of the Museum [of Art] at Smith [College], as I told you, and giving courses in the history of engraving at Williams [College]. At least at the Clark [Art Institute].

RIKALA: So she left this neighborhood--

MONGAN: Much earlier than I did.

RIKALA: I think it is quite fascinating that you had this kind of rapport with your family.

MONGAN: I suppose so.

RIKALA: I think it's delightful, I really do.

MONGAN: I enjoyed it.

RIKALA: They must have always been keeping up-to-date on what your work was as well.

MONGAN: Yes, they were, and I can remember they were both interested in the kind of guests I brought in, because whether it was German or Italian or English, they all had something to say. And the fact that Father was a doctor, they could talk about medicine or they could talk about-- Mother knew an awful lot about the fine arts, though she'd never been a fine arts scholar. What with a sister who was a painter and a sister who was a musician and a sister who was a poetess, she was ready for many subjects.

RIKALA: I meant to ask this earlier, but did your family have art at home?

MONGAN: Yes, definitely. That was the reason that I put the question to Father about the rugs and the silver. They had engravings and they had a few paintings, and they were both

crazy about antique American furniture. Now, that bureau is not too old but it is-- Well, it's pre-Victorian. Oh, the chair you are in is a museum piece, because it was made in 1804 and it's Regency.

RIKALA: It's beautiful. It has oriental detailing on it.

MONGAN: And the bed is unique. It's English. And this Father had made for him because--

RIKALA: The chair.

MONGAN: --he was very heavy, but he was at home in this. About ten minutes before you want to go, I'll take you down and show you the study. All the furniture there, or most of it, is family antiques.

RIKALA: Did you keep a study at the Fogg? How did you divide your working hours? Did you bring work home at all, or not?

MONGAN: No, I didn't take any work home from there. I could stay until six or seven, as long as I wanted to stay. Well, I knew that I couldn't get very far because I was a woman, and I wasn't going to fuss about it, because I wanted to go on doing what I was doing.

RIKALA: Did you have--? I'm sorry to interrupt you. Did you talk about this with your father at all?

MONGAN: No. Not at all. But I talked about it a little bit with my mother.

RIKALA: And what did she think?

MONGAN: She thought that I should make the decision, and she would stand behind me whatever decision I made. I was offered jobs in other places and I'd think about them, and in the end I'd turn them all down because I preferred to be at the Fogg and doing what I was doing to anything else I could think of. I was offered museum jobs in Chicago, in Minneapolis, in San Francisco, in San Diego, and, no, I didn't accept them. Now, Lincoln Kirstein said to me I ought to be in New York [City], because New York was far more interesting than provincial Cambridge [Massachusetts], and I thought that Cambridge was far more interesting than New York. I'd get to know two or three people in New York in two or three disciplines, but here I knew all kinds of people in all kinds of disciplines.

When I wanted to join the faculty club I couldn't join because I was a woman. So Father joined for me and I signed his name. But the ladies in those days had to go in the little side door; we couldn't go in the front door. So you see things have changed. And one night I-- Oh, I had an extra-- When PJ [Paul Sachs] saw that I was working so hard he got me an extra study over in Widener [Library]. One night I got so deep into what I was doing that it went well past six o'clock

before I came to. I went up and I couldn't get out the front door because they locked them at six o'clock. And the head of the librarian guards was there, and he said to me, "Oh, Miss Mongan, you can't go out the front door. No woman is permitted in Widener after six o'clock, and it would be a scandal. I'll take you out the back door so you'll not be seen." And he took me downstairs and around to a sort of a stairway I didn't even know existed and up a little path and up onto the street.

When I discovered I was paid half what the men were paid, I was pretty cross. Three months before I retired, Massachusetts passed a law "equal work, equal wage," and they had to double me. But I believe that my pension is still based on the meager one.

RIKALA: Certainly, then, these experiences weighed heavily--not being able to go out the front door.

MONGAN: I put up with it. All the ladies were putting up with it. I didn't want to make any big fuss.

RIKALA: But still you recognized that it was wrong.

MONGAN: Oh, yes. Yes, of course. In those days they didn't want the ladies in many places, and certain of them still don't. I mean, I had forgotten a lot of this until last week's scandal broke.

RIKALA: But certainly the people you were colleagues with--you know, Paul Sachs and Professor [Edward Waldo] Forbes--they treated you with respect and intelligence.

MONGAN: Oh my, yes.

RIKALA: Because it was your intelligence that they respected.

MONGAN: I think it probably was. I was thinking of that the other day, and I think that that was it. They knew that I knew more than any of their male students at that point about drawings, so they didn't bother me about female things. They just let me carry on as a scholar.

RIKALA: And being a scholar is of greater equality.

MONGAN: Oh, I think so.

RIKALA: And certainly your sister must have experienced it much that way too.

MONGAN: Oh, I think so. Except that Lessing Rosenwald was generous. When she went to work at the Lyman Allyn Museum, of course she was paid very little.

RIKALA: That was during the Depression.

MONGAN: Yes.

RIKALA: Were you conscious that you were in a sense, if not at the pinnacle, nearly at the pinnacle of what your career was about?

MONGAN: I was just doing what I wanted to do and doing it

all the time. But I got to know all kinds of people. I was telling somebody the other day this story. I think the Courtauld Institute is fundamentally based on the Fogg. Because Viscount [Arthur Hamilton] Lee of Fareham turned up one day at the Fogg to see Paul Sachs. And Paul Sachs was very busy that whole day and the following day. He saw Lord Lee for an hour or two, and Lord Lee still had questions. So Paul Sachs called me and said, "Would you take over?" Well, I was delighted to take over, because when I went to England with Professor Kennedy, one of the country houses he had taken us to was Lord Lee's. I showed him the Fogg Museum, beginning at the fourth floor, which was conservation, and taking him as far as the basement. He was particularly moved by the fact that on the second floor we had all our great paintings in a storage room that was as tall as the gallery and we had screens--metal, wire screens--that we could pull out or push back. Because our best pictures which we showed on the second floor changed every couple of weeks because we were showing them to students.

RIKALA: Because it was a--

MONGAN: An educational museum. Well, lots of people don't know that this goes on. He was very struck by it and asked me lots of questions, and I gave him lots of answers because, as I say, I liked him and I remembered his background and

I knew he was intelligent. Then I drove him a little bit around Cambridge. Well, when the Courtauld moved out of the place where they were, they got to be nearer us in spirit, but I thought that when they set up the Courtauld that he had been influenced by the Fogg and he told specifics to the people in London who were putting together the Courtauld. Now, this has not been recorded anywhere. I told it to John Shearman, who

is chairman of our department and is a Britisher and who came to us from Princeton [University]. He couldn't have been less interested. He had worked at the Courtauld. He almost didn't pay any attention to me. I'm so accustomed to that, it doesn't-- You know, there's a type of a gent who can't listen to a lady. I've learned that. Not if we have something to say that is new. Then they think we're crazy.

RIKALA: Yeah.

MONGAN: Or used to. Women have made some dent now and they're making more. But when I began--

RIKALA: Did you encounter frustrations?

MONGAN: Oh my, did I!

RIKALA: But where would you vent these frustrations? Who did you talk to about this and--?

MONGAN: I didn't talk to anybody about it because it wasn't worthwhile. I didn't want to harm my job at the Fogg because I enjoyed it so much, and so I just kept quiet.

RIKALA: But what about to your mother or anything?

MONGAN: I mentioned it to Father, and, well, we didn't see any use of doing anything. He didn't want me to promote difficulties.

RIKALA: But he was sympathetic to your concerns?

MONGAN: Oh my, yes.

RIKALA: Did those frustrations compel you to work harder?

MONGAN: Yes. I thought rather than making a fuss just work harder.

RIKALA: Exactly. And perhaps that's a very common theme in women's careers.

MONGAN: I think so.

RIKALA: Yes, I do too. I do too. We left off earlier talking about your travel in 1929 when you brought--

MONGAN: Oh, with Betty.

RIKALA: With Betty. And I just found a little--

MONGAN: She had to go back when September came because she was still an undergraduate and had to go back to class at Bryn Mawr [College]. I stayed on until January. I was doing things. I was looking up drawings for the Fogg.

RIKALA: So you were on a work trip, effectively.

MONGAN: Really, yes.

RIKALA: And you had photographs of your drawings with you?

MONGAN: I had a number of photographs. I also had about fifty letters of introduction from Paul Sachs. Well, for example, I got into the various Rothschilds' houses, which nobody had got into for a while, because Paul Sachs knew the Rothschilds as he knew the-- Oh, I don't know, he knew everybody.

RIKALA: And how was it that he was both connected in Europe and the U.S. that way?

MONGAN: Well, because the Rothschilds knew what was going on in Wall Street, and he had kept up several of his Wall Street relationships. He had also known them earlier.

RIKALA: So he was a tremendous asset for the Fogg, and Forbes had brought him, on the one hand, because of that. Is that true? Yes. And together their partnership was a very complementary one.

MONGAN: Very complementary, and they always got on, though they couldn't have been more different in character.

RIKALA: Could you tell us a little bit about the two characters that way?

MONGAN: Well, Emerson would go around-- Edward Forbes was the grandson of Ralph Waldo Emerson. That's the reason he

was Edward Waldo Forbes. And Paul Sachs was the son of the head of Goldman, Sachs [and Company] and a great friend of Eddie [Edward M. M.] Warburg's father [Felix M. Warburg]. And in the Warburg family there had been scholars. Aby Warburg was of course a great scholar--a fellowship in England was named for him--that finally came from Hamburg and went to London. By the time I came to know any of them they had left Germany some time before. Now, what was your last question?

RIKALA: The question was just about the personalities of Forbes and Sachs.

MONGAN: They couldn't have been more different. PJ loved good food and good wine. He knew all the good restaurants. He didn't mind spending money for good food and drinking. Edward Forbes was a very, very proper New Englander who wasn't for any display of any kind, who would like to be very quiet and was. Somehow or other he did manage to attract people who could give things, and he himself had given quite a lot of early Italian pictures. He had money of his own. He had a very pretty house right up here, but he didn't have a great fortune. PJ didn't have a great fortune either, but he had more money and was more used to fancy things. Edward Forbes, the way proper New Englanders are, was very modest in his life as well as in his activities.

RIKALA: How did they divide up their responsibility for running the museum?

MONGAN: They each did very different things. I think they must have talked together more than I realized at the time, because there were certain people that Forbes went after and certain people that Sachs went after, and both people enriched the museum to an extraordinary degree. The pictures from the donors that we have are the results of friends of either one or the other.

RIKALA: And how large was the staff? I'm trying to get a sense of the goings-on in the--

MONGAN: The staff wasn't nearly as large as it is now, except in the-- No, not even in the basement. There hadn't been so many robberies of museums and other places, so that we didn't have to be as careful at the back door as we are now. We had our own carpenter; we still have our own carpenter. Well, I think the staff has increased, and it had to increase, because we have more exhibitions. They didn't change things as quickly, and of course not as many people came in. As many people as wanted to come in could come in. We didn't have any blockbusters. That was unknown. PJ had been offered the curatorship of prints at the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] and had turned it down, I believe.

RIKALA: When was that?

MONGAN: Before he came to Cambridge. He knew curators in many museums before he came, and he kept up those friendships. Of course, when they formed the Museum of Modern Art, they did take Alfred [H.] Barr [Jr.] as first director, and Alfred Barr had been one of his students. Then he kept up very close relationships with the Museum of Modern Art. They even have a gallery named for him, haven't they?

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

OCTOBER 26, 1991

RIKALA: You mentioned to me that you were looking over this article in the alumni newsletter [of Cambridge School] about you and you sister [Elizabeth Mongan], and you mentioned that there were a couple of errors?

MONGAN: Two little errors. I think I should find them for you. You see, with my sister not so gray-- I was gray by the time I was thirty. Nearly white. I came home from college one holiday and asked Father what I was going to do about it, and he said, "Get different grandparents." I said, "It's a little late to tell me that now." Margaret [Scolari-Fitzmaurice Barr] wanted me to begin dyeing it, and I said no. "Oh," she said, "you should. You'd look much younger." But when anybody dyes their hair, it shows, doesn't it? Because when their hair changes, so does their skin.

I Tatti renamed a part of the library, calling it the Fototeca Mongan. And there is something going to be named for Agnes and Elizabeth Mongan--I've forgotten precisely what that is--but they haven't voted yet. They're just suggestions.

RIKALA: We talked about this a little bit; I'd like to wrap it up a little bit more. I asked you earlier--and I think

it was off tape--about how you came to decide not to pursue a doctorate degree. You mentioned to me that you were very happy working on the drawings, but perhaps you can recount for me just the thinking that you went through.

MONGAN: Well, I did think that if I were to get a Ph.D. degree, I would have to give a lot of time to a paper. I'd found out all kinds of things about drawings that I wanted to continue to find out. I knew that preparing a thesis would distract me from what I was doing. As long as I had a job and was doing what I liked, it seemed unnecessary for me to get the doctorate. It would just be a delay. So I didn't do it, and I think I was right.

RIKALA: And your sister, as well, decided not to, and she too had very good career offers.

MONGAN: Yes, she did.

RIKALA: So there was never any hindrance.

MONGAN: No, no. It was our own decision in both cases.

RIKALA: How do you view the state of art history now, where most students are compelled to spend an awful lot of time--?

MONGAN: I think they're compelled to spend too much time getting their doctorate. Because those who already have a subject that interests them and has some relation to what it is they know they're going to do, they should keep on doing

what they're doing, not have a doctorate and have to go to all kinds of courses that don't interest them very much. I think they would do better. And yet most curators now are supposed to have a doctorate, aren't they?

RIKALA: Yes.

MONGAN: I think they're going to begin to work out a doctor's degree slightly differently. I hope so, because I think it's become a dull, long job. For many posts that you will be offered later, the first thing they ask is "Have you got a doctorate?" Don't they?

RIKALA: Let's go back and talk a bit about your early career at the Fogg and the kinds of things you were doing taking care of the drawings and prints.

MONGAN: And also more than you know. I was also taking care of occasional visitors, and every now and then they were quite important. So I got to know people. Well, there was very little I could acquire. What I was going to tell you was when they set up the Fogg annual report with a budget in it, for the first time one could see that there was some money for the acquisition of drawings: $82.32 a year!

RIKALA: That's quite a sum.

MONGAN: I didn't need to worry about missing great masterpieces, because I couldn't in any way have paid for them. But John

Newbury, who came from Detroit, and Henry McIlhenny, who came from Philadelphia, and Gordon [Bailey] Washburn, who came from Worcester [Massachusetts] and went on to become the director at the Albright[-Knox] Art Gallery in Buffalo-- They were all interested in drawings. Newbury collected them actively. He left them to the Detroit [Institute of] Arts. His family made Packards. In those days, there used to be three cars at the front door of the Fogg. This was when very few people had cars. John [S.] Thacher, who came from New York; Henry McIlhenny, who was from Philadelphia; and Jack Newbury from Detroit. They all came to their classes in the fine arts in their private cars, which they parked outside the Fogg Museum. Thacher wanted passionately to be the director of the Fogg, but he never became it. But he did become the director of Dumbarton Oaks Research Library [and Collections] in Washington, administered by Harvard University. He died in Washington some years ago.

RIKALA: And why was he so keen to become director of the Fogg?

MONGAN: Because he loved the idea. He was a Yale [University] man as an undergraduate, and he came to the Fogg quite soon after he got his degree from Yale. He became the assistant to the directors, not the assistant director, but assistant

to the directors. Most people thought he was the assistant director. And he kept his eye on those two gentlemen who were codirectors and hoped that he would succeed them, but he didn't.

RIKALA: How long did he stay at the Fogg?

MONGAN: He stayed a long time. Wait a minute. He went away when John Coolidge was made director and went down to Washington and stayed in Washington for the rest of his life. He had a very pretty house on I guess it was Thirty-third Street out in Georgetown. He wasn't as rich as the other two, but he was very comfortably well-off. Newbury of course had, as I said, the Packard fortune. I don't know what McIlhenny's fortune came from, but his was quite large I guess. He's the one who owned Glenveagh Castle in Donegal. After [Arthur] Kingsley Porter died, Mrs. Porter sold it to him. He went to Ireland almost every summer until he died.

RIKALA: On the subject of fancy cars, you mentioned a couple of times that you like driving.

MONGAN: I like driving. My sister says I drive like a bat out of hell. Very few people want to drive with me, but I haven't had any accidents. I've done all right.

RIKALA: Good. Did you learn to drive very young?

MONGAN: No, I didn't learn to drive very young. I drove with

Father for so long, because when we came over daily to Harvard Square for the New York Times, from the time I was thirteen he was always driving. He had a driver very briefly, and he had driven his own buggy. He'd given up the man that used to drive for him and drove the car himself. When I was very young I went with him in the buggy. Now, he got the first car in 1909, and in 1909 I was four years old, so it was when I was about three that he gave up the buggy, but I do remember it.

RIKALA: How about if we talk a little bit more about your early experience--

MONGAN: At the Fogg?

RIKALA: --at the Fogg. You mentioned the first catalog that you put together.

MONGAN: That wasn't for the Fogg. That was for the Albright Art Gallery.

RIKALA: That was for the Albright. That was mid-1930s. And you worked with Gordon Bailey Washburn?

MONGAN: Uh-huh.

RIKALA: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

MONGAN: Oh, Gordon was very handsome. Very handsome and very nice. He came and took the museum course--that was the reason he knew me. He got the job in Buffalo after somebody had

given up the job and gone somewhere else. He stayed there quite a long time. He had a nice wife, but I never knew her as well as I knew him, though they often invited me to come and see them. He discovered that there were some drawings out there, and he was borrowing some others, and he asked me to do the catalog, which I did. That was my first publication for something more than the Harvard group.

RIKALA: How did you work, the two of you?

MONGAN: Well, he sent me photographs, and then I think he sent me some originals, because I didn't think I could do it. He was born and brought up in Worcester, and he knew the Worcester people and the Worcester museum very well. Where had he gone to college? I don't remember. I know he wasn't a Harvard man. But he came as a graduate student. Paul Sachs was quite fond of him. I think Buffalo wasn't his first job, but it was pretty nearly his first job, and he did quite a good deal there.

RIKALA: How did you put the catalog together? Did you write entries together?

MONGAN: No, I did it all myself and I sent it out to him. Then I went out to see the show when it was-- I think I went out to hang it and saw it then.

RIKALA: So it's really your catalog.

MONGAN: Oh, yes, it's really my catalog.

RIKALA: So your first publication was a complete catalog.

MONGAN: Of an interesting show of old master drawings. You probably can find it in the L.A. library.

RIKALA: How was that catalog received at the time?

MONGAN: Well, it was reviewed. I was quite surprised that it was reviewed in so many places that had nothing to do, I thought, with Buffalo, but it did get reviewed. I think it got reviewed in a journal published in Washington. Whether that was the art show or something else, it got a fair number of favorable reviews, which was nice.

RIKALA: How did your colleagues at the time here at the Fogg--?

MONGAN: Paid no attention to it whatsoever.

RIKALA: Why is that? Because it was another--

MONGAN: Because I was a woman.

RIKALA: Really.

MONGAN: Oh, that made me think of another story. What were we talking about? I wanted to go back to it. How did my colleagues--

RIKALA: How did your colleagues feel about your--?

MONGAN: They thought that I wasn't worth anything, most of my colleagues. My classmates in the graduate school-- There were several of them who were very nice and we became lifelong

friends, like Tom [Thomas C.] Howe, the retired director of the fine arts museum of San Francisco, the California Palace of the Legion of Honor. But there was a whole group that didn't want to have anything to do with me, because there I was, a woman in a man's job.

RIKALA: Well, can you tell me about them? Who do you remember?

MONGAN: I just remember there was a group, and I can't remember who was in it. I didn't want to know who was in it. I've crossed them off my memory.

RIKALA: Sure. Get rid of them.

MONGAN: I know the ones that I knew and liked. They all have stayed friends until they died.

RIKALA: Having produced this catalog then-- The catalog that comes from the Fogg [Drawings in the Fogg Museum of Art] is 1940, isn't it? The next catalog. When did you set out to work on that? Soon after or--?

MONGAN: Soon after I began working at the Fogg. I mean, in the early 1930s, because PJ said he wanted a catalog, and I helped with it. He was too busy to do anything about it at all. He was teaching and he was going to New York and he was on any number of committees, and he knew more about managing a museum than almost anybody, so he had visitors and long-distance calls. He wasn't a writer in any way. He

wrote when he had to, but it wasn't easy writing. He found it much easier to talk. RIKALA: He also had a philosophy that somehow there was a distinction between a museum person and a scholar, even though you seem to have been both of these people. But he seemed to distinguish between working at a museum and scholarship.

MONGAN: He did a bit when he was trying to bring the scholarship into the work of a museum. Very strongly.

RIKALA: From what point of view did he perceive this?

MONGAN: Well, after his first Harvard degree, he was appointed a member of the visiting committee of the Fogg Museum. As a young schoolboy in New York, his mother [Louise Sachs] used to take him on Saturday afternoons--I told you that--to dealers where there were prints and drawings and paintings. He began, all on his own, to collect prints. Apparently his bedroom from the time he was a child was filled with original prints. He didn't know anything about their history, but he did know what he liked. As he grew older, he learned more and more about the history. By the time I came along, he had already given a course or two on the history of engraving.

He came to Cambridge in 1915 and he went abroad shortly thereafter. World War I had started. I've often wondered about this, because there's no place that I can find a full

account. He must have gone to France very shortly after the war began, because he was still in France when World War I ended. That was the reason he got to go to the Degas sales. He had some wonderful stories he told about the war and the French. I was going to tell you one of them. It will come back to me in a minute.

RIKALA: I think you did mention to me he went towards the end of the war. Was he at that point shopping for the Fogg?
MONGAN: Oh, no. We never had enough money for him to go shopping for the Fogg. But he was meeting friends and telling them that they should give us money or works of art.
RIKALA: So he was fund-raising.
MONGAN: But not saying so. That way he raised quite a lot of money, I mean by getting his friends to give us or leave us their pictures. [tape recorder off] His brother Arthur [Sachs], when he married a second time, married a French girl. Arthur had a lovely house in Paris and a beautiful house on the Riviera.
RIKALA: So Paul Sachs had an attraction to France, then, all his life.
MONGAN: Uh-huh.
RIKALA: The way you describe him as not knowing the history

of these drawings until later but having a strong appreciation-- Did he teach that appreciation to people? Was he able to pass that on?

MONGAN: I can tell you another brief story. He was giving the French painting course on nineteenth-century French pictures, and it was a very popular course. One of the students in the class-- And in those days the students were all male, or 90 percent male. Well, the undergraduates were all male, because if the course was repeated, it had to be over at Radcliffe with the girls. You know that. Well, he was giving this lecture and some student asked him a question that puzzled him. He turned around and looked at the slide, which was then already a colored slide. He stopped his explanation and he said, "My God, just look at it." All he needed to do was just look at it and he knew he loved it. He wanted them to love it the way he did.

RIKALA: So he taught people to--

MONGAN: Really to look at a work of art and let it speak to them. He always wanted, before we made any judgment, that it speak to us.

RIKALA: That's a very strong and confident position for him to take and to nurture in his students as well, I would think.

MONGAN: I suppose so. I can't remember any other professor ever handing us a work of art and telling us to feel it and think about it and let it speak to us. What he said that day was, "My God, just look at it."

RIKALA: You've mentioned several courses now that he taught. He taught the museum--

MONGAN: He taught the history of engraving. He taught the history of drawings. He taught the history of French painting. He taught the museum course.

RIKALA: Before he came to Cambridge, had he had teaching experience?

MONGAN: None. None whatsoever, and he was nervous as a witch about this when he first came. In fact he didn't agree, when he first came, to teach anything. But he realized that he would have to. So he got a job at Wellesley [College] teaching there. Now, I'm going to write something about this, because I haven't heard anybody say it. But there was an extraordinary woman who was head of the department at Wellesley. I think she had a profound influence on him. Wellesley's done awfully well, you know, in fine arts. Then he was willing to begin to teach at Harvard a year or two after that. But he was nervous as could be about his lectures, because he didn't ever consider that he was a good lecturer.

RIKALA: And he went on teaching until he retired? Until 1944?

MONGAN: Uh-huh.

RIKALA: So it was a commitment he stuck to and--

MONGAN: Did he retire in '44?

RIKALA: Well, I have that Forbes and Sachs together retire--

MONGAN: Yes, he wouldn't retire by himself and Forbes wouldn't retire by himself. They had been director and associate director, and they were very good friends in their very different ways. And Paul Sachs insisted on retiring and would only do it when Edward Forbes also did it.

RIKALA: So the date I have for that is 1944. *[That was the year Sachs retired from the Fogg, but not from teaching.]

MONGAN: Well, that was it.

RIKALA: So they were together for what? Thirty-five, thirty years together working for the Fogg. That's a very big commitment. And did Forbes teach as much?

MONGAN: Oh, no. But he had separate students. And when A. Everett Austin [Jr.] -- Have you ever heard of A. Everett Austin?

RIKALA: No.

MONGAN: When he left our department of conservation and went down to Hartford to become director of the [Wadsworth] Atheneum, he probably knew more about
contemporary painting--then called contemporary paintings--

than anybody. He built a new addition to the Hartford Atheneum, and he filled Hartford with wonderful great paintings. He also liked the baroque and the rococo, which were not liked here. And it was he who had the first performance of Gertrude Stein's opera [Four Saints in Three Acts]. Virgil Thomson, a Harvard man and a gifted composer, wrote the music. A special train came up from New York with people on the opening night. I went down from here by the road. And people came literally from all over New England for that opening. It was a terrific party.

RIKALA: Really. And when was that date? Do you recall?

MONGAN: I don't remember what the date was.

RIKALA: About the mid-thirties, I have here that you started teaching modern art at the Boston Center for Adult Education.

MONGAN: I did? No, it was in Cambridge.

RIKALA: It was in Cambridge, okay. And where had you fostered your interest in contemporary art?

MONGAN: Through Lincoln [Kirstein] and Eddie [Edward M. M. Warburg] and Johnny [John] Walker. I used to have lunch with

---

* Mongan added the following bracketed section during her review of the transcript.

them almost everyday. *[They were preparing the exhibition to be shown at the Harvard Society of Contemporary Art, which had its gallery upstairs over the Harvard Cooperative Society.] There was a Schraft's in Harvard Square that was just about three doors from their place at the Coop. We'd go out the rear door of the Coop and go to the corner and have lunch and talk and discuss things all through lunch. I mean, most days there weren't so many people; you didn't have to stand in line. We could go right to the back of the store into where the restaurant was and give our order and then just chitchat for the rest of the meal. And then Lincoln and Eddie would go back to the gallery [Harvard Society of Contemporary Art]. I would go back to the Fogg.

RIKALA: So you had your update on contemporary art all the time.

MONGAN: You see, Eddie lived in New York anyway. His family had a house on Fifth Avenue, Fifth Avenue at Ninety-second Street. It is now the Jewish Museum. And Lincoln's family--Well, they went occasionally to New York, but he already had

---

* Mongan added the following bracketed section during her review of the transcript.

an apartment there. Johnny Walker went and stayed at I Tatti with BB after he graduated. Because he was a great admirer of Kenneth Clark's, and "K" [Clark] had told him about I Tatti, because he'd been there. Johnny wanted to go there more than anything and ended up there after he graduated from Harvard. Then when he came back to this country he got a job at the National Gallery. What year did that open?

RIKALA: 'Forty-one, I think.

MONGAN: Wait a minute. This is '91-- Yes. Fifty years. He got a job there as an assistant in the painting department. He's also written a book about I Tatti, or about his own life.

RIKALA: In the early thirties you did work on the Degas portraits, and in that you described the people and the personalities of those--

MONGAN: Of the sitters?

RIKALA: Yes, of the sitters, of those portrayed. That seems to be a very exceptional way of looking at portraits. Can you recall a little bit why you got started and how you got involved in that project?

MONGAN: Well, I got involved, I think, because Degas was one of PJ's great favorites and he had quite a number of Degas drawings. Then when Sachs bought the two studies by Degas

for his picture of Diego Martelli and I had to look into that, I began to look at the portraits of the epoch. I was already intrigued by Ingres. I became, as you know, what the French call "le Ingriste de l'amèrique." I've lectured on Ingres in Montauban, the town where Ingres was born. I have lectured in various places around this country. Now we have one of the great collections of Ingres. When we added the Winthrope collection to the Sachs collection, it turned out that we had something very marvelous.

But I do find Degas a more sympathetic artist than Monsieur Ingres. I can admire Ingres and love his drawings, but as a human being he doesn't appeal to me as much as Degas did. Degas was extraordinary. He loved music, he loved art, he loved landscape, he loved to dance. He didn't do anything he didn't actually-- Well, he loved to see the movement and so forth. I'm smiling because I think of a funny story about Henry McIlhenny. Henry told me this story. He was in Paris, and he bought one of those statues of the dancer and he discovered that she had a torn skirt. So he ordered a new skirt, and it hadn't come and it hadn't come. He was staying with his mother in a hotel near the Place de la Concorde. When he came down one day at lunchtime, there was his mother with a package with a dancer's skirt. She was looking very cross

because she thought he had been keeping a dancer and had ordered a new skirt for her. She didn't know about the bronze Dancer. That amused Henry a great deal. It amused me too.

RIKALA: What are your other particular recollections of the workings of the Fogg and your career through the thirties, your new career?

MONGAN: Well, PJ was not only interested in fine arts and in portraits, he was terribly interested in good food. When I went abroad he told me where to go, and when he and Mrs. [Meta Pollak] Sachs went abroad and I joined them, we certainly went to good places and had wonderful meals. They had a good cook up at Shady Hill, so any dinner party-- Well, the one that Mrs. [Isabella Stewart] Gardner came to was delicious.

RIKALA: On what occasions did you join the Sachses in your--?

MONGAN: Well, I suppose one of the most exciting experiences of my life was when-- I'll have to see what year it was. He received Gustav Mayer of Colnaghi here in Cambridge. He was so excited. I couldn't quite understand why, and then he told me. The dealer who had
come to see him told him that the drawings in the Albertina [Graphic Art Collection] would be for sale and that it would cost several million, but it would be worth it. When PJ heard this he could scarcely believe it. He sent me abroad

in June. I could tell no one why I went. He came over with Mrs. Sachs--I guess it was in September. He got leave somehow, and we went to Vienna. Now, we were told that the Vatican, the English foreign office, and the French equivalent of the foreign office had all been told what was going to happen and that we were the people who were going to buy it. We were also told that our telephone conversa-tions would be recorded and our mail opened and we would be followed. We stayed at the Hotel Bristol, which is next door to-- Do you know Vienna at all?

RIKALA: No.

MONGAN: In the next hotel beyond the corner that has the opera house on the great circle [the Ringstrasse]. And we couldn't go out in the daytime for the first week because it would be too hazardous, but we could go out for lunch and we could go out for dinner. We couldn't tell dealers that we were there, but we could look at old churches. We didn't look in the Albertina. I didn't go to the Albertina. At the elevator on the first floor, on the ground floor, there was a man who sat opposite the elevator who had on a shiny blue serge suit, had a derby hat which he kept close to him. He was watching. When I came down he followed me at a discrete distance, so I knew he was a detective. After we'd been there

in Vienna about a week-- Well, the first time we went, we went in September, and we were told to leave and to come back later. We went to Paris, where Arthur Sachs lent us his Rolls-Royce and chauffeur. We went off to have a look at Belgium and Holland. When we came back to Paris, we were told to go to Vienna again, and so we went to Vienna. And then we were told--I think we went three times--again to leave. And then towards the end of November we went back again because we had been told a deal was being made. Then the whole thing blew up and we were asked to leave the city. I said to PJ I wasn't going to go until I'd seen the Danube. I wasn't going to have all those months in Vienna without even seeing the Danube!

PJ and Mrs. Sachs went off, went back to Paris, and the man from Boston-- Because the Boston Museum [of Fine Arts] was going to support the Fogg. We were going to do this together. Boston had a collector, a very active print collector, named Russell Allen, who was six feet two and a great friend of Paul Sachs's, who came with us. They left town, and I was told to follow them to Paris. When I came down Sunday morning, the man in the shiny blue serge had gone, and I became aware of the fact that I was being followed by a young man who had been sitting there in a greasy khaki suit with a greasy khaki

coat and blond, greasy hair. I didn't like his looks one little bit, and I decided that he was a Nazi spy.

Because it was the Nazis who ruined this. They had found out what was under consideration. There was in Germany a bright young man who was a reporter for the Frankfurter allgemeine Zeitung. He had learned in Germany that something was going on. His suspicions had been aroused, and he wondered why we were in Vienna. And he had an idea. So he went to Boston and pretended he was selling drawings. He offered some to the staff of the Boston Museum, and they said they couldn't buy any and they weren't going to be able to buy anything for a couple of years and they wouldn't need them. And he decided this was the museum-- He hadn't been told which American museum was involved. He didn't need to be told. He then knew it was the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts]. He went back to Frankfurt and published a story about the whole thing.

I never did know who he was, but I decided I'd make this little Nazi spy who was following me in Vienna earn a living. I first went to high mass at the Stefanskirche and I stood the whole time. Then I went to the Lippizaner horses and saw the whole production, and then I walked to the Kunsthistorisches Museum and began going around the galleries

and then thinking of something and going back to the gallery I'd just left, and he always following me and running back to the next gallery. Well, I kept him on his feet for seven continuous hours. It was nothing for me, but apparently it was quite a bit for him. Then I walked down to the Danube and had a look. That night I took a train to Paris.

RIKALA: What an interesting, interesting day. And he didn't follow you on the train.

MONGAN: He didn't follow me and the whole episode quietly vanished. Well, it would have been sad for the Austrians had it been successful. The archduke had lots of political debts. He declared himself a Hungarian and had gone to live in Hungary and was offering to sell the Albertina art in order to pay his Viennese debts. *[The Austrian officials decided that the collection, which had been in existence for generations, was not his private property.] So there's a story for you. I've told it before.

RIKALA: It's a good thing, though, that it stayed--

MONGAN: Oh my, yes, we all agreed with that. It would be dreadful to think of the Albertina not being there.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

OCTOBER 27, 1991

RIKALA: I've reviewed our tapes, and so I'm going to ask you a couple of questions from our last conversation and then we can move forward again through the thirties. One of the things that I'm still very interested in and hope you will talk a little bit more about has to do with your family. What was very clear on the other tapes was that you seemed to have a very good rapport with your mother [Elizabeth O'Brien Mongan].

MONGAN: Oh, yes. There's no question about that.

RIKALA: So I hope we can talk a little bit more about that. What I also was interested in was your role as a person who is Catholic in this community, and how did that make a difference in your life? Perhaps you can tell me a little bit.

MONGAN: I can tell you, if you haven't heard it, the story of what happened to me when I was in the first grade.

RIKALA: No, I haven't.

MONGAN: There was a little girl who was also in the first grade, and she came up to me and she began running her hands across my forehead over and over again. I said to her, "What are you doing?" "Well," she said, "my parents tell me that you're a Catholic. You're the first one I've ever known.

And all Catholics, they say, are devils. I'm looking for your horns."

RIKALA: Oh, my goodness.

MONGAN: This was in the first grade. People changed very much in Somerville, and Italians came in and Irish came in. But in the beginning it was one of the great centers for the APA, if you know what that was, the American Protestant Association. They didn't want anything to do with Catholics. But it wasn't only in school. When I got to college I went in one of our first vacations to the house of one of my-- Well, she was in the same hall. She was not in the same class, but she was in the hall. She was a Boston girl. When we were both in Boston, she invited me to her house for Sunday lunch, and I went. When we got back to college she told me I was the first Roman Catholic ever to come in the front door of their house. They had many servants who were Italian or French or Irish, but they always considered that anybody who was Catholic was a servant. And she had to convince her parents to have me. There were several episodes of that kind. I put as many as I could out of my mind, because I didn't like them and I didn't think they'd get my friends or me anywhere. But I was aware of it all through college, that I was practically unique. There were one or two other Roman Catholics who would

walk home from church with me when we saw each other at church. But there was a real prejudice. That seems to have pretty nearly vanished, you know.

RIKALA: Yes. It has changed. But your family came from a very well educated--

MONGAN: Yes, they did, but that wasn't expected. You were supposed to have come from the servants. On my father's side of the family they'd been in the church and they'd been teachers, and on Mother's side they'd been minor nobles and also teachers and writers. One of my ancestors--and I've got to find his name--was the first person to translate a Polish novel into English. At least that's what I was brought up being told. I've tried to check it but didn't get anywhere, because it's hard to-- Well, I had to go to Widener [Library] to get some information.

RIKALA: And yet you've always been very devout. It's served you and your whole family--

MONGAN: Yes, the whole family. We've done all the Catholic holidays. Father [Charles Edward Mongan Sr.] looked after the poor and the Little Sisters of the Poor, and he looked after the terminally ill at the Holy Ghost Hospital [now Yonville Hospital]. If poor Italians came to see him he didn't send a bill. He waited. He said he didn't need to send a bill;

when they had enough money they'd pay him. And that was true. Sometimes he'd come in from the office when his office hours were over and he said, "It's unbelievable. Those people have owed me for eighteen years and I've never sent a bill, but they brought the money today. They knew how much." So he wasn't going to badger anybody to get a bill out of them.

RIKALA: And how has that really affected your world view? Do you feel you've been more--? You've obviously been more considerate and sensitive to prejudice. Both a woman in a male career field and this--

MONGAN: I hadn't thought of it from that aspect, but it may have had more to do with my patience at the anti-feminist activities as well as the anti-Catholic ones. I mean, from the anti-Catholic ones I would have understood how to be quiet about the anti-feminist.

RIKALA: Yes, that's interesting.

MONGAN: I almost meant to tell you that Mother was so extraordinary that a well-known Boston writer in the second half of the nineteenth century when he met Mother was so astonished by what she was doing teaching the Russians and the Poles English that he wrote a story about her. I've never found it. I've got to find that too.

RIKALA: That would be very interesting. You spent some of

your travel time with your sister [Elizabeth Mongan], but I learned from the other interview that you also traveled with your mother early in your career. You went to South America together?

MONGAN: Oh, we did go. Yes, in 1931 we went along the north coast of South America. Mother loved the sea. She loved boats. She and Father went to London and Paris on their honeymoon. And Father hated boats, but he went with Mother because she loved boats. Very early, before people began to visit South America as travelers, Mother and I went on a cruise along the north shore of South America, and that was my first view of South America.

RIKALA: It was a holiday just for the two of you?

MONGAN: It was a holiday for the two of us, and I think we were three weeks.

RIKALA: Were there other such holidays that then you and your mother were able to do together?

MONGAN: No. I can't remember going anywhere else alone with her. I told you, we went to the mountains because Father wanted us to know what a mountain brook was and what trout were like. Where else did I say he took us? He took us to western Massachusetts. Several times he took us up to Portsmouth [New Hampshire] and the beginnings of Maine because

he wanted us to be aware of what New England was. Once he took us to New York, and that was something. We stayed in a hotel on Twenty-third Street that was then a famous hotel, and we went up and down Fifth Avenue to see what that was like and we went up and down Park Avenue and we went to several stores because he wanted to. Oh, there were many soldiers coming back from abroad, and they were all-- Before they came home to New England, they were passing through New York. Father thought we ought to know what New York looked like. That was the reason he took us there. That was all four of us. When we went on these trips, there were all four of us. I wonder if Betty [Elizabeth Mongan] remembers them as well as I do, because she and John [Mongan] were so much younger. Well, I mean, you know, five years younger than I am.

Some lady friends were making remarks the other day about a book that they all had read as a child and just loved, and they said to me, "What did you think of it?" And I said, "I've never heard of it." They said, "You've never heard of it? You must have. Everybody knew it." I had never heard of it. I think the reason I never heard of it was Mother was protecting us from stories that were not, in her mind, of value. *[We were familiar with all of Beatrix Potter's little books.] A little later she did read us Silas Marner,

she read us Dickens, she read us all things of that kind. She didn't read us little funny stories that these ladies were talking about. She didn't think she needed to.

RIKALA: You had a very special education at home as well.

MONGAN: And Mother knew enough German to teach us German songs; the aunts knew enough French to teach us French songs. So we grew up knowing English, American, and some French and German songs. [sings] "Meinen Blumen Durst haben, das kann man wohl gesehen. Will ich denn zu den Blumen gehen." All of it comes back to me.

RIKALA: Oh, yes, your German's very good. Let's talk about the 1930s some more. I'm sorry I'm skipping around, but--

MONGAN: It's all right.

RIKALA: The first day I stopped by here you told me about the story of Lillie Bliss and Mrs. Sullivan and Mrs. J. D. Rockefeller. I'm wondering if you would tell that again.

MONGAN: Oh, we didn't have it on tape? Well, that year the crash hadn't come.

RIKALA: So it was before '29.

---

* Mongan added the following bracketed section during her review of the transcript.

MONGAN: The crash came in '29. That was '28-'29. So no, the crash hadn't come. I was taking the museum course, and there were six of us. We met in the big room at Shady Hill. And PJ [Paul J. Sachs] always went to New York on the weekend to visit his mother, who had an apartment--before it was in the Pierre [Hotel] it was in another elegant hotel--and he kept his New York clothing in New York. He knew a great number of very important New Yorkers because he knew the bankers. It wasn't only that he knew the Schiffs and the Warburgs and the Goldmans, but he also knew the Rockefellers. Well, Mrs. Rockefeller was on our [the Fogg Art Museum's] visiting committee. Curiously enough, at that point she was interested in oriental art and was collecting it. I knew that she was because we were supposed to know who was collecting what, get this into our backgrounds. I knew that she was collecting medieval miniatures, but particularly oriental art. She was in touch with it.

Now, in the museum course, if he told us anything it was supposed to be in absolute confidence, because he was teaching us things that were actually happening, and he didn't want us talking about it because many of these people were internationally famous. He came back one day saying that there were three ladies in New York who were extraordinary,

and he had been to see them because they'd been in touch with him in Cambridge and asked him to see them in New York. They told him that they thought it was a disgrace that there was no museum of modern art in New York. They wanted to do something about it: What would he do? Of course it had already happened that the undergraduates Lincoln [Kirstein], Eddie [Edward M. M.] Warburg, and Johnny [John] Walker had formed the [Harvard] Society of Contemporary Art in Cambridge. And PJ was also aware of what Matisse and Picasso were doing, so he said to the ladies that they should found a museum of contemporary art--modern art. He came back after one weekend just bubbling full of interest in what was going on. Then he talked to these ladies on the telephone. Now, I think he was closest to Mrs. Rockefeller. The second one was Lillie Bliss, who had a great many modern pictures which she gave eventually to the Museum of Modern Art. The third one was named Mrs. Sullivan. These three ladies met in New York and talked it all over, and I can't remember quite why it was-- I'm not sure that this part was entirely Paul Sachs's influence. A committee that faced the public and became known for founding the Museum of Modern Art didn't mention any one of these three ladies. The three ladies asked Paul Sachs whom should they get as a director. And that was the year that Alfred [H.]

Barr [Jr.] had come up from Princeton [University] to take a course in the history of engraving with Paul Sachs. Paul Sachs had been enormously impressed by this young scholar and said to Mrs. Rockefeller that he thought she should offer Alfred Barr the directorship of the new modern museum. Now, this doesn't come out in any of the books that tell you how it came into being, but this is an actual fact.

RIKALA: How old was Barr at that time? He was a graduate student?

MONGAN: He was a graduate student.

RIKALA: So he might have been in his mid-twenties?

MONGAN: Yes, he certainly was in his mid-twenties, because he'd taken a year-- His father was a famous Presbyterian minister in Baltimore. Alfred had taken several courses in different subjects before he turned to fine arts. He had a broad interest in language and literature. I mean, it wasn't only fine arts. He had a broad interest in language and literature. I'm not sure he wasn't a little bit disappointed in the lack of breadth of what was going on in Princeton and that was the reason he wanted to come to Harvard [University], but he came.

RIKALA: Was he in the arts and archaeology department at Princeton?

MONGAN: Oh, he was a graduate student there too.

RIKALA: Yes, in arts and archaeology. So he came here and got to know--

MONGAN: He came here I think it was in '23 or '24 and got to know Paul Sachs very well, because they were sympathetic in their tastes and in their outlooks. They were still in touch. Alfred had made such an impression on Paul Sachs that when the Modern began to look as if it would come into being, Paul Sachs recommended him. I know that.

RIKALA: And did Barr finish his graduate studies then, or how did that--?

MONGAN: He never got a doctorate, no. After a lengthy interview with Mr. [John D.] Rockefeller he accepted his offer, and the Museum of Modern Art came into being.

RIKALA: Barr becomes a very important person during this time in all the things that he was involved in.

MONGAN: Oh my, yes.

RIKALA: He was also involved in the College Art Association [of America].

MONGAN: Yes.

RIKALA: Sort of his friends took it over, didn't they, for a while.

MONGAN: I'd forgotten that. And of course there were his wife [Margaret Scolari-Fitzmaurice Barr]'s interests, as I told you.

Her father was a Venetian. Her mother was Anglo-Irish. They lived in Rome. They had quarreled so that they weren't speaking to each other, and Marga as a girl was used as a translator at the dinner table. People wondered why she was so strange. She had reasons for being strange. She was brilliant, but she really was strange. But she adored
Alfred and Alfred loved her, so that it went very well, though each was not an easy person.

RIKALA: Under what circumstances was Alfred Barr fired from the Museum of Modern Art? Do you remember that story?

MONGAN: He was fired as director, but he stayed on as curator.

RIKALA: As curator, yes.

MONGAN: There had been an awful lot of gossip, talk among the various members and the people who were coming in. I suppose several people must have had good reason for complaining, but those people didn't really understand how unique Alfred was. But he became more centered on his plans, unwilling to listen to others, which had some merit very often. I'd have to look back. I haven't even thought about this for some years.

RIKALA: Did you keep diaries at the time?

MONGAN: I wish I had. I only kept them when I traveled abroad. I have an extensive one on China and I've got a fairly good

one on Japan and I have one on North Africa, but I don't know for the rest what I've covered. I've never looked at them again. But I can remember feeling, when I was in China, "I must make some record of this." And I think it goes on for pages. I must find it.

RIKALA: That would be splendid, because here your whole training was about looking and understanding and interpreting your--

MONGAN: As I began, I fell in love with the Chinese things, and as I said to you the other day, if I had been able to get the language, I would have become an expert on oriental art. But I knew I would never be able to manage Chinese, so I thought it was not worth the effort and I would do the Italian, and did.

RIKALA: Did they teach Chinese here at Harvard?

MONGAN: Yes.

RIKALA: Yes, that would have been a lifelong endeavor to just learn the language. But you've obviously had much opportunity to spend time with oriental art as well and cultivate it.

MONGAN: Oh, well, every time that I got the least bit annoyed I'd go down and walk through the oriental galleries, because they were able to raise my spirits and calm my nerves. Oh,

I think the oriental galleries were extraordinary. They've all moved into the place across the street, the [Arthur M.] Sackler [Museum]. They're up on the top floor and I think they look beautiful. Did you manage to get there?

RIKALA: Yes, I walked through quite quickly.

MONGAN: You saw the superb collection.

RIKALA: Yes, and it's a lovely space in there too. It's very nice.

MONGAN: Well, what moved me when I got to China eventually and into the edge of the Gobi Desert-- I went to every museum in every town. I went with a group of Italians, as I've told you, because they wouldn't let an American into the part of China I wanted to go to. I pretended I was--

RIKALA: So you masqueraded as a--

MONGAN: And we had an Italian-speaking Chinese in every town, until we got to one where they couldn't find an Italian-speaking one and they engaged a Spanish-speaking one. It didn't occur to them that all these cultivated Italians--I was with a group of about fifteen very, very nice Italians--all had English.

RIKALA: Of course, of course. What year was that, the China trip?

MONGAN: 'Sixty-seven? No, it was later than that. I guess

it was '69 or so. I'll have to look this up. Later I was invited to lecture in both Japan-- [tape recorder off] I gave a lecture in Japan. How did I happen to talk in China? Oh, I talked to an American group. And I got to see Cambodia, I told you that, because I wanted-- From Phnom Penh I got into Angkor Wat, and I wanted to see the monument because we have a piece in the Fogg which is from that part of the Orient.

I was being very careful. Those mountains that have the caves in front of them and before-- When I heard that I was going to go, I rushed down to the oriental galleries and took the numbers that were on these labels. Those were the things that I wanted to see when I got to China. The first day we were received at tea in Italian by the curator outside of his office in the building where he had his office, and he was very charming and nice. When we got to the caves I gave the girl who was to show us through the caves my list, and she said she'd show us what I was interested in. She showed us things, Ming and things later than that. There was nothing Tang or interesting to me, so I wondered what was wrong. We went back a second time and it was another girl, so I gave her the list and she showed me something else, but again it was totally beside the point. We went back for

tea. After tea I signed the guest book. They're doing this just the way the Russians are. Have you been in Russia?

RIKALA: Yes, but not recently.

MONGAN: Well, I signed my name Agnes Mongan, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, instead of pretending I was Italian anymore. And when we came the next morning, I said a third time to the girl, "What is the matter? Why can't I see the things I want to?" And she said, "Oh,

you're using--" What's the name of the great French orientalist? "You're using what's his name's numbers. We've changed the numbers. I know what you want to see. I'll take you there." She said, "The curator said I should do it because he knows what you want to look at." And she took me there, and it was worth the effort. Really extraordinary. There was a little piece out of the wall where we had a piece of the fresco in the Fogg. What's the name of the plant, the flower?

RIKALA: The lotus.

MONGAN: There was the lotus bud that had this figure sitting on it, kneeling on it, empty. There was a third thing, and she said, "No, you've had the wrong numbers. We've changed the numbers. This is what you want to see." It was what I wanted to see. I said, "Well, may I go back and thank the

curator for making this possible?" And she said, "Oh, no, he's gone away. He's gone to Peking. You can't see him." So he didn't dare meet me, so he pretended to be out of town. Peking was two hours by bus, overnight by train, and three hours by plane to get there, so you could see it was really in northwestern Asia.

RIKALA: Far away. You've traveled almost everywhere in the world, then.

MONGAN: I haven't been in Australia, and I haven't plans to go to Australia. But I've been to the Orient twice, and I've been to Russia twice, and I've been to other places. I've been to South America. I was invited by the Brazilian government, I told you that. Yes, I've been all around South America and I know Europe fairly well.

RIKALA: And you're also interested in Mexico, aren't you?

MONGAN: Yes, I was very interested in Mexico. I've made at least five trips there. We had, at the beginning, a room at the Fogg, a small gallery filled with Mayan art, and I was very much taken with that. Also I was taken with the early churches. The year I went to Mexico I went with John McAndrew. At that time he was writing his book on the history of early sixteenth-century Mexican art. He had left the Museum [of Modern Art]. He had been teaching at Vassar [College].

From Vassar he went to Wellesley [College]. And at the point that we drove from Boston to Oaxaca--

RIKALA: That's a long drive.

MONGAN: And this in an army command car. One of those things that would take four people. We were John McAndrew, Isabel Pope Conant, who was the wife of Kenneth [J.] Conant, the medieval expert-- She was a specialist in early music and was writing a book on Spanish sixteenth-century music. John was writing a book on the churches of Mexico built between 1528 and 1588. The third person was Elizabeth--oh, my, it will come--who was writing a book on-- John was doing the architecture, she was doing the music, the third one was doing the illuminated manuscripts. So that we were quite a group. I was driving; John and I shared the driving. But it was a wonderful experience, because he had been in Mexico very often. He spoke Spanish, and he was really, really up-to-date on what all these churches were and how they're different and when they were built exactly. We went to Oaxaca because there was a town near there with a church we wanted to look at.

RIKALA: Monte Albán? Is that it?

MONGAN: Monte Albán? Sounds right.

RIKALA: Yes, I think so. That's where also those masks, the

gold masks, were. Yes. That sounds like a very exciting trip.

MONGAN: It was.

RIKALA: And that's a long drive.

MONGAN: I can tell you when exactly it took place, because the Americans dropped the atom bomb on the Japanese while we were in Mexico.

RIKALA: On that trip.

MONGAN: I mean, the Americans dropped the-- They should never have done it.

RIKALA: And do you remember that day?

MONGAN: Oh my, yes. Never forget it. It took a day or two for the news to get to Mexico, but when it got there we felt the way they did, that it should not have happened.

RIKALA: Mexico wasn't involved in World War II much, was it?

MONGAN: No, not at all, but they were afraid that as long as we had it we might come bomb them too, if we were displeased at something and wanted to take action. Oh, they were terrified, many of them. Not all of them.

RIKALA: Did you visit the museum much in Mexico, in Mexico City?

MONGAN: Oh my, yes. We got to know the museum people. John had had an apartment, and I rented rooms near the great park.

RIKALA: Chapultepec Park?

MONGAN: Well, we went to that town, but I don't remember that was the name of--

RIKALA: No, the park in Mexico City I think is Chapul-tepec Park, where all the museums are.

MONGAN: Yes, yes. John knew the authorities, and we got to know many of them. I think I've got quite a good book about that. I should look that up.

RIKALA: What I would like to do next is to talk about some of the people who were faculty members when you were new at the Fogg, after you were no longer a student but you were a curator, and your relationships with the department, and talk a little bit about how the department changed and things like that. I'd like to do a little bit of work on the history of both the museum and--

MONGAN: Well, of course there were very distinguished people in the department in those days. There was not only A. [Arthur] Kingsley Porter, there was Chandler Post, who was a great Hispanist, because the Fogg had more photographs of Spanish architecture and painting than any museum anywhere in the world.

RIKALA: And was that his doing?

MONGAN: That was his doing. And there was Arthur Pope, who

was writing his book on the theory of drawing [The Language of Drawing and Painting]. There was Langdon Warner, the orientalist.

RIKALA: Yes, what was he like?

MONGAN: Oh, he was a charmer. He was an absolute charmer.

RIKALA: Now, he was a Bostonian originally. Is that correct?

MONGAN: I suppose so.

RIKALA: I think so. And there was Jakob Rosenberg.

MONGAN: Jakob. He came towards the end of the thirties. He wasn't there when--

RIKALA: When you were a student. What about Kenneth Conant?

MONGAN: Kenneth Conant was there. Medieval architecture.

RIKALA: Architecture. He worked on Cluny.

MONGAN: Yes. Cluny was his subject.

RIKALA: Did you all take an architectural history class from him, or was it for the undergraduates?

MONGAN: He was very popular with the undergraduates, but he also gave, I believe, a graduate course. I didn't take it. I should have, but didn't.

RIKALA: I think he might have taken students with him as well to do some of the archaeological work. I seem to remember hearing stories about that.

MONGAN: You see, his wife, Isabel Pope Conant, became a great

friend of mine. She died a year or two ago.

RIKALA: If I may ask you, it would be interesting for me to have some personality sketches of these people. What was your impression of, for example, Rosenberg, Jakob Rosenberg?

MONGAN: Oh, I loved him from the beginning. He was a dear man.

RIKALA: He came as the prints curator?

MONGAN: He came as the curator of prints. That's right. And he was also-- From the beginning he was a lecturer in fine arts. Everybody liked him. Everybody liked him. Philip Hofer, who was already working at Widener Library, said that he shouldn't be Jakob Rosenberg, he should be Saint Jakob.

RIKALA: In what ways did he contribute to the museum?

MONGAN: He had a warmth in his friendship that every student could feel, and they did. The students just loved him. He could give time for anybody who wanted to talk about some problem about engraving or etching or medieval or whatever. He had a wide experience in works of art, and he would see and help any student at any time if he just could make the time, and 90 percent of the time he could make the time.

RIKALA: Where did he come from when he--?

MONGAN: Germany.

RIKALA: He came over from Germany.

MONGAN: Yes, he came over before Hitler did his worst. He was Jewish and he knew that he would have no job if he stayed in Germany.

RIKALA: Who made the appointment? Do you recall?

MONGAN: Well, I think Paul Sachs had known about him, and so had others. His family were bankers, and he had a brother who'd gone to England. That brother persuaded Jakob to leave Germany and come to this country. And when-- I don't know which one it was, but when some Harvard fine arts person heard he was in New York-- Oh, he came as a visiting lecturer and was lecturing around the country, and this fine arts person said, "Get him to come to Harvard." And they did and he came, and it was a great success.

RIKALA: Like Walter Cook, was Paul Sachs interested in helping the German Jewish people settle and find apartments?

MONGAN: Oh, yes.

RIKALA: Was he part of that campaign?

MONGAN: No, he didn't join the campaign--he always wanted to do it privately--but he did it a great deal. At least I don't think he joined-- I didn't know there was a campaign.

RIKALA: Well, I'm using that word in a sloppy way, but it seems that Walter Cook was very active all the time in helping.

MONGAN: Well, PJ didn't like Walter Cook too much.

RIKALA: No? Why not?

MONGAN: I don't know. Never asked. They were different temperaments and different manners.

RIKALA: But they must have circulated in New York.

MONGAN: Oh, they did.

RIKALA: Had close friends and things like that. Was Sachs involved at all at the Institute of Fine Arts at NYU [New York University]?

MONGAN: No, he was a Harvard man.

RIKALA: He became a Harvard man. There are a few other people I'd like to ask about. Fred [Frederick] Deknatel. MONGAN: Fred Deknatel. He was a graduate student. He signed up the week I did. So I knew him from his first-- Wasn't he a Princetonian? He came to Harvard to get a doctor's degree. We took Paul Sachs's course together. He didn't take the museum course that first year. But he lived here-- Oh, he got married. I was invited to the wedding. The wedding was in that early church north of Harvard Square, Christ's Church. That was the first time I was in it. Fred had some money and his wife I think had some more money. They were able to travel and do things. Fred was working, hopefully, towards I think a professorship when he died suddenly. I don't remember

what he died of.

RIKALA: As a very young man.

MONGAN: Yes.

RIKALA: Yes. That's very sad. And there's Charles Kuhn. Was he--?

MONGAN: Oh, Charles Kuhn was an extraordinary man. I didn't know him until I came to Harvard, but as I think I told you, his wife was my classmate at school, so that I knew who he was from early on. He was very ambitious to do something about the Germanic museum. There's a very good book coming out this year by Greta Goldman on the history of the Busch-Reisinger [Museum], as we called it. Now, Cockie [Charles Kuhn] knew that there should be somebody interested in contemporary art, and by the time he became the curator of the Busch-Reisinger-- He wasn't the director because the director-- It was run by the Fogg. But he was the man in charge. He had great feeling for contemporary art. By contemporary art-- Well, if you've gone in to see that [picture] that hung in the dining room of my friends the Geiers in Rome, and they gave it-- Paul Geier and his family came from Cincinnati, so they share that picture. Paul Geier went to Harvard. He was a roommate of David Rockefeller's. He wrote in his will that that picture and one or two others should be shared between

Harvard [the Fogg Museum] and Cincinnati [Cincinnati Art Museum]. So we borrowed it from Cincinnati for the opening of the Busch-Reisinger.

He also was interested in decorative arts, which almost no art historian was in my time. That was the one qualm I had. They were paying no attention to decorative arts in any period. I wanted them to have a department. They wouldn't even listen to me. I wanted them to have special publications, special lectures. They wouldn't listen to me. I gave it up. It wasn't any use, because all those full professors at that time--well, the ones I've told you about first--they'd gone. It was a new set of professors, but they weren't interested in decorative arts at all. And I'm afraid dear John Coolidge was one of them.

RIKALA: Well, we'll get to John Coolidge in a few minutes.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

OCTOBER 27, 1991

MONGAN: Painting, sculpture, theoretically interested in architecture but not much.

RIKALA: But you had architectural drawings in the drawings collection.

MONGAN: Some.

RIKALA: Had they come through Sachs, or were you acquiring them?

MONGAN: Well, no, I wasn't acquiring them. With my $82.32 a year-- What was I about to say?

RIKALA: About the architecture. We went from talking about decorative art--

MONGAN: Oh, no, the Fogg Museum, the one you've just been in, was the second Fogg building. It opened in 1927, so it was a year old when I got there. The original building had been opposite Memorial Hall, where one of the new dormitories now is. That had been a small building. Mr. [Edward Waldo] Forbes wryly described it as "a building with a lecture hall in which you could not hear, a gallery in which you could not see, working rooms in which you could not work, and a roof which leaked like a sieve."

RIKALA: Not a very good museum building.

MONGAN: No.

RIKALA: Was this new building one that Harvard acquired or built for the museum?

MONGAN: They built the Fogg from the ground up. They had put in a great deal of thought as to how it should be made, and there would be a beautiful garden between it and the next building in case they would someday have to add a wing. Now, that garden was destroyed when they brought the Corbu [Le Corbusier] building [the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts] up from the river bank, for which it was designed, to build it on Quincy Street.

RIKALA: Why did that change? Why did the building--?

MONGAN: I don't know who it was who was against it, but when somebody went down to the river to look at it, they said you couldn't have girl students walking at night up from that building to Harvard Square. Things had changed all over and that would be dangerous, so they moved it up near the yard [Harvard Yard]. I don't know how many places were available, but that was the one that was chosen, and that is where we are. If we were to expand, the planned garden was where we were to have the next addition. Very few people know this. Very few.

RIKALA: And how did the Fogg regard its neighbor, that Le

Corbusier building?

MONGAN: Most of them paid no attention to it whatsoever, because when it opened it began having these exhibitions that were considered outrageous.

RIKALA: It is quite a stunning streetscape when you walk by.

MONGAN: That curving footpath was built so that the students coming home from the Cambridge Latin School, which is in the next block, would walk through there and look in and see what the students were doing in the Carpenter Center. Only what the high school students did was they reached inside when they saw the coats hanging there and robbed and robbed and robbed, so they had to change the--

RIKALA: How terrible.

MONGAN: The few that came through were-- There weren't very many, but those who discovered that they could get money easily did it.

RIKALA: That's a sad story.

MONGAN: Uh-huh. But now with the new wing--

RIKALA: The pavilion in the back.

MONGAN: --it can work. It works much better because you can walk over from the Fogg.

RIKALA: Who's the architect of the new wing? Do you recall?

MONGAN: No, I don't recall his name. [Charles Gwathmey and Werner Otto Hall]

RIKALA: We started to talk about the two generations of faculty in the department and having to do with the Fogg. There was the older generation around Conant and Kingsley Porter, and then--

MONGAN: Conant was the only one who stayed on, because he was the youngest.

RIKALA: Of the old guard.

MONGAN: He did stay on until fairly recent years. But Chandler Post and Kingsley Porter had retired. Arthur Pope and Langdon Warner had retired earlier.

RIKALA: It was toward the middle of the forties that Forbes and Sachs retired, and a couple of years later, three or four years later, John Coolidge came on as both a faculty member and then soon after a director. Could you talk a little bit about your memories of that period and the changes that the Fogg was going through? The Fogg was at that point broke, wasn't it? It was the middle of the war period and there wasn't much money.

MONGAN: We've never had much money. For example, we've never had anywhere near the amount of money that Smith College had for works of art, because everybody thought Harvard was rich.

And the people in the department-- "You don't need to go after money." But we did need it.

RIKALA: Let's talk about some of the classes that you taught as part of the museum and the department. You taught a history of drawings class.

MONGAN: Yes. That was for graduate students only and it was in the drawing room. I could get out original drawings. I didn't know that the students who took it were so moved until recently several of them have come up to me to say how much it meant to them. Well, I would get quite excited when I got out some of these very fine drawings. I think I gave a course in Ingres once. And I told you that I think Ingres is a marvelous draftsman, but as an artist I preferred Degas. I think Degas's drawings are marvelous.

RIKALA: You taught the museum course at some point.

MONGAN: I taught the museum course-- Well, we did that. John Coolidge and I did it in alternate years. Because he was also giving it and I was giving it. I took the class to New York [City]. I took the class to Washington [D.C.]. Occasionally I took them to Philadelphia. Paul Sachs had said to me when I was a student that I would have to look at originals, so when I taught I took them to as many places as I could. I do know that we went to Washington and we went

to Philadelphia and we went to New York.

RIKALA: John Coolidge didn't have a museum background though, did he?

MONGAN: John Coolidge has another background which is historically interesting, because he's a descendant of Thomas Jefferson. And that means that he is interested in Jefferson and knows an awful lot about him. You knew who he was.

RIKALA: And that his family also has been in this area--

MONGAN: Oh, my, his father was a professor, a very well known professor. And John was in the family tradition. He was very concentrated on getting certain things done. Naturally, I thought he would be very interested in American art. He was not. I was really rather surprised, because I had thought with the surprising number of Gilbert Stuarts and [John Singleton] Copleys the Fogg has that he would have a great interest in that. But John Coolidge's interest at that time was in sixteenth-century Italian architecture.

RIKALA: Yes, yes, the Villa Giulia and such. He was offered a faculty position when he was very young, in his early thirties, in the department. How is it that he came to be part of the department and the Fogg here? Do you recall?

MONGAN: I recall that I was astonished, and then I realized that with his family history and intellectual gifts as it

was, John had a somewhat better chance at his young age than he would have had otherwise.

RIKALA: In the mid-forties you had already been working at the Fogg for--

MONGAN: Nearly twenty years.

RIKALA: --nearly twenty years when they were looking for a director--

MONGAN: Oh my, they couldn't have a woman. Alfred Barr came up from New York and asked to see the board of overseers and presented me as the best candidate possible. They wouldn't even listen to him.

RIKALA: And how did you feel?

MONGAN: Well, I was a woman and I knew I was a woman. I knew how it felt that way.

RIKALA: But certainly that must have been frustrating.

MONGAN: I didn't even know that Alfred had come or that he was promoting me.

RIKALA: Really? He told you later or--?

MONGAN: Much later.

RIKALA: And how did you feel when Paul Sachs and Forbes retired? Did you feel that--?

MONGAN: Oh, I felt it was a chance that the Fogg should do something striking, but there was no chance that we would

find any pair anywhere like those two.

RIKALA: Soon after, sometime in the late forties I presume--I don't know the exact date--the Fogg started having proper exhibitions.

MONGAN: Proper exhibitions?

RIKALA: For example, like shows. Not blockbusters, but--

MONGAN: Oh, not blockbusters. They wouldn't have a blockbuster.

RIKALA: But having different kinds of, you know, sort of themed exhibitions. Did that--?

MONGAN: *[They had put on a variety of exhibitions of a kind that had never been held before, exhibition which preceded by decades the first "blockbuster" shows. They were following and elaborating a tradition already well established in the Museum's history. There had been a show of Degas paintings and pastels in 1911, a show of early Italian paintings from Giotto to Michelangelo in 1915, and numerous special exhibitions, including the first show in America of Italian baroque paintings. Of course these shows really related to the various courses in fine arts then being given.] They were not something just abstract. They might even be related to something that was being given in an English literature or in a French history course. That could happen if the professors from those courses

had enough imagination to come over and corner PJ and say, "Do something." I don't think that professors in other parts of the university realized at all what they could have done. I thought occasionally at the time that they could have done more striking and interesting things than they did, but nobody asked me a question.

RIKALA: You also taught French decorative art in the eighteenth century, a class on that. You mentioned earlier this afternoon that you thought there should have been a greater interest in the decorative arts. So that was something you did contribute to actively, if briefly.

MONGAN: I don't know when I saw that in print recently, but when I was lent to Miss [Helen C.] Frick, I wasn't lent to the Frick Collection. I was lent to Miss Frick to put together a volume of a series of catalogs of the collection [Catalogue of the Frick Collection: French Paintings (1950)]. She was eager to have me work on French art. I went down and spent a winter in New York. I had come to know many people who collected it, including dealers. I was really interested

---

* Mongan added the following bracketed section during her review of the transcript.

in the quality of French decorative arts from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. I wanted to give the course and did. It was a very small group, and we did look at a great many originals, but I wouldn't have given that course unless I had really liked the things. One of the reasons I had become terribly interested was that in the winter that I was in the Frick Collection I saw what beautiful eighteenth-century porcelains, silver, things of that kind
there were in New York. When I came home I wanted and did give a course that was relative to that. Now, curiously enough, two of my students-- One went to Sotheby's and one went to Christie's. They both have left those places now, but while they were there they did very well. And they were both girls.

RIKALA: Was the graduate program large? Were there lots of students in the forties and fifties?

MONGAN: They seem to have gone in waves. I don't know why. But there were occasionally very bright groups, and then there were occasionally quite dull groups. On the whole I had interesting groups. I liked the students, and I could get fairly friendly and did. But there were my colleagues, like the one who did a turn as chairman, who didn't want anything to do with decorative art and who didn't like to be bothered by students because he had publication plans. But if you

are a professor of fine arts you should see and listen to students.

RIKALA: And as your experience has taught us, it's especially in those few graduate years that you polish and find your interests and find people who help shape your interests, and those are the crucial years really.

MONGAN: Yes.

RIKALA: So aside from the drawings class, did you use slides when you taught?

MONGAN: Oh my, yes.

RIKALA: And did you give papers or readings?

MONGAN: I didn't give papers. I did read my notes. Johnny [John] Walker, who became the director of the National Gallery [of Art]-- Carter Brown, who until recently was the director of the National Gallery, went to Harvard, but Carter took only a few fine arts courses. He didn't need to because that beautiful house with many works of art--decorative arts as well as paintings and sculpture--that his family had in Providence [Rhode Island]-- It had been occupied by his family since 1786. His mother was a great enthusiast for certain things, and his father, John Nicholas Brown, had been I think a great student of Kingsley Porter.

RIKALA: Who were other students that you remember?

MONGAN: Well, there was one named Brown who went off to the South and went from where-- He went from Corpus Christi [Texas] to Houston, where he died suddenly of I think cancer. Tom [Thomas C.] Howe in San Francisco and--

RIKALA: Now, he was a contemporary of yours?

MONGAN: He was my classmate in the museum course, and he was in one or two other courses that I took, so that I've known Tom Howe as a fellow student before he went out to California to become the director of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor. There was a very, very distinguished curator of drawings at the Chicago art institute [Art Institute of Chicago] who died suddenly. He was another bright student. What was his name? I'll have to just look up some of these things, because I've forgotten them. Names now certainly go from me. And the director of the museum in San Antonio [Texas] was another Fogg boy. He's just retired. And the director in Minnesota was another, and the director in Buffalo was another. That was Gordon Washburn. Well, now Paul Sachs's grandnephew is the director of the RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] in Providence. Frank [Franklin] Robinson. His father was a very well known medievalist. PJ was very proud of him as a student.

RIKALA: Who do you recall was, or might have been, Sachs's

favorite student? Was it you?

MONGAN: I don't know. It wouldn't have occurred to me that it was me.

RIKALA: But you stayed close to him always.

MONGAN: You see, I continued to know the daughters, all three daughters. And for a while we shared our boyfriends, so there were never two who went to the same parties and--

RIKALA: Can you tell me their names? I should get their names.

MONGAN: Yes. Elizabeth "Libby" [Sachs] was the eldest, and then Celia [Sachs]. The youngest one, Meg [Marjorie Sachs], the closest to me, was the tennis star. She died in 1992. I saw the eldest one occasionally. I don't see any of them with any regularity anymore and haven't for a number of years. But in the past and when we were going to the same parties, we knew each other pretty well. When I lived just over on the next hill, it wasn't hard to see them.

RIKALA: You mentioned I think the first day I was here that Paul Sachs was very proud of you for going on in drawings, because you were, in a sense, like one of his daughters.

MONGAN: Well, he had wanted the daughters to understand fine art. I became aware of the fact that it had been his hope that one of them would become a drawing expert. When I did, I was a kind of supplement to those daughters who had not.

He never referred to it, and I never referred to it, but I was aware of the fact that this had counted. I don't think people like Philip Hofer realized this at all.

RIKALA: Were the daughters Harvard educated? Did they go to school?

MONGAN: Two or three of them went to Radcliffe [College]. I don't know how many of them finished. You'd have to look it up in a Radcliffe book. Libby married an Austro-Hungarian, a doctor, Soma Weiss, who had come to Boston and made a very good reputation. He died years ago, and she was married again to Victor O. Jones. Celia married a young man who was a medievalist, and she had a couple of children. One, Franklin Robinson, has been, until recently, director of RISD. Meg Sachs also had a child or two. Curiously enough, Meg is the one I knew best, and she's the one I've almost never seen since. When we'd have special parties at the Fogg-- Well, when we had his fiftieth birthday party, which was something I organized, they all came. When we had another party where we were honoring him, they all came. So that they knew how much the Fogg meant to him.

RIKALA: Can you tell me a little bit about what that fiftieth birthday party was like?

MONGAN: No, I can't. I don't remember it at all except working

terribly hard to get it done.

RIKALA: Let's see. I've brought along--let's see now--the One Hundred Master Drawings catalog.

MONGAN: Well, I did that after the-- That didn't come out until after the show, did it?

RIKALA: Nineteen forty-nine is when the catalog was published. This bound book is the memorial exhibition catalog [Memorial Exhibition: Works of Art from the Collection of Paul J. Sachs, 1878-1965].

MONGAN: Yeah. I have a copy of that over there because I was looking up something.

RIKALA: This is the late sixties, mid-sixties.

MONGAN: Yes, because he died in '65 didn't he?

RIKALA: Yes. What I don't have with me is the first catalog that you and Sachs did together, the 1940 catalog of the drawings collection [Drawings in the Fogg Museum of Art].

MONGAN: Oh, the three-volume one. That was funny. Harvard [University] Press was bringing them out. They were going to print an edition of fifteen hundred. I thought that was a small number, that they ought to bring out more. They said it was going to be three volumes and cost $25 and people wouldn't be able to afford it. They couldn't waste money on it. When it came out it was out of print in only a matter of weeks.

The press was just astonished. I knew that there were collectors of drawings, and I knew that there were people who adored PJ.

RIKALA: And that the scholarship was a growing scholarship. I mean, certainly you must have been aware of the fact that you were in the vanguard of the field.

MONGAN: No, I wasn't aware of that at all. I was just busy writing.

RIKALA: You were just busy writing.

MONGAN: I was absolutely astonished when I heard that.

RIKALA: That must have been very, very exciting. You were still very--

MONGAN: Well, I was up there in that third floor back room all by myself. I had a few friends like Lincoln [Kirstein] and Eddie [Edward M. M. Warburg] and whatever, and then I had Tom Howe and then I had later ones who went off to museums. Well, the two girls that went one to Christie's and one to Sotheby's, they both were good friends. I've had friendships with my students who became my former students all the time. That didn't permit me time to wonder what was going on because we were going on.

RIKALA: Yes, yes, you were.

MONGAN: May I see the catalog? This show was my idea.

RIKALA: One Hundred Master Drawings.

MONGAN: Yeah. Now, does PJ contribute anything to it? Oh, Jean Seznec wrote the introduction. How interesting. "Drawing and the Man of Letters." I'd forgotten that Jean had anything to do with it. He was the one who came from England who had been head of the French Institute in Florence and whose wife was having hysterics in the closet when I went for tea the day the French officers appeared.

RIKALA: So he presumably was a very close friend of yours, wasn't he?

MONGAN: Yes, they both were. Oh, I'd forgotten that some of these were in this show.

RIKALA: Now, you say the show was your idea. Were you showing the best pieces in the collection?

MONGAN: No, I was showing the best drawings I could get, because it was in honor of Paul Sachs. Master drawings, and it didn't matter whether they were in the collection or not. Quite a number of these I borrowed, and they went back.

RIKALA: Where did the show hang in the museum?

MONGAN: On the second floor in one of those galleries that is-- Well, the one that now has the English paintings that are up on the second floor. It wasn't in either of the big

corridors. It was in a square corridor where the decorative arts now are. If I remember, it was in the square gallery in there.

RIKALA: And was it well attended?

MONGAN: Yes, it was quite well attended.

RIKALA: Were old master drawings being exhibited in other museums?

MONGAN: At this point?

RIKALA: Yes, at this point.

MONGAN: Well, there was the show that I did for [Albright-Knox Art Gallery] Buffalo, but I don't know-- Now, this was '49, so this was the late forties. It was his seventieth birthday, wasn't it? And this is edited by me. It doesn't say it was written by me. I had help. You know, that's the size they are.

RIKALA: The original size.

MONGAN: "Brushed with gray and very light brown wash and touches of red on vellum." I thought they were handsome. I haven't had those out for years. Paul Sachs was always in good relations with the [Pierpont] Morgan Library collection, whether it was that lady who ran the library for so long [Belle da Costa Greene] or members of the family. The chief people I borrowed from were Robert Lehman-- Well, there's Mrs. Jersey

Bacchus, Seattle--I don't remember who she was--the Morgan Library, and John Newbury. I wonder what he did with that particular drawing. He probably gave it to Detroit. It's a remarkable drawing.

RIKALA: Did Robert Lehman--?

MONGAN: He was a friend of Paul Sachs on the banking end, and Paul Sachs admired the way he acquired things, and he acquired a great many fine things. I had been sent to see the collection at his house.

RIKALA: In New York.

MONGAN: In New York. So I knew the collection. So when it came time to borrow, I knew what I wanted to borrow.

RIKALA: What was he like? What was Robert Lehman like?

MONGAN: Well, he was about as different from Paul Sachs as anybody you could find. As I remember, he was very contained. But he could be quietly enthusiastic. You would become aware of the fact that although he was quiet, he was also deep. He loved good works of art. But he engaged a curator and then troubles began, because-- Well, some of us didn't think the curator was as good as he should be. When Lehman left his collection to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art], or mostly to the Met, that curator moved over to the Met.

RIKALA: Did Robert Lehman support the arts at all here at

Harvard?

MONGAN: No, he wasn't a Harvard man. I think he was a Yale [University] man, wasn't he?

RIKALA: I don't know.

MONGAN: The Lehman family had been generous to Harvard, but Robert-- I'll have to find that one out. [tape recorder off]

The person who knew a great many of the important New York collections was Eddie Warburg. I told you that the family lived at Ninety-first Street and Fifth Avenue in the house that is now the Jewish Museum. I knew Eddie well because of the Harvard Society of [Contemporary] Art and used to go and stay the weekends there occasionally. Eddie would take me around. He would take me to the Lehmans and Lewisohns and Strauses and any number of the great Jewish houses. They all had fine collections, and they were all related. I can't think of all the names now, but I'll get to some of them.

RIKALA: And Eddie took you along as a--

MONGAN: A visitor.

RIKALA: How did his career go, Eddie Warburg's career?

MONGAN: Well, it went with bounces. He never was on the staff officially of the Museum of Modern Art, but he was on special committees for special shows if I remember, and he taught

at Bryn Mawr [College] for a year or two. But I think he's more at home in New York than he is in many other places. He married a lady named Mary [Currier Warburg]. She's not Jewish. She was a widow and had a couple of children, and Eddie took over the children and Mary. She is very interested in fashion, not so interested in fine arts, but she has not kept him from it.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

OCTOBER 27, 1991

RIKALA: I neglected to mention Sydney [J.] Freedberg earlier. You said you've known him since he was an undergraduate. Could you tell me a little about him and your impressions?
MONGAN: He was always very bright, he's still very bright. I suppose he was also ambitious, though that hadn't occurred to me for a long time. When he finished at Harvard [University] a year or two ago, he moved to Washington, and he's been in Washington ever since and he loves it. I know that he's not well, but I do know that also his mind is working perfectly well, because he came to this meeting of the [Villa] i Tatti-- He's chairman of the scholarly committee, and I'm on the scholarly committee. I'm also on the money-raising committee, the council. I think he's been given a place on the council, too. At one time I was the only one on both committees. Sydney's written a marvelous book on Parmigianino. He loves polysyllabic words, but he can handle the language. The funny thing is that he has an articulate but highly-- [tape recorder off] I was saying he did a beautiful book on Parmigianino. He can manage the English language marvelously, but he does like polysyllabic words. He is apparently doing quite well in Washington at the National Gallery [of Art]. I wouldn't

have thought that he would have enjoyed it, but he's enjoying it. He has a very nice second wife and a son who entered Harvard last month. I couldn't believe it. I have not seen him since he was a little boy, and that he should be old enough to come up here as a freshman seemed to be unlikely, but that's what he is. Sydney attracts very good students, and they remain friends. So he has wide friendships throughout this country, and he's quite well known in Italy. I don't know how well known he is in France.

RIKALA: I don't either. He's written some on Bernard Berenson also.

MONGAN: Has he? Where?

RIKALA: There is an article that I know appears in one of the I Tatti Studies chapters.

MONGAN: Oh, well, then I've got all of those.

RIKALA: I think it's volume three, but that had been printed elsewhere. [tape recorder off] Let's talk a little bit more about your friendship with Bernard Berenson while we have time here.

MONGAN: Well, I told you about my sister [Elizabeth Mongan] and I arriving there at [Villa] Vallombrosa, didn't I?

RIKALA: Yes.

MONGAN: You know this book by Chamberlain don't you, Ernest

Chamberlain, on BB [Bernard Berenson]? Well, he's got in there two pages about the fact that Marga [Margaret Scolari-Fitzmaurice] Barr introduced me to Mr. Berenson in 1939. I've written him a note to say that I'm sorry, but Marga was quite wrong. I got to know Berenson in 1929 with my sister up at Vallombrosa. We both went back either together or separately when he was at I Tatti a number of times. And we always enjoyed it. I enjoyed him and she enjoyed him. He was interested when he found that I knew the New York Times. When I came in the first day, I picked up several things around the library, which was then quite informal. I said it made me feel at home
because these were the kinds of things that my father [Charles Edward Mongan Sr.] had lying around all the time. He was interested that I had been brought up in that kind of an atmosphere. I guess most Americans hadn't been. And I knew the London Times a bit; I knew the Manchester Guardian quite well; I knew at least two of the French newspapers.
I knew a good many magazines. Things that interested BB
I was familiar with, and that meant we started off on a friendly relationship. Well, one day when I was at Vallombrosa--BB still went up to a house in Vallombrosa; I believe Nicky [Mariano] owned the house--I looked out the window-- "K" [Kenneth] Clark was also

there. "K" was a great
friend and was there as often as he could be. I've forgotten where I met him, but I suppose through BB, and I adored him. We got on like a house on fire. And I knew his first wife. I met his second wife, a nice lady. Well. What was I starting to say?

RIKALA: Being at Vallombrosa.

MONGAN: Oh, I looked out the window, and there at the end of the garden wall was BB sitting talking to "K," and they were having the most animated conversation. Oh, my. They couldn't get enough words, couldn't get another word in between them, they were talking to each other so fast. When "K" came to Boston and gave his first lecture in that series of-- What was it called? Oh, we can find that. [Civilization] [tape recorder off] At the opening in Boston, I was invited to introduce him, and did. Then I said I'd like to have a dinner party for him, and he didn't want any dinner party. He just wanted to have a quiet dinner with me. So we had a quiet dinner together in my apartment if I remember correctly. I said to him that I had looked out the window, and I thought that that was the origin of the lecture series. And he didn't deny it. He didn't accept it. He didn't say, "Yes, you're right," but he didn't deny it. So I think something went

on there that had provoked later the series. Of course, BB died in '59. I last saw him in '58.

RIKALA: And you corresponded with him.

MONGAN: Oh, apparently. Well, no, I knew I corresponded with him, but I didn't know there were so many. I'm told there are eighty-nine letters from me at I Tatti, and the next time I get there I must look at them.

RIKALA: And you received letters in return, obviously.

MONGAN: Not as many, but pretty nearly.

RIKALA: Do you still have them?

MONGAN: I have them. I've tucked them away at the Fogg [Art] Museum. I don't want anything to happen to them, because it's quite a bundle.

RIKALA: It's important that they be preserved. Did you tell him about your goings-on at the Fogg?

MONGAN: I think I must have. I think I told him--

RIKALA: The things that you were doing.

MONGAN: No. I think I told him what was happening, because he had been told not to leave his house or money to the Fogg. He'd been told that very strongly by quite a number of people.

RIKALA: People outside of Harvard?

MONGAN: Yes. But even some people at Harvard when he gave

the Villa i Tatti thought it should be sold so they'd have the money to do something else with it. They didn't think that it was sensible for Harvard to have a center in Florence. But those people, they've gone or now they're keeping quiet, because they find in its twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth year that I Tatti is doing very well. I mean, it really does have an international audience. Among the fellows there, there's one from Australia and there's one from Japan, and last year for the first time we had one, I told you, a Frenchman. And there's been a Norwegian and a Dutchman and a Swiss. This year we have two or three from Latin America, and that hadn't happened before. I'll find out how they work out, because they haven't finished their year. The year has only begun two months ago.

RIKALA: So you were active in persuading Berenson to hold on to Villa i Tatti. Were you advising him or giving your opinion as to--?

MONGAN: Oh, no. I must have given my opinion many times, but I have to see those letters in order to know. I do know that Philip Hofer had also become-- He loved to be a great correspondent. He was also making suggestions. But I do know that I didn't agree with Philip, so I've got to find out what was going on.

RIKALA: Yes, that's important. [tape recorder off] There's another person I've failed to ask you about, and that's Albert Gardner, who was assistant to [Paul J.] Sachs.

MONGAN: Albert Gardner?

RIKALA: Yes, wasn't he?

MONGAN: Never heard the name.

RIKALA: No? I have it here on my list, so I'll have to cross that off.

MONGAN: I don't think anybody-- Well, I don't know any Albert Gardner. When was he there? [tape recorder off]

RIKALA: Irving Lavin was also--

MONGAN: Irving Lavin?

RIKALA: He was a Harvard fine arts department student, wasn't he?

MONGAN: I remember the name. I can't remember the face at the moment.

RIKALA: Oh, well, that's okay. There's Michael Fried.

MONGAN: Michael Fried. He came after Sachs, well after Sachs.

RIKALA: Yes, these are people who came later. Rosalind [E.] Krauss came later as a student.

MONGAN: Was she at the Fogg?

RIKALA: Was she at Harvard? Yes, I believe so.

MONGAN: I didn't know that.

RIKALA: Well, we'll check that one too.

MONGAN: Well, she could have come in the later years and I'd not have known her at all. Because she's quite young, isn't she?

RIKALA: Well, older than me.

MONGAN: You're quite young.

RIKALA: Let's see. Who were some of these other students? Barbara Novak?

MONGAN: Yes. She was there.

RIKALA: She was a student here.

MONGAN: Uh-huh. No question.

RIKALA: And Svetlana Alpers was a student here?

MONGAN: Yes, indeed, and her father was a very famous professor--that you know.

RIKALA: Oh. No, I didn't know that.

MONGAN: Well, Svetlana was the daughter of a distinguished professor. Now, what was his name? We'd have to look her up. She's done very well. And she's in California?

RIKALA: She's at [University of California] Berkeley and has made a real place for herself there in the school, yes.

MONGAN: Yes, her father was a distinguished professor. Not in fine arts. I'm trying to think whether it was science or economy or something of that kind.

RIKALA: Just in terms of the department, I have some questions about that. What was the relationship to the history of architecture and the history of design and the history of arts?

MONGAN: It all depended on who was director here at the Fogg and who was director there. Sometimes they got along, and sometimes they didn't get on at all. Very often they had their own programs and we didn't even know what was going on.

RIKALA: Really. But for the sake of the students, was--?

MONGAN: That wasn't considered, unfortunately. That's the reason that Jim [James] Cuno, who considers this is very important, is making all the efforts to bring them and us together on a friendly and illuminating basis. Another person who will be interested in this is the man who's been chairman of the department who's just retired, Seymour Slive. He's all for our working with him, I'm sure.

RIKALA: And Slive became director just--

MONGAN: Briefly.

RIKALA: Briefly, yes.

MONGAN: No, his book on Hals, he's still working on it I guess. He's been working for years on a catalogue raisonné on Hals. Or a great book on Hals. He's given several wonderful

lectures. He lectures very well.

RIKALA: And why did the directorship change? Did he no longer want to be director?

MONGAN: He didn't want it anymore. He had his books to do and his classes, and he could just manage. I'd even forgotten that he'd been director. He was very briefly. Was it a year? A year and a half?

RIKALA: No, but it was fairly recently, wasn't it?

MONGAN: Uh-huh. And John Rosenfield was the same. John Rosenfield is an orientalist and very, very good. He did quite nicely.

SECOND PART

OCTOBER 28, 1991

RIKALA: Now, let's talk about the work you were doing during the 1940s. One of the projects is preparing the catalog on Ingres. You also were working at the Frick [Collection] on this material, is that right? We talked a little bit about it yesterday.

MONGAN: Oh, at the Frick on Miss [Helen] Frick's plan to publish a book on the French paintings in the Frick Collection. That was before the current catalog was even a dream. And I remember she lived in the house, so I was shown the entire house. I was amused that there was a little maid who was

to follow me around when I went through the drawing room and the elaborate rooms downstairs. I was told to walk on the border of the rugs in the drawing room, which had a pattern. I was not to walk on the central part that was all one color. The border was quite wide and lent a good bit of interest to the room, so it didn't distract you from looking at the pictures. But what amused me was that if I forgot and stepped into the central part, the maid had a little brush and a dustpan with her, and she went immediately and erased my footsteps.

RIKALA: How funny.

MONGAN: Oh, I thought it was very funny, but that was-- Miss Frick had lots of little ways. Well, you know that she wouldn't let a German into the house.

RIKALA: No, I didn't know that.

MONGAN: For a long time, she wouldn't even let one of those Germans driven out, who was an anti-Nazi in a sense. Well, she had to wait to know who they were. Eventually she let them in. But in the early years of the war, no Germans were allowed in at all. One of the stories I remember her telling is about the Rembrandt-- Oh, dear. What is the Rembrandt in the Frick?

RIKALA: <u>The Polish Rider</u>?

MONGAN: Yes, <u>The Polish Rider</u>. She heard a noise in the house

and came down in the small hours, and the noise was because her father [Henry Clay Frick] was on a stepladder with a special light, and he was looking at the picture closely. Because he absolutely loved that painting and he wanted to know every inch of it. People didn't believe that Frick really liked pictures, but he really did. Her mother was still in her room when I was first in the house, so that I saw how the current museum managed and functioned as a private house. And that interested me very much.

RIKALA: It's a splendid, splendid house. The court in the middle, the garden court, is very, very lovely. That's extraordinary. And were you invited by Mrs. Frick?

MONGAN: I was invited by Miss Frick to come down and work on that catalog. She had actually asked Paul Sachs to help, and Paul Sachs said he couldn't do it but he'd be willing to send me. She was willing to accept me, so I went.

RIKALA: And you were there for about a year?

MONGAN: Yes.

RIKALA: You took an apartment.

MONGAN: I took an apartment in a former house. It was furnished too. I didn't need to do anything but live there.

RIKALA: In the meantime, what happened to your work here at the Fogg?

MONGAN: Well, PJ [Paul Sachs] thought it would be worthwhile for me to leave that amount of time because I would have so much experience as well as working with actually important works of art. So he was for it.

RIKALA: At this time, though, you were also working preparing the Ingres catalog.

MONGAN: Yeah.

RIKALA: Perhaps we could talk a little bit about--

MONGAN: Oh, no, I hadn't gotten as far as the Ingres catalog.

RIKALA: What were you doing in between?

MONGAN: I was still working on the Fogg drawings and getting them together and getting to know drawings throughout the country. I was cataloging. I suppose that was one reason that Paul Sachs was willing to have me go to Miss Frick: I was to do a catalog that she pretty well had in mind in her own mind. But I was to work on it and give her-- I don't think my name was ever mentioned. But she had this in her own collection. This wasn't the one that was eventually published. In fact, many of the people who worked on the one that was eventually published didn't even know that mine existed.

RIKALA: That's a shame.

MONGAN: I don't know what became of it. I must have a look. Oh, dear, these things that you make me think of are things I haven't even thought of.

RIKALA: I'm making you work hard here along the way. That was in the early 1940s or late thirties, then, when you were working on the Frick? Must have been the early forties.

MONGAN: Might have been the early forties. I hadn't even thought back on these years. [tape recorder off]

RIKALA: Towards the end of the forties, you were named curator of drawings.

MONGAN: In the forties?

RIKALA: Nineteen forty-seven your title changed.

MONGAN: This is all down I know, but I haven't even thought about it for years.

RIKALA: Do you remember any of the goings-on surrounding that?

MONGAN: No. I don't think there were any goings-on. I think they just quietly did it.

RIKALA: Do you remember if your salary changed at all at that time?

MONGAN: I don't think so. Oh, well, I was beyond the $50 a month.

RIKALA: Well, you'd been there twenty years.

MONGAN: But it never was generous. Fortunately, since I lived at home I didn't need to pay anything.

RIKALA: Yes, so it was just your own money for-- And whenever you traveled, obviously, the museum--

MONGAN: When I went on museum business, the museum paid, yes. Or PJ paid out of his own-- I never knew which it was. But at that point the crash hadn't come, so he was still privately rich. The crash, the Wall Street crash, did him in.

RIKALA: Did it?

MONGAN: Oh my, yes. When was that?

RIKALA: Well, it was 1929 that the stock market first collapsed.

MONGAN: But it was a year or two before-- Yes, it was the early thirties when he first knew it.

RIKALA: Did that affect his business also? The family business?

MONGAN: Oh, my. It nearly ruined them. It wouldn't be ruin to us, but because they were rich and had done whatever they wanted-- They didn't have that kind of money thereafter. You see, his brother Walter [E. Sachs] was living on his income. That's the one who lived in the beautiful house in Paris on the Rue-- You know the street. It runs parallel to the

Seine on the left bank. What street is that? Rue de l'Université. He had an eighteenth-century house. He was the one who had the beautiful house on the Mediterranean, high up near Cannes. I think it was the edge of Moujain, but it wasn't Moujain. It wasn't Cannes, but it was right down there.

RIKALA: If Sachs was working then as the associate director here at the Fogg, are you aware of other things he might have been doing to help build his family fortune, or any other business dealings?

MONGAN: He never, never mentioned business. Never. He never mentioned finance either, but I knew about that from, you know, people talking who knew that I was under him. No, he was very discreet. He hated gossip and wouldn't indulge in it. But he would tell you stories that he knew happened, and some of those were given a gossipy touch. He thought that all good art historians should be experts in choosing good food, because he didn't see how you could appreciate a work of art and put up with bad cooking.

RIKALA: So his interest in questions of quality went to all aspects of his life.

MONGAN: Oh, yes. That's quite true. I mean, the way he appeared, the way his manners were, the way he chose the drawings.

It all was part of one man.

RIKALA: Some of the points that I've picked out from-- I was able to look over the notes that were made for the museum course.

MONGAN: Oh, really?

RIKALA: They're in the archive that I spent time at. So I picked up some of the points, and perhaps you can talk about them as they inspire you. One has to do with understanding the problems of a genuine object, which we've talked about, questions of quality, to cultivate a good visual memory--these are all parts of what curatorial work was about in his opinion--to study a work or object from its physical side, so that--

MONGAN: What do you mean by that?

RIKALA: Physical, its--

MONGAN: Its texturals?

RIKALA: Its appearance rather than the emotional, its actual technical qualities. Knowledge of the tools, as you've talked about, the tools that make it. One of the important aspects for curatorial work is the ability to weigh evidence and make decisions. I thought that was an interesting point, that--

MONGAN: That is. I've never heard-- I suppose I've read it, but it didn't stay with me.

RIKALA: Then he lists the duties of a curator having to do

with--it's a long list here--installation, the mounting, the care of objects, and the importance of travel, that travel was a duty. I thought that was an interesting one. And then to pronounce judgments on works of art. So that's a tall order that he was interested in. MONGAN: Where was this all? RIKALA: This was out of one of the volumes. The museum courses, the notes that were prepared for it, were bound in volumes. So I've read through several of them. This was just an outline that I made from that. It's my interpretation, but there are--

MONGAN: Well, certainly it expresses his feelings and point of view.

RIKALA: In your estimation, from knowing Sachs, did he set up museums that were different from the European museums? Or can you say that they compared in the way they ran and they worked?

MONGAN: Oh, no. They didn't compare in the way they worked at all.

RIKALA: So he defined a purely American-style museum.

MONGAN: Yes.

RIKALA: And in that sense, he's contributed greatly.

MONGAN: Oh, enormously. And it's never been really acknowledged. And so I hope you have a success with this.

Because when I made that show on the first birthday, I should have mentioned things of this kind, but I didn't because it seemed to me to be normal and usual. It took me a long time to discover that it was anything but usual. Of course I knew he was extraordinary. When you came in the front door of the museum you could tell whether he was in the building or not because you felt that the whole building was vibrating.

RIKALA: Tell me a little bit about how you felt about him. You were a student, you got your first job, and you got to make your whole career around him.

MONGAN: Oh, I thought he was an extraordinary man, because I considered him a great teacher, though he himself had doubts about his teaching ability because he didn't have a doctorate. He minded that all his life, but it really didn't matter. It was better that he didn't give up the time to try and get it when that time was valuable as he used it to promote the works of art, that he was interested in the Fogg and then eventually as associate director. But he wasn't always associate director. He wasn't working so much I guess, when he first came, with works of art.

RIKALA: But maybe his understanding of the word "teacher" was the kind of classroom teacher, where for you it was much more of a personal learning experience, working elbow to elbow

so to speak.

MONGAN: Well, I told you that story about the little bust, when he went into the closet and brought out the thing it stood on, the--

RIKALA: The pedestal.

MONGAN: Well, it was part of it, actually, but it was the pedestal. Until quite recently it had never occurred to me that he would have had a special point of view on my making that statement, because we were just all a class together and I considered that we were just all a class together. But as I thought it over years later, then I realized that he-- I wondered why he gave me so much work to do on my own. "Well," he said, "I won't bother you unless you get something that you really can't do. If you can't do it, bring it down to me and we'll work on it. But you go and do it." So I went through and did it. But had I known how carefully he had observed me, as he must have, I would have recognized that he had quite quickly known that I had a kind of eye. Well, there we are.

RIKALA: He must have been fascinated by you.

MONGAN: I was absolutely unaware of this. I was fascinated by him, but I didn't think he paid much attention to me. Apparently he did, because really, in the last years, we were

friends. I was friends with the whole family. Mrs. [Meta Pollak] Sachs was just as nice to me as he was. She wasn't as warm, she wasn't as outgoing, she wasn't as intelligent, but she was a very nice lady.

RIKALA: You told me once about one trip that you went on with Mr. and Mrs. Sachs together. Were there other trips that you were able to do with the two of them or with him alone?

MONGAN: The ones that I remember are the ones to Vienna when the Albertina [Graphic Art Collection] was up for sale, and she wasn't with us on that one. That was when Russell Allen was with us, the curator of prints from the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts]. What else did that make me think of? And the fact that he sent me to a great many dealers in New York and in Paris with his letter of-- For the dealers I had a card. For the collectors I had a letter.

RIKALA: Did you ever have your own card at the museum?

MONGAN: Not for years and years.

RIKALA: I suppose that wasn't a protocol, really. And you say towards the mid-forties or early forties, before he retired, you became equals in friendship.

MONGAN: Yes. Well, I was still upstairs. They never gave me an important-- Well, there wasn't any to give me because

the Fogg didn't have one. But I had my own hours, and I could come my own way. I guess he knew that I'd be there if I could be, which was true. Mr. [Edward Waldo] Forbes and he retired together. When did Forbes die?

RIKALA: Oh, I don't know when he died.

MONGAN: Now, we might look that up. [tape recorder off] That's Forbes talking to John Coolidge.

RIKALA: Oh, that is a very nice photograph.

MONGAN: Isn't it?

RIKALA: At the opening of the exhibition Edward Waldo Forbes, Yankee Visionary.

MONGAN: I don't remember what year that was.

RIKALA: Well, the credit is 1960 on the photograph.

MONGAN: Now, he began to acquire in 1898, so he was-- "The Italian primitives selected for this memorial exhibition have been arranged in chronological order of their acquisition by Edward Forbes. They will be discussed in detail by Everett Fahey in his catalog of Italian paintings at the Fogg Art Museum to be published at a future date." Well, it never was. Everett went to New York and became-- What is he now curator of?

RIKALA: I don't know. I know his name.

MONGAN: So this must be after he [Forbes] died. "One day

toward the end of his life, wandering through the galleries, he remarked quite casually that he considered there had been five truly outstanding painters: Giotto, Titian, van Dyck, Rembrandt, and Turner." Oh, my. Oh, I guess nobody mentions anywhere how old either of them were, when they were born, when they died. Well, I worked on this. I think I put it together in 1971. What was I doing in 1971?

RIKALA: Well, you were the director up until 1971, from 1969 through 1971, following Coolidge's retirement. So that was put out during your directorship.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO

OCTOBER 28, 1991

RIKALA: We were talking about Edward Forbes, and you showed me the books that were done for the exhibition in honor of Forbes. Here they are. I've lifted them over here.

MONGAN: Now, it was my students who helped me on this. I noticed that-- Is my name on it at all? Oh, this is the Sachs one.

RIKALA: As we mentioned before, the exhibition and catalog came out at the time that you were the director.

MONGAN: Yes, I guess I was. This was '71.

RIKALA: 'Seventy-one. Do you want to talk a little bit about that time?

MONGAN: About the seventies?

RIKALA: Yes, the late sixties and seventies. John Coolidge retired, and lo and behold, you became director.

MONGAN: I became director, and I was director for only three or four years, wasn't I? Well, it didn't make much of a difference in my life at that point because I was not going to start something that I couldn't see more than one or two years ahead on. I didn't want to hinder an incoming new director by having started something. Now, why else--? Oh, I was a certain age. I was over sixty-five. They let me stay until

I was sixty-eight.

RIKALA: How did your responsibilities change?

MONGAN: Not at all. I mean, very little. Yes, I had to cope more with the financial end, and one of the nice parts of being the assistant director was that I didn't have to cope with the financial and debt end. [tape recorder off]

RIKALA: Did you have a feeling, though, that time that the museum had finally become yours, just even for the shortest time? No?

MONGAN: I never felt that it was mine.

RIKALA: Well, but you'd been there so many years.

MONGAN: I know. It was the place where I passed my life, but I didn't think of the museum itself as being mine in any way, because I was always impressed by what Edward Forbes and Paul Sachs had given to it, not only in the way of service but in works of art as well. Forbes, of course, collected early Italian paintings.

RIKALA: And he bequeathed his entire collection?

MONGAN: No, just occasional things, because he had quite a family and several of them were interested in the fine arts, which none of Paul Sachs's daughters really were. I don't want to say that publicly. It's true. You can say it in another way.

RIKALA: I was going to ask you about your lecture position, the Martin A. Ryerson position in the fine arts.

MONGAN: Oh, well, that was so that they wouldn't have to consider every year making me assistant director over again. It was the equivalent of a full professorship, except in pay, and it was because the board of overseers wouldn't make me a professor, wouldn't make me a lecturer. They got around it. [tape recorder off]

RIKALA: Were you offered other teaching jobs also around 1960?

MONGAN: Yes, I was.

RIKALA: There was some effort made obviously to keep you here at the Fogg. Can you recap that?

MONGAN: Well, I know that was when they appointed me the lecturer, because I had been asked to go and be the director of a museum in the Midwest. I didn't really want to go, but I didn't really want to stay where I was. I wanted to say no. But they made the lectureship a life appointment, and they also extended my period of action as-- Well, made me actually director. So I wasn't leaving.

RIKALA: You also spent a year in San Diego as a visiting director.

MONGAN: That's right, visiting. Yes. Visiting director of

the Timken [Art] Gallery.

RIKALA: What was that like for you there?

MONGAN: That was very, very different. I had known slightly the man who was chairman of the board, and he was very interested in and was responsible for the idea of having the Timken Gallery in San Diego. He was a lawyer. He knew that they were going to look for a new director and that they had no idea, so he thought it would be a good idea for me to go out and hold on for a year while his board of trustees looked for a permanent director, and I accepted it. This was the second time I had spent time in the San Diego area. I lived at La Jolla [California]. I rented a room over the garage of the Roger Revelles and had my own car and drove in every day the fifteen miles from La Jolla to San Diego. I got to know that road pretty well. But I could go along the sea coast as well as on-- Was it Route 5?

RIKALA: In 1950 you were a year in residence at the American Academy--

MONGAN: In Rome, uh-huh.

RIKALA: And what kind of work did you do then?

MONGAN: I only had to give one or two public lectures. I was there if anybody wanted to consult me, and almost nobody did. I was at work on my book on the saints and their legends.

I did very little work on that because I was visiting churches and exhibitions and objets d'art all the time. I had a lovely, lovely time. Now, what year am I at?

RIKALA: Nineteen fifty.

MONGAN: Oh, yes, in 1950 I traveled to Rome. I had a small suite at the American Academy. My suite was in the corner of the Villa Aurelia and it looked out over all of Rome. One side of it was a garden and then it dropped and then there was that magnificent view of the city.

RIKALA: How splendid. And that was really the only time you lived in Europe, wasn't it?

MONGAN: Oh, no. I lived in Europe when I went the first year.

RIKALA: That was several cities.

MONGAN: That was Florence and Paris. And we went from Florence, as I told you, to all those cities all around. And my brother [Charles Edward Mongan Jr.] and I went to Rome for a week at Christmas, then we went to Paris. The Florentine group went around Paris and we got to private collections and dealers. We went over to London for two weeks. Then when March or April came, we went to central Europe. So I was in Paris from the beginning of January to I guess it was May. Then briefly in England and then even more briefly in central Europe in those various cities, Berlin, Dresden, Prague, Munich,

Vienna. Then down over the pass to Venice, and we could do Padua and all the towns around Venice, and then back to Florence in June.

RIKALA: Do you have a favorite place? A favorite city?

MONGAN: Well, when people ask me what's my favorite city-- When I'm in Venice, Venice is my favorite city. When I'm in Rome, Rome is my favorite city. When I'm in Florence, Florence is my favorite city.

RIKALA: And on the other hand, having traveled so much-- On the other hand, you've lived in this area, this very close neighborhood here, for all your life.

MONGAN: All my life, yes.

RIKALA: And you've been able to see it grow and change?

MONGAN: It's a neighborhood that has changed enormously, and it has for years been pulling in the important people intellectually from all over the world. I mean, there have been orientalist specialists. There have been law specialists. I am, and have been for some years, the chairman of the house committee of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. I think I was one of the first women members. If not the first, at least the first or second. And they made me, several years ago, the chairman of the house committee. So I got to know the staff that lives and works in the-- The chief committee

for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences lives in a modern house built where they tore down Shady Hill, which was Mr. Sachs's house.

RIKALA: Oh, dear.

MONGAN: Yes, they shouldn't have done it, but the university said it needed new heating and it was cheaper-- They were planning to put up an apartment house. The university at that point was not interested at all in the fine arts, for one thing, or in the history of architecture for another. I was just appalled at the things they were doing. They discovered that it would be cheaper to tear it down so they tore it down, because they were going to build an apartment complex for their faculty. All the neighbors got together and protested--they didn't want anything of the kind in that area--and they won. Now, John Kenneth Galbraith is one who lives in that neighborhood, and there were others almost as well known as he. So they were able to express themselves firmly and in an orderly fashion, and did. And the university when they tore down the house left the space. Then the American Academy came along and wanted to build a new house. They decided that they would rent the land to them for a hundred years and did so. They didn't want to sell university land at that point. The academy had a German and a Scotsman who

at Harvard had also made their own committee. They'd come to Harvard as practicing architects to give, I think, lectures at the place next door.

RIKALA: MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]?

MONGAN: No, the--

RIKALA: The Carpenter Center [for Visual Arts]?

MONGAN: Their names will come. Isn't it awful the way the names have gone from me in the last week? They built the house. They had built and won a national merit medal for the Boston City Hall, which I think is hideous. And they built this house on the top of Shady Hill that wasn't any larger than Shady Hill house and did make use of the gardens around it. It has been a very popular place, and as I said, until recently I was chairman of the house committee. I think I'm rotated off this year. They have academy member luncheons on Tuesdays, which I go to occasionally--everybody goes occasionally. But once a month they have a meeting with a distinguished person talking about their specialty. Either somebody who's just come from abroad or somebody on the faculty who's won distinction for what they've done. And I have met by belonging to that committee all kinds of people, and that interests me. Well, I don't think it would have happened to me in New York.

It might have, but I didn't think that it would happen as easily as it happened in Cambridge [Massachusetts]. Yes, because MIT, Tufts [University], and Harvard [University] are all right there. Now they're having a series of performers on Saturday afternoons for concerts, which is nice. It doesn't cost anything to go.

RIKALA: You were chairman of the house committee. You've been director of the Fogg Art Museum. You've done a lot of important--

MONGAN: Oh, I was one of the founders, one of the first trustees, and since it was started a complimentary trustee of the Institute of Contemporary Art. Because when that started-- Nat [Nathaniel] Saltonstall-- Saltonstall, of course, is a famous name around here, because they've been here since early times. Nat thought it was time that Boston do something about contemporary art. It was he who drove me to Hartford and back for the opening of Four Saints in Three Acts. On the way home he said to me that Boston should do something about contemporary art. I said I'd help. His mother said, "What you should do is have a concert and raise some money, because you can't start it unless you've got some money." Nat said that was a good idea. She said, "I'll lend you my drawing room." She had a lovely house on the river. It didn't face

the river, it faced the land side, but it looked out from the drawing room across the river. Nat said, "There's a young man at Harvard who plays the piano very well. I'll ask him if he'll perform." And he said he would. The house was sold out. It was our first occasion and it went very well. His name was Leonard Bernstein. He was a junior at Harvard.

So I was on the board. They put me on the board of trustees of that modern art museum, and I am still a complimentary member of the board of trustees. So I get all the announcements. That folder there is almost full of announcements from the Institute of Contemporary Art.

RIKALA: You've given me bits and pieces all along about your awareness as a woman in these positions, but you've made a stunning career for yourself.

MONGAN: I didn't want to quarrel with anybody. The minute I became a member of the board, I was a colleague. There were things that perhaps should have been done. I didn't try to do them because I thought I would just stop what they were promoting, which I was in favor of.

RIKALA: So you've always looked towards the benefit of whatever institution you've been involved in.

MONGAN: I've tried to.

RIKALA: In all the paths that your career has gone, do you

feel that you've had to compromise much?

MONGAN: No, I don't, because I didn't compromise my scholarship. I didn't compromise my taste, so that I was into fine arts and I was in an organization that was promoting them. Why make it stumble?

RIKALA: Also, when you were at the Fogg you didn't feel--Yes, there was an issue of pay difference, but do you feel there were--?

MONGAN: No, I was accepted by colleagues and the students. I can remember there was a meeting of the [Association] of Art Museum Directors in Boston and-- What was his name? Oh, dear, it wasn't Reinhart, but it was nearly that. He was director of the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art].

RIKALA: [James J.] Rorimer?

MONGAN: Yes. Exactly. Jim Rorimer came up for the meeting, and he came up to have a look at things at the Fogg. I went downstairs to speak to Perry Rathbone, who was there, because Perry wanted to see something. They greeted each other and I was there, and I don't know whether it was Jim or Perry who said it first: "I have a daughter and she wants to go into fine arts and she--" No, no, the daughters didn't want to go into fine arts. "I have a daughter. What does she want to do?" And Jim said, "So have I." And there came a question

of women in the fine arts, and they both turned out to be against it. Well, those girls grew up, and the first one decided that she wanted to go into a museum, and her father sent her to talk to Jim Rorimer. That was the Rathbone girl. And Rorimer's daughter grew up and wanted to go somewhere and her father tried to stop her. I thought it was terribly funny that those two gentlemen whom I'd seen talking together, and they had known that I was there, both talked against women in the fine arts, in museums. But they changed their minds. They must have, because both daughters went into museum work.

RIKALA: Really there's no reason for women not to be in the museum business. Obviously Paul Sachs didn't think that there was a problem.

MONGAN: No, he didn't if you were good enough.

RIKALA: It was just a matter of being right for the job and well educated for the position.

MONGAN: He was also very strong for linguistic--

RIKALA: Background.

MONGAN: Uh-huh. And I had four that I could read and write and understand. I didn't talk them well, but I talked Italian at that point fairly fluently, and my French wasn't too bad. My German has always been difficult. But I could take anything German home to brother Charles, who could do it for me. And

did quite often.

RIKALA: Your parents must have been immensely proud, though, to have their two daughters go in the museum world. How did they feel about that?

MONGAN: They never said anything to us about it. They liked having us bring our friends home because they liked having intelligent people, but they never made anything of our having an unusual job. It was just natural.

RIKALA: It was just accepted. And your careers were certainly perhaps more publicly recognized than the careers of your brothers, I would guess.

MONGAN: Yes. John's career-- Charlie didn't want his career. He was invited very early to go out to Los Alamos, and he didn't want anything to do with the atom bomb and he refused to go. He never told anybody that because he was very secretive. But he stayed around the Boston area. All the time I run into Boston ladies, mostly very proper Bostonians, who used to have him regularly for dinner. He wouldn't tell me where he'd been. He wouldn't tell anybody because he was afraid of gossip. He had a very private-- When he came back--

RIKALA: He came back from Zurich after I think you said it was eight or nine years.

MONGAN: Eight years--

RIKALA: Eight years that he did his degree.

MONGAN: His doctorate.

RIKALA: And did he continue--?

MONGAN: He worked in Boston for a while, and then he went to Hartford and had a job there. When he came back to Cambridge he got an apartment by himself just around the

corner from us on Mass[achusetts] Avenue, so that he lived alone and liked it. He never married. There were several girls who were chasing him. He thought about it I guess, but he decided he liked what he was doing.

RIKALA: And your sister never married.

MONGAN: No.

RIKALA: And you never married.

MONGAN: No. So John was the only one that married, and he married a divorcée.

RIKALA: And John didn't have children either.

MONGAN: No. She couldn't have them by that time, so there are no Mongans in this generation.

RIKALA: What will you do to pass on all this lovely heritage?

MONGAN: Well, we've got quantities of cousins on both sides of the house. Mostly in California.

RIKALA: By the name of Mongan?

MONGAN: No, this was the O'Brien side. Uncle John [O'Brien] designed-- What is it called where the soldiers did their marching up and down in San Francisco?

RIKALA: The Presidio.

MONGAN: The Presidio. Uncle John designed the Presidio. John O'Brien. He had sent in his bill, and it was in the mail the week of the terremoto.

RIKALA: The earthquake.

MONGAN: The city was so badly off that they never paid him.

RIKALA: Oh, my goodness. So that was 1906.

MONGAN: Was it 1906?

RIKALA: Yes.

MONGAN: I suppose. He lived into the twenties. Uncle Florey [Florence O'Brien] lived much longer, but since he was so busy with the Chico Enterprise, which he owned and edited-- Well, he discovered Grandma O'Brien loved to write. Like my mother she was a great reader, and she had a sister who lived near her on the hill right near the Bunker Hill monument. Mother never went up the monument, though she was born in its shadow. And what was I saying?

RIKALA: About Grandmother O'Brien.

MONGAN: Grandmother O'Brien wanted to write, and she wrote this to Uncle Florey in California. He said, well, when she

had a proper thing to send, he would be interested in putting it on the editorial page, but it would be without her name. She loved that, and she wrote several editorials for the Chico Enterprise.

RIKALA: But her name's not attached?

MONGAN: No. Nobody knows them.

RIKALA: So we'd have to scavenge for them.

MONGAN: You know, I didn't know why-- Do they still have a minister of education for the state of California?

RIKALA: Uh-huh.

MONGAN: Well, that's the job he ended up having when he was practically retiring from the newspaper job. But we used to get the Chico Enterprise, so that I know what it looked like and what it was like. Grandma just was very proud of him. She didn't talk about it. If there was a special number she could show it to you, because she got it every day. So that we had an Atlantic/Pacific--

RIKALA: And East Coast/West Coast family. That way you had a lot of information coming from the West and contact.

MONGAN: Yes. Their families came to visit us, and we went to visit them, though Uncle Florey came only once, and Uncle John never came. I don't know whether they were too afraid of becoming too involved with all those eight sisters or not.

RIKALA: So your brother Charlie had an apartment here.

MONGAN: In Cambridge, yes.

RIKALA: And then you took an apartment soon after--

MONGAN: After Father died Mother decided to sell the house, and we moved to Cambridge.

RIKALA: Did she move with you?

MONGAN: Oh my, yes. I lived with her. We lived first on Kirkland Street in an apartment that's quite well known. Then when she died I moved into a small apartment up on--Well, it's on Mass Avenue just north of the common. I've been there for, well, a good many years. Thirty years at least.

RIKALA: Then from there you moved to this place?

MONGAN: Yes, I moved to this place.

RIKALA: And you've been here two years. Almost two years.

MONGAN: Almost two years.

RIKALA: Geographically you've been very close to--

MONGAN: Well, I like being near Harvard. I like being near the university. I'm also on the board that is called the Council for the Arts at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. I've been on that since it was founded over ten years ago. So I go to the meetings at MIT and I meet a totally-- They approach the arts--and this intrigues

me--from a totally different angle.

RIKALA: What perspective is that? What angle?

MONGAN: Well, they have music, dancing, theater, painting, and sculpture all in together. I mean, there are groups, and they have faculty, and they're doing all those things. They have a little letter that comes out--I think it's every month, or perhaps every fortnight. I'll show you one, because I just put it in there. Does it say there at the top how often it comes out?

RIKALA: No, it doesn't, but this is their MIT Tech Talk, their newsletter.

MONGAN: There's a young man who is a junior who's also starting something at Harvard that will bring the arts together at Harvard again. I've put these aside for him. There's another one. You see how diverse they are.

RIKALA: Yes, this one's about singing and voice and music.

[tape recorder off]

MONGAN: He may know about these, but I want him to know how much is going on. So I put everything that might have some relation to what he's interested in in this file. He's been traveling, so he's going to come and see me next week.

RIKALA: This is the poster for the exhibition at the Sert Gallery at the Carpenter Center.

MONGAN: [José Luis] Sert was a lovely-- Oh, he was a sweet and gentle man. And he was a great friend of [Joan] Miró. They came together to the Fogg one day and saw me. I shan't forget it because they were so polite to each other. Each must have been under five feet and under a hundred pounds. Sert was small as small, you know.

RIKALA: Did they look at drawings with you?

MONGAN: We have a lot of Sert paintings, and Sert wanted to see where we were showing them. We'd had a one-man show once. Oh, and I've also joined the Caucus for the Women in Art [Women's Caucus for Art], and they send me lots of information. I have known since she founded the Canadian Center for Architecture--

RIKALA: Phyllis Lambert.

MONGAN: Phyllis Lambert. She's an old friend.

RIKALA: Tell me a little bit about her.

MONGAN: You know her father was quite well-off, and she inherited a fortune. This is what she's doing with it. She's a charming person, and she's highly intelligent. She has brought people together and brought people in from outside to Montreal that never, never would have been there otherwise. This is their most recent announcement. I don't know who Marvin Shiner is, but you probably know.

RIKALA: Looks like the work of a contemporary, a recent artist. And did you get to know her through--?

MONGAN: When they were here she was taking some courses. I've forgotten where, whether it was at Radcliffe [College] or BU [Boston University] or where it was. But I was introduced to the family and she and I became friends, because I was into the kind of things she wanted to know more about and she used to come and see me. She's invited me to stay with her. I've been up to Montreal a couple of times, and I don't go without telling her I'm coming and she has me for dinner or she has me for lunch. And she has a sister, somewhat younger, who's not quite as interested, but they work together on things. But it's Phyllis whom I know.

RIKALA: She's done extraordinary work in the library.

MONGAN: Yes, yes. You know about the Journal of Art, do you?

RIKALA: Yes.

MONGAN: You know, I think the English one is better than the American one. Don't you? Oh, my. The English one is fascinating. There are so many references and so many things you want to follow up. Well, this is the Women's Caucus for Art. I'm on their-- I don't know what committee it is, but they send me all their announcements, the Boston chapter.

RIKALA: And what kind of work do they do?

MONGAN: Well, they put on contemporary shows of women's art. And I'm on the board. They've started a history museum in Somerville [Massachusetts]. And I'm on their board. They have artists I've never even heard of before. This keeps me very much up-to-date about what's going on there.

RIKALA: Yes.

MONGAN: In Oregon.

RIKALA: Oregon Art Institute sends you information.

MONGAN: Yes. [tape recorder off] I've told you that I am on the MIT committee. I've known MIT since my brother Charlie went there in the twenties. It's still very different from Harvard in the things that interest them. They have a big committee for the fine arts. Most of the committee members are not New Englanders. They come from New York, they come from Chicago, they come from the West Coast.

RIKALA: And do you think that's the reason--? Because they're diverse?

MONGAN: They're very diverse. That's one reason I want to stay going, because I discover there's not only one way of doing things. There are at least two valid ways of doing things. Well, what's this one for? Museum of Contemporary Art. I think this is the Chicago one. [tape recorder off]

RIKALA: There was a period that you were at many, many universities.

MONGAN: That was when I'd given up being director of the Fogg. First I went to [University of] Louisville as Brigham Professor, and I was terribly pleased and so were the Brighams. I'd known them for years, first as undergraduates, because they both-- She went to Radcliffe [College] and he went to Harvard. I'd known them both and enjoyed them both. When they heard that I was coming to Louisville, they wondered--they had given money to found a fellowship--if I was the recipient of that money they had given. When I discovered the professorship I held had nothing to do with the special Brigham money, I was immensely relieved and so were they.

RIKALA: Oh, well, that's good. And what did you do in Louisville? Did you teach?

MONGAN: I taught a class on French art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

RIKALA: A graduate course or--?

MONGAN: No, an undergraduate course. One undergraduate course and I think one graduate course. Then I came home. That was one semester. Then I was a semester at Northwestern [University]. I did something that had never been done at Northwestern before, I told you that. I took my class into Chicago every week. When the curator of drawings [at the Art Institute of Chicago, Harold Joachim], who had been trained

at the Fogg, knew that we were coming, he turned his office over to us and gave me permission to have any drawing I wanted on the table for the meeting of the class.

RIKALA: Oh, how terrific.

MONGAN: It was terrific. And when I went-- We came and went by train, and my colleagues at Northwestern said, "You go all the way into Chicago for a class?" And I said, "Fifty minutes on a train is nothing." I discovered this year that they're doing something like it for the first time. They're taking classes into Chicago. It took a long time. But those kids were so excited. And the curator had been trained at the Fogg. He was a German of German origin. He was terribly nice. He died a short time ago. I don't know what's happened since, whom they had replace him. That's a very active department at Northwestern.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

OCTOBER 28, 1991

RIKALA: When did your sister [Elizabeth Mongan] retire? MONGAN: Late seventies or early eighties, I think.

RIKALA: Did you two ever discuss problems or points of view or differences? No? You each kept your work life distinct and separate.

MONGAN: Uh-huh. [tape recorder off]

RIKALA: What do you feel are your strongest contributions that you've made?

MONGAN: I haven't thought about it.

RIKALA: Well, what we talked about off tape was the-- You've written about and worked a lot on artists, left-handed artists. We were talking about Leonardo da Vinci, and that's a big contribution. I learned it when I was studying drawings ten years ago. That was just a fact, that Miss Mongan had worked on this.

MONGAN: Well, you know they've discovered recently that Holbein was left-handed.

RIKALA: Oh, I didn't know that.

MONGAN: Who discovered that was one of the famous English curators, A. E. Parker. And-- Oh, dear, the Swiss who went to live in London in the eighteenth century who had such an

influence on Blake [Fuseli]. He was left-handed. I can spot a left-handed artist very quickly, not only because we shade this way and you shade that way, but we compose this way and most right-handers compose that way. RIKALA: How interesting. And so you just--

MONGAN: Look at something, and then if I have a thought there, then I look at the handwriting as it were, and left-handedness-- When the whole thing is done in this angle, I know it's a southpaw. Well, I was at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo on my first visit to Japan. I was eating my meals alone in that dining room and I had a very nice waiter, only he didn't have a word of English. But all the menus were with English opposite the Japanese, so he brought me a menu of that kind. When it came to my last day--no, next to the last day--I said, "I'm going tomorrow. Can you put together all my bills and I'll come and sign them at my next breakfast?" So he brought them, and he began to heave with laughter when I signed them. He looked at me and he said, "Southpaw." It turned out to be the only two words of English he had, so I knew he was a baseball fan.

RIKALA: How funny. And I'm thinking more about your contributions. You were part of this legacy of teaching the museum course that was passed on from Paul Sachs. Certainly

it's partly his contribution, but it's yours too because you were a product of that museum course.

MONGAN: I hadn't thought of it in those terms.

RIKALA: You passed on all your good insight and instinct both in your work and I'm sure in your teaching.

MONGAN: I tried to.

RIKALA: Then the interest in artists that you've brought out here in the U.S., your work on Ingres, certainly that's a very big contribution to the scholarship, I would guess.

MONGAN: Well, I hope more people are looking at him and understanding him and valuing him than there were. Oh, I was going to tell you-- I went from [University of] Louisville to Northwestern [University]. Then the next year I went to [University of Texas at] Austin. The next year I was at home, and then I went to [University of California] Santa Barbara. No, in the meantime I went to [Timken Art Gallery] San Diego. I went to Santa Barbara a year or two after I'd been in San Diego. This is all written down in one of my things. And then I went to Coral Gables [Florida] and I was the acting director of the [Metropolitan] Museum [and Art Centers] there while they were looking for somebody. Then the next year I was the Kress Professor at the National Gallery [of Art]

for a year, and I was the first woman. But I think I told you I was more flattered to be the first American-born. There had been one or two Germans who had been born abroad and educated abroad, but I was the first born and educated American to be a Kress Professor. It's happened again since. And so far I think I've been the only woman.

RIKALA: Most likely. What did you work on that year when you were there?

MONGAN: You know, isn't it awful, I can't remember.

RIKALA: Let me go back a little bit. How did you find Austin?

MONGAN: I found Austin very interesting. I liked it very much. I did the same thing to my students there. I had a graduate class, and I did the same thing that I had done in Northwestern. I took them to Dallas. I took them to Fort Worth. I just staggered my friends, but they began to imitate me. And my students-- Well, I guess it was in Louisville that they had the most difficulties writing good English. There was a student who wrote a paper for me, and I returned it to her and said, "This is not written in good English, and any student of mine has to write in good English." She said, "But this is fine arts. You know what I'm trying to say. What does it matter?" I said, "If you're my student,

it matters." So she took it back and she worked on it, and she did me a fairly good paper. Towards the end of the year, she came to see me. I'd been giving a course on Chardin. I said, "What is your field?" She said, "Child psychology, and I don't know what on earth I can write for my history of art paper." "Well," I said, "Chardin, he did those wonderful children. Why don't you do something about Chardin's children?" The idea had never occurred to her. She wrote a very interesting paper. And she wrote it in English.

RIKALA: Well, that's a good story.

MONGAN: Although when she first came to me, she came to me because I had shown that picture of the woman who is going to bake bread standing up and--

RIKALA: Kneading.

MONGAN: Yes, and I said to her, "Does that interest you?" She said, "Yes, I come from the Appalachians. This is my first time in a city. The reason I am interested in that picture is I didn't know that it went on anywhere else in the world, but we're still doing it that way."

MONGAN: Then I told her her paper was-- That was the one.

RIKALA: So she was a Louisville student.

MONGAN: She was a Louisville student, and she'd come down from the Appalachian Mountains for the first time. Of course

they go that way as well as this way.

RIKALA: And in Austin did you have undergraduates or graduates?

MONGAN: No, I had graduates in Austin. I had graduates at Santa Barbara.

RIKALA: That was part of the art history department in Santa Barbara.

MONGAN: They've got quite a lively art history department.

RIKALA: Yes, they have a very strong program. Do you remember some of the faculty there that you were close with? On the architectural side there's David Gebhard, who has had a big influence in developing the city, the townscape.

MONGAN: I don't think I knew him, and I don't think he was there that winter. The architectural group were in another building from the one in which we were.

RIKALA: Now that's a joint faculty, isn't it. What about some of the other art historians there? I can't think of any offhand.

MONGAN: Well, one of the ones who was in Austin, Dick [Richard R. Brettell]-- He went up to the Art Institute of Chicago, and from the Art Institute of Chicago he was a professor at Austin. Now he's at Dallas, where he's director of the museum [Dallas Museum of Art]. [tape recorder off]

RIKALA: It's been a real honor spending time with you and

working together.

MONGAN: Oh, well, it's been a pleasure for me to get to know you.

RIKALA: Yes, and it's been very, very good, and I think we've been very productive as well.

MONGAN: I think you have. And you've asked me the right questions, so you got me thinking about some things I hadn't even thought about.

RIKALA: Well, that's terrific. Thank you.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE

APRIL 6, 1993

SMITH: I have a general question that I wanted to start out with. It is related to the question of prints and drawings and their special role in art history, or if in fact they do have a special role. It strikes me that prints and drawings are not as popular a form of art as paintings are, obviously. [tape recorder off] I was saying that prints and drawings, at least in America, have not had the same kind of popularity.

MONGAN: Oh, no. Certainly not.

SMITH: I wonder, to what degree did being away from the main interests of public attention give you and your colleagues a greater freedom in terms of the problems you set for yourselves and in the kind of work you were able to do? Did you feel freer because you were working in--?

MONGAN: I wasn't even aware of the fact. I fell in love with drawings before I finished my degree, and when I returned to Cambridge [Massachusetts]-- You see, my family lived about a mile from here. When I came to the Fogg [Art Museum], I had taken my Smith [College] exams in Florence. I'm trying to think when it was. I don't know. If I may go back a bit--

SMITH: That's certainly fine.

MONGAN: I graduated in the class of '27 at Bryn Mawr [College].

My father [Charles Edward Mongan Sr.] had said to us when we were children-- He called us together one day. There were four of us, two years' difference--well, that's two years' difference between each--boy, girl, boy, girl. He said to us he just wanted us to know he was a family doctor and there would be no fortune. That he would do the best he could but there would be no fortune. What he could do would be that he could see that we had the best education the country could offer. And that would be it. And he started to go out the door, got as far as the threshold, and turned and came back to us and said--I remember we were still sitting where we'd been sitting--"No, there's one thing more. After I finished at Harvard [University] Medical School, I had a year of advanced study abroad, and it made a great difference. I can give each one of you a year of advanced study in Europe when you get your first degree, and that will be it."

Well, my older brother [Charles Edward Mongan Jr.] knew exactly what he wanted to do. His time came along not very long after that. He finished at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] when he was nineteen or one month [short of] twenty, and he knew where he wanted to go. He wanted to go to Zurich to the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule. And he went. Only instead of staying one year, he stayed eight.

[laughter]

Father came to meet my train, the Washington-Boston train, because I came up and down by train from Philadelphia and then out to Bryn Mawr. He said to me, "Well, I guess you're the next one. Where do you want to go?" I didn't realize for some time that he had hoped that I would become a writer, because he had been so impressed. His year abroad was in London at Guy's Hospital, which was connected I believe with the London University. He had had about a year there doing gynecology. And then he had moved over to Dublin to-- What's it called?

SMITH: Trinity.

MONGAN: Trinity College. That's right. And had had an appointment at the Rotunda Hospital with a group of students from all over, because the Rotunda apparently had a very, very fine medical reputation. I mean, there were Scottish and there were Irish and I think there was one other American. Why was I bringing all this up for you?

SMITH: Well, it was a question of why you selected prints and drawings.

MONGAN: Oh, he said, "What do you want to do?" I said I wanted to go to Italy and study Italian art. He said, "Do you really?" I said, "Yes. I really do." And how my parents found it,

I don't know, but they discovered that Smith was sending two professors--one for painting, one for sculpture--to Florence with girls who would work for their master's degree. My parents sent for the announcement. They sent for the catalogs. We went over it. I applied and I was one of the six chosen. I joined that group. We had never seen each other before. We fetched up at ten o'clock or nine o'clock in the morning on September 15 outside of the bronze doors in the Baptistery. Not the famous doors of Ghiberti, but the doors of Pisano. There were five of us. We had our classes on the top floor of a building behind the dome of the Baptistery.

Our classes were from five [P.M.] to seven [P.M.] and nine [P.M.] to eleven [P.M.] at night three times a week. We were free to go into the museums, the galleries, the archives, or whatever, all day long on our own. When Professor [Clarence] Kennedy discovered that there was a famous visiting professor who was going to give a lecture in Florence, he engaged him to give us a lecture. Weekends we went to places like Pisa, Pistoia, Lucca, Assisi, and so forth. We would leave at six o'clock on a Saturday morning and come back at ten o'clock at night on Sunday. We couldn't go to bed until we'd gone over what we'd seen all day. That was a marvelous thing, because up until about five years ago, I could have taken

you by memory through the Museo Civico in Pisa, for example.

We stayed in Florence looking at the galleries, the churches, the private collections, and the dealers until Christmastime, and then we were on our own for Christmas. My brother [Charles] came down and joined me in Florence and took me to Rome for Christmas.

Then on January 2, we fetched up outside the Porte d'horloge of the Louvre. That was Monday, and on Mondays the Louvre, in those days, was closed. We went in with our equipment to the galleries where they had the trecento and quattrocento pictures. Our equipment was an automobile headlight, a small stepladder, and a binocular microscope. And we were there nine to four. Well, the guards were also there, to my surprise. They thought that we were out of our minds. We had classes again in the evening--if we had a class. But Professor Kennedy finally discovered that he could have the curators there give special talks to us in the museum in the afternoon or the mornings where we had been doing our special work with the equipment. Well, we got to know exactly what the surface of a trecento or quattrocento or cinquecento picture should be. In that area, they were mostly small pictures.

Then he took us to private collections, and I selected

as my thesis subject the Musée Jacquemart-André on the Boulevard Haussmann, because it had so many distinguished Italian pictures in it. Once again, we went weekends to various places. We got to know the Paris dealers quite well. We were not to be just interested in quattrocento or cinquecento Italian art. Clarence Kennedy was writing a book on Verrocchio. His wife [Ruth Wedgwood Kennedy], whose field was painting, was writing her book on Baldovinetti [Alesso Baldovinetti: A Critical and Historical Study]. So we had two specialists. They got all kinds of people to come and talk to us in the museum or in the university, at the Sorbonne and so forth. Then in the late spring, we went three weeks to London, and from London we came back for a week to Paris. Then we left Paris and went to Berlin, Dresden, Prague, Munich, Vienna, down to Venice, and came back to Florence, where we, after that trip was over, stayed until we had our exams in late July.

Now, Florence had been ninety degrees for two weeks. And the Italian professors who had agreed to come and give us our oral exams and read our theses, our long papers or whatever, refused to come into town because it was too hot. So we didn't know what Clarence Kennedy was going to do. He took us up to [Villa] Vallombrosa. The six Italian professors

went in one car and we went in a bus up to the Albergo Giaforesta where we had our exams. Then we came home or did whatever we liked.

That was an extraordinary experience, because in the Uffizi [Gallery] we could look at drawings. In the Albertina [Graphic Art Collection] we had a special talk. Because he was also interested in drawings. I didn't know very much about prints. I'm afraid I've never learned very much about prints, but I discovered that I love not only paintings but drawings, and I've been into that ever since.

SMITH: Could I ask you what your personal favorites were at that time in terms of the art you were looking at?

MONGAN: I liked Florence art of the quattrocento. All wonderful.

SMITH: So from Giotto and Masaccio--

MONGAN: Yes. Just crazy about them.

SMITH: The way you described it, the training was very much focused on getting to know the texture of the artists and how they worked. Did you also concern yourself with the social meanings of the images?

MONGAN: We had special talks about that. Well, it was something I heard a good deal about at Bryn Mawr because Georgiana Goddard King naturally took up that part, too. She was not

only a teacher of fine arts but she was a poetess. Her specialty was Spanish, early Spanish art. I mean, again, fifteenth, sixteenth century.

SMITH: So you felt comfortable dealing with art as a form of intellectual endeavor as well as a technical--?

MONGAN: Oh, yes. Well, my mother had seven sisters. One was a poetess, one was a pianist, and one was a painter. So it was a natural background I had been brought up in.

SMITH: This is moving a little bit later, but Harvard is one of the places where American art is discovered and studied in a comprehensive way for the first time. I'm just wondering to what degree you were involved with that with drawings?

MONGAN: With American drawings?

SMITH: With American drawings.

MONGAN: Not at all. Because Paul [J.] Sachs was not very interested in American painting. And I became his assistant. When we came back to Cambridge, I had sent word to Smith to send me my degree. I'd passed my exams. I had a letter back from Smith saying that they wouldn't--couldn't--send me my degree. I had had no drawing and painting at Bryn Mawr. They wouldn't give me a degree in fine arts unless there'd been a special knowledge of drawing and painting. What was the other thing that I hadn't--? Well, so I went over to the

Fogg and asked Mr. [Edward Waldo] Forbes, who was the director--I had never met him before--if I could volunteer as a docent or something because I was going to take a course.

Oh, when Smith told me they couldn't give me my degree because I'd not ever taken drawing and painting, I went over to the Fogg and registered to take a course in history of drawing. I had been in that course about three weeks when I had a letter from the registrar at Radcliffe [College]--in those days, you couldn't register at Harvard --and she said, "Young lady, are you working for the Ph.D. degree here?" I said, "No." Well, she said, "Well, I'm afraid that you can't stay in that course. That's a double-daggered course." She opened the catalog. There was one of those little daggers on the description of the course that I was taking. And she said, "President Lowell once discovered a young woman in one of those courses whose serious intent of mind he doubted. He made a rule that no one could take a double-daggered course unless they were working for the doctor's degree at Harvard. Here is your money. Good morning. If you have a quarrel, it is with the president of Harvard University."

I was pretty shaken up and was walking back to the Fogg, across the yard [Harvard Yard], when I ran into Dean [George Henry] Chase. Chase was the dean of the graduate school and

also the professor of archaeology. He was a learned man of antiquities, Greek and Roman antiquities. He was a nice man, and he said, "What's the matter? You look as though something has happened." I told him what had happened. He said, "The man giving that course at Smith took it under Arthur Pope here, and you're in Arthur

Pope's course. Just send your papers up to Smith. To get your degree you don't need to be registered at Radcliffe." Which I did. And I passed at Smith.

But in the meantime, the girl who had been with me in Florence, one of the two Smith girls [Phyllis Bache], had gone also to the Fogg. When I went to see Mr. Forbes and said, "Could I be a volunteer?"-- [tape recorder off] The girl who had gone to see Paul Sachs--and she had the longest eyelashes I have ever seen--she batted her eyes at PJ [Paul Sachs] and said, well, could she do something. He said, "How about you making a list of the drawings? There's no list of what belongs to the Fogg. They're scattered in boxes all over the building. Can't you put it all together and get them all in order?" Oh, she said she'd love to. But she had taken a course at Smith under a very distinguished psychologist who had said that you mustn't repress: if you have a strong

impulse to do something, don't repress it or abandon it, because that will be bad for your psyche. She'd been three weeks at the Fogg writing and just making this list. Then the young man she was in love with told her that he was going to go and live in the Balearic Isles because he had TB [tuberculosis]. She decided to give up everything at the Fogg and just leave. When she told me, I said, "You've told PJ?" She said, "Oh, Mr. Sachs?" And she said, "Oh, yes." "Well," I said, "I'll go and see if I can get that job." I went and got it right away. But, as I said, that's the story of my life, because PJ was a great drawing collector, as you know, and I had those to hold in my hands and to study in the finest detail.

SMITH: When did you start purchasing drawings yourself for the Fogg? When did you begin to assume that kind of responsibility?

MONGAN: Do you know what the Fogg fund was for drawings?

SMITH: Probably next to nothing.

MONGAN: Eighty-two dollars and thirty-two cents a year. What kind of a master drawing could you buy for that? PJ would spend what he could. Then of course came the crash in his family business. Well, Goldman, Sachs [and Company] upended, so he didn't have the kind of money he'd had before. His father [Samuel Sachs] had wanted him to be his successor as

the head of Goldman Sachs, and he didn't want to at all. He loved drawings. He liked paintings too, but he loved drawings. I became infected, because he would show me what he would love to get and we would discuss prices or-- Well, first, we would discuss the drawing. He couldn't buy very many thereafter. So he said wouldn't I start a catalog of his drawing collection. I couldn't think of anything I'd like to do more.

SMITH: Well, after he retires in '44, I believe, you become curator of prints and drawings.

MONGAN: No. Not prints. I never--

SMITH: Drawings. Okay. I'm sorry.

MONGAN: My sister [Elizabeth Mongan] was the print girl.

SMITH: In the 1950s, were you collecting drawings at that time?

MONGAN: We never had enough money to buy really distinguished drawings. This would astonish most people, but this was what was true at the Fogg. Paul Sachs had friends, bankers, inherited wealth, whatever. When he couldn't afford a drawing and they knew he wanted it for Harvard, he would go and ask them to get it and either leave it to us or give it to us right away. That's the way the collection grew. I didn't even have to know the market. This was very extraordinary.

SMITH: What about collectors who would then donate their work to the Fogg? You have several very good painting collections that have come to the Fogg. Were there prints or were there drawings that came along with them?

MONGAN: Occasionally. Well, for example, Felix [M.] Warburg, whose wife [Frieda Warburg] was a Schiff and they were-- He was the head of Schiff, and they were great-- He had a beautiful collection. He kept that collection in his house, but he gave occasional things to Harvard. The Strauses and the-- There were many rich Jewish families that PJ could turn to. He had friends who weren't Jews, but they just happened to be the ones he knew and had been brought up with. His friends in New York were among the most cultivated, great collectors. They collected paintings and sculptures and all kinds of things. When PJ found a drawing he really wanted, he would call it to Philip Lehman's attention or speak about it to a Straus or he would ask Felix Warburg to give it to us. That's the way the collection grew while he was still alive. Now, they brought it up from $82.32 a year to something like I think $200.

But, no, I'm not a collector and I'm not much of a money raiser, I guess. But there were friends. Well, like Tom [Thomas C.] Howe. Tom Howe was in the first course that I

took. Well, it was the history of museums. All our friends at Harvard were in that course. I think we were either eight or twelve in the course.

SMITH: It varied?

MONGAN: First, you had to have your first degree, and you had to have one year of graduate work before you could enter the museum course. So it was a group that knew where they wanted to go. My initiative year at Harvard was, let's see, '27-'28. Then the crash came in '29, so it came quite early from my point of view. And PJ by then was not-- He was passionately interested but not collecting himself, because his big fortune had gone. He never referred to it.

SMITH: What about twentieth-century artists? Were you able at all to get any of their work into the Fogg?

MONGAN: Because of him, I'm afraid I didn't share an interest in the "way out." He loved Picasso. We got beautiful Picasso drawings. And he loved Matisse. He did not like most of the modern Americans or even some of the Europeans. He followed modern art, but it didn't have his passionate interest.

SMITH: What about somebody like [György] Kepes, who was on the Harvard faculty? Did he donate his drawings or was there--?

MONGAN: No. He didn't. I've forgotten about him. [tape

recorder off] I was one of the founders and on the first board of the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art, so that I was aware of what was going on but not so passionately interested in it as I might have been.

SMITH: I had wanted to ask you about the famous Andrew Wyeth show that you were involved with.

MONGAN: I was involved with that because-- I don't know how I came to know Andrew Wyeth, but I did. I've been to visit him in Maine, and I had one drawing that Andrew gave me. Then he sent me photographs of the show he was having. I'm trying to think where it was. I wanted to have a drawing show at the Fogg. I asked the then director, because Paul Sachs then would have been retired, wouldn't he? What year was that show?

SMITH: I think that was '58.

MONGAN: It was. I liked Wyeth's landscapes particularly. I put on that show. A few members of the faculty wouldn't even walk down the corridor to look at it. That's how beloved he was where I was.

SMITH: At the time, I guess it was because he was a representationalist or--

MONGAN: Uh-huh.

SMITH: That was controversial.

MONGAN: They wouldn't even look at it. I said, "But the drawings--the landscape drawings particularly--" So I didn't go after Wyeth's drawings, though I remained a friend, because I couldn't afford them myself. Oh, I was going to tell you about my salary. I was paid--and I didn't realize this for a long time--exactly one half what my opposite number was paid because I was a woman.

SMITH: Then this was done consciously? This was discriminatory on the--?

MONGAN: Well, the Harvard--

SMITH: The Fogg.

MONGAN: It wasn't the Fogg's doing. It was the board of overseers. Because a curatorial job was the equivalent of a full professorship and the appointment had to be made by the board of overseers, and they didn't want a woman. Alfred [H.] Barr [Jr.] came up from New York. I didn't know this for a long time. He went to a meeting and proposed me as the director. And they wouldn't even listen to him.

SMITH: This was in '46? Approximately? After Forbes had retired and when Arthur Pope was acting director?

MONGAN: Yeah. Well, they-- No. That was before they appointed John Coolidge. But I was so in love with what I was doing that it didn't matter to me terribly. I could live

at home with my parents. I didn't have to have that money.

SMITH: But still fair is fair, right?

MONGAN: Well, that didn't enter my head at that time. I spoke to several people and several of my friends spoke to several people. When I began to teach, I couldn't go into the catalog under my own name, so they put me in just as "A. Mongan" so it wouldn't look as though Harvard was being swamped by females.

SMITH: Swamped! [laughter] When did this start changing? Or did it?

MONGAN: It started, but not in fine arts. For a long time, I was the only board of overseers appointment of a woman. It certainly has changed now.

SMITH: Whereas in the fifties and the sixties, you had a number of very strong women graduate students who were working on their dissertations. Do you feel that they encountered resistance and discrimination as well?

MONGAN: No. I didn't feel it at all. They were working for their degrees and they had places where they could get jobs. I think they knew that it wasn't available at Harvard. Some of them were best known for their studies of American art, weren't they? Especially contemporary American art. Nobody at that point at the Fogg wanted contemporary American art.

SMITH: What about Fred [Frederick] Deknatel? I thought he was interested in it.

MONGAN: Fred Deknatel and I appeared at the Fogg in the same week, and we were friends. His family, his wife [Virginia Deknatel], and Fred and myself. He had money enough to go after what he wanted, though I didn't know it at the time. I went to his wedding, and because he wasn't married when he got here, he was in my museum class. Well, at least we were friends. We took some of the same courses together, so I got to know him. I liked him very much. Virginia is still around. She has done a great deal for the Fogg, as you know.

SMITH: I'd like to talk a little bit about the question of quality and development and training the eye. Obviously, your year in Europe did a tremendous amount to train your eye. How did that affect the way you related to students? Did it affect the way you taught students?

MONGAN: Oh, I think it must have. I wasn't interested only in Italian art. I was interested in anything. Well, I don't like German art the same way I do Italian. I didn't know why I was, myself, so passionately interested in Italian art. Then I remembered when I was about-- Oh, I don't know that

I had even reached my teens. My mother had a friend, a Boston lady, who took me to my first opera and who sent me some photographs. Now, she was an extra-ordinary lady. *[Her name was Mrs. Louis Agassi.] She said to mother that I looked like a Perugino. I had never heard of a Perugino, but we had books around and I could look him up. I looked him up and I liked him. Then she said I looked particularly like the Perugino in the
[Isabella Stewart] Gardner [Museum] collection. Well, that meant that I got to know the Gardner collection. I got to know and like Perugino, so that when I got to Italy, I felt in a certain sense at home. I don't know why she selected Perugino, if she really thought that I looked like his work, but it made an opening door for me as a student.

Mother's youngest sister [Harriet O'Brien], who was the painter, couldn't sell her paintings well enough to make a living. But she could draw well, so she became an illustrator of children's books. I would pose for her fairly often. So I got to know what posing for an artist meant. It seemed

---

* Mongan added the following bracketed section during her review of the transcript.

to me not unusual at all at the time that I would go and look mostly at Italian pictures. I could expand this after I got--

Well, of course the Kennedys were tremendously interested in quattrocento and cinquecento painting. Professor Kennedy took us to see private collections. He took us mostly to see Italian pictures in collections in Berlin and in Vienna and in London, so that I developed inclinations to go after certain artists: Mantegna and people of that order. You could go to the dealers and not find any, but you could go to the Uffizi or the Albertina
and find wonderful things to look at.

SMITH: What do drawings have especially to contribute to the understanding of quality? How do they round out students' understanding of an artist's touch?

MONGAN: Well, I told the group to whom I was speaking yesterday afternoon-- And I find that I'm repeating myself, but you won't mind if I repeat myself? Not at all?

SMITH: No. Certainly not.

MONGAN: I'm on a committee of the [Pierpont] Morgan Library.

---

* Mongan added the following bracketed section during her review of the transcript.

I'm a fellow. As a fellow, I'm invited to the previews of all their art exhibitions. I wasn't able to go to the opening of the Raphael and His Students exhibition several years ago, so I went down when I could get there. When I got there, it turned out to be on a day when the exhibition wasn't open to the public. There weren't guards on duty, so they locked me in that big, great room with the drawings of Raphael and his followers. A great many of my distinguished European colleagues had been arguing over what is Raphael and what isn't, especially among the drawings. I was in that room with those drawings for three hours alone. I suddenly realized that it doesn't matter whether the drawing is done or not done, is finished or if it is a slight sketch. If it's by a very great craftsman, the minute you see it, it will speak to you. It has a kind of vibrance that carries its ideas. It might only be a study for the drawing of one arm or could be the drawing of a face. It could be the drawing of a back. But even if it has one or two strokes, it has that vibrance. That is the mark of a great master, and he passes this on to the painting.

SMITH: I guess the question is, can you define that vibrance?

MONGAN: No. You can't. And that's the reason that it's so difficult to make-- I told these ladies they would just have

to use their eyes and then when they used their eyes, turn their minds on at the same time, so that they would see--and they could see much more quickly than they would believe possible--what it was that interested the artist most. Even if it was only part of an arm, it was important for the artist to understand it, because when he was going to do it in painting he had to know exactly where the bones were, where the flesh was. If you then knew what the artist was like when he was in it deeply for himself--which you could know only through a drawing--you would be conscious of what it was in him that made him the great artist that he was. And I don't know how you could define it any more clearly.

SMITH: In my interview with Otto Wittmann, we were talking about the question of connoisseurship, or the eye versus scientific tests. Otto's convinced that a well-trained eye can detect things much more clearly and much more accurately than "scientific" tests. How do you feel?

MONGAN: I agree with him. I agree with him. Because, you see, scientific tests don't approach your emotions. It's better that they don't because they're so clear. But artistic effects do.

SMITH: So it is that emotional response that tells you whether something is--?

MONGAN: Is it right or not right? There's either the great man speaking or somebody is imitating his speech. It doesn't have the same vibrance.

SMITH: What was your involvement with the drawing collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts?

MONGAN: None.

SMITH: Did you advise them at all?

MONGAN: No. They didn't even come to me. I suppose it's true that there was another man in charge and he was more-- They do prints and drawings together. He was more interested in prints than in drawings. But there's never been anybody in Boston that thought that they needed to come to Harvard to get information or opinions. Although, until I became director, every director of the Fogg has been automatically made a trustee of the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts]. I was not. They weren't having women either. I've seen changes.

SMITH: Yes. Switching a little bit-- One of the things that we've been looking at in the series is the impact of the German immigration upon American scholarship in the 1930s and 1940s. I wondered if you could compare, from your own point of view, what some of the differences were between, say, Jakob Rosenberg and Paul Sachs as scholars?

MONGAN: Paul Sachs did not consider himself a scholar ever.

SMITH: But he was, wasn't he?

MONGAN: No.

SMITH: No?

MONGAN: No. He was a collector and an intelligent man and a lover of fine art. Jakob Rosenberg was a dear and a very, very gentle gentleman. They got on nicely together, but there was nothing at all similar in their lectures. You see, Paul Sachs's father didn't want him, after he graduated from Harvard, to go on in the fine arts. He wanted him to go on in the family business. His mother [Louisa Sachs] was a Goldman, and when he was a child growing up, she used to take him along when she went to the dealers and out to museums. So he was exposed to original works of art of quality from his childhood. She probably was the one who first told him about quality. He saw what she looked at and it became part of his own quality. When he came to Harvard--invited by Edward Forbes--Edward Forbes knew what he was like, and they couldn't have been more dissimilar, those two men, and they got on beautifully. I was searching for some event that would illustrate this.

Paul Sachs always admired scholarship and felt that he didn't have any because he didn't have any advanced degree. The members of the fine arts department were civil and polite, but they didn't think of him as a scholar. But every summer--and

if it were longer he could do it--he went to look at works of art in Europe. I didn't know where he first got the idea of a museum training course, but it was Edward Forbes who had him made associate director. Edward Forbes was a very vague-seeming man. Very gentle and very nice. I did not know for years that he was Ralph Waldo Emerson's grandson. Well, he had Paul Sachs look at certain things because he recognized right away that French pictures, Italian pictures, German pictures of a certain kind would be perfectly familiar to PJ, because he'd gone with his mother abroad all during his youth. Then when he got to be a Harvard man--

You know, he wanted to be in the army during World War I, and he went immediately to volunteer to enter the army. He was turned down because he was exactly five feet tall, and that wasn't tall enough. So he joined a special ambulance corps and was on the French border with American troops with an ambulance. He was in Paris at the time of many great sales. For example, the Degas sales and certain Ingres sales. So that there were certain fields that he knew better than others.

Now, he went out to teach at Wellesley [College] before he taught at Harvard because there was a distinguished lady there who was giving, I suppose, the first museum course.

I've got to go to Wellesley and look through the papers there someday. I've got a Wellesley girl who's going to take me. He mentioned it very little, but that course that he-- She had him give a course, because she got to know him when he came to her courses. So his first course was at Wellesley. I don't think that's ever said. But it went so well that Forbes was able to convince his colleagues here that Paul Sachs could also give a course in the history of art, though it wouldn't be the kind of course that anybody else was giving.

Jakob Rosenberg was brought up as a scholar. Now, PJ wasn't brought up as a scholar. If that's behind you in one way, and not behind you in another, it shows.

SMITH: Well, what would be the difference in their approach to prints and drawings?

MONGAN: Great works of art they were equally enthusiastic about. But in class, their classes were very different. PJ would look up the finest--

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE TWO

APRIL 6, 1993

SMITH: You were saying PJ put slides on.

MONGAN: He would put a slide on, and he would have the main facts that he could get together and he would discuss the picture. I remember one day in the class a student interrupted him to ask him a question, and to PJ the question had no relationship to what was going on. PJ said, "Just look at it. Just look at it for heaven's sakes. Just look at it." It was a good color slide. Of course, to him, the picture was speaking all it needed to say.

SMITH: In the German tradition, you were always concerned with defining the problem.

MONGAN: That's right.

SMITH: Was Sachs concerned with problems?

MONGAN: No. He was concerned with the beauty of the work of art.

SMITH: What about you?

MONGAN: I was concerned with problems if I knew the problems existed, because if I was going to write this catalog or if he was going to write it and I was going to do the bibliography and the discussion, then I better know. And I didn't. I had never even been brought up with the kinds of funds he had,

so I wasn't going out to buy them for myself.

SMITH: Right.

MONGAN: Of course, any of these great works of art certainly weren't going for very little.

SMITH: Would you go and talk to Rosenberg about--?

MONGAN: What I was going to get?

SMITH: Yeah.

MONGAN: No. Because he was making the acquisitions in prints and I was making them in drawings.

SMITH: So you were two separate realms.

MONGAN: Well, we were on three different floors in two different places, but I was very fond of him and I think he was quite fond of me. I liked his family and I thought he was a great success as a professor as well as a curator.

SMITH: Did you know Wilhelm Koehler?

MONGAN: Yes.

SMITH: What was he like as a teacher and a colleague?

MONGAN: I didn't go to any of his lectures. He was <u>echt deutsch</u>, and that was too much for me. He was a nice man, but there was always a space between us since I wasn't his student. I don't remember him looking at drawings.

SMITH: There are some people that we interviewed who view

the thirties and the forties as a period of contest between the older American way of looking at art and the new or German way of analyzing art. NYU [New York University] was the center of German influence, and Harvard was often described as the center of the American way of looking at it. Does that--?

MONGAN: Because of Charles Eliot Norton and his descent.

SMITH: And perhaps because of people like Sachs and yourself.

MONGAN: Yeah.

SMITH: How do you feel about that characterization? Does that make sense to you?

MONGAN: Now, what was the first one?

SMITH: Well, did the German immigration have a profound impact upon Harvard and the way the fine arts department defined its problems and its training?

MONGAN: Not profound. There was certainly an influence, because they were very distinguished German scholars who came. But they wouldn't have been very interested in nineteenth-century American art, and we weren't either.

SMITH: Well, Benjamin Rowland was.

MONGAN: Yes. Oh, Ben was very different. He was a painter. I wish I had a few works here to show you. Have you ever seen any?

SMITH: No. I haven't.

MONGAN: Well, how long are you going to be able to stay?

SMITH: Oh, I'm leaving tomorrow evening. I have to go down to Princeton.

MONGAN: Well, when the book comes out, perhaps you'll come back and see some things.

SMITH: I've been here before, but where are the Rowland paintings? If I were to go seek them out, where would I look for them?

MONGAN: Well, I would have to find out where they are.

SMITH: Oh, I see.

MONGAN: I don't even know where my own are. I have a couple and I don't even know where they are. They're probably in the Fogg.

SMITH: But his interest in American art and luminism was not contagious.

MONGAN: Oh, no. I can remember there were three students, at least, who made themselves into specialists and who felt there should be more history of American painting given. But the then members of the faculty, the full appointments, weren't having any of that. I think it was too bad.

SMITH: You know, at Harvard, like everywhere else, there were tremendous changes in terms of the student body, especially after World War II. I wonder how the fine arts department

and you, in terms of your work, responded to an expanding student body, a student body that was changing, not necessarily coming from the same sorts of backgrounds that Harvard students had traditionally come from. What did you feel that your role was in terms of the establishing of standards and criteria for that quality of education?

MONGAN: I don't know that I gave it much thought. What I gave individual thought to was the individual. And I had all kinds of students. There was one year where I--I was giving the museum course--had six from outside the country: one from Peru, one from Norway, one from the Orient, one from Japan-- They expected something of Harvard, but they didn't expect something totally different from what we were doing. I don't know that the students were so different. It seems to me that students were pretty much alike generation after generation.

SMITH: Do you think they came in as well prepared or as knowledgeable?

MONGAN: Some of them came in better prepared. But I'll have to think about this. This has not occurred to me, there being a sharp difference between Paul Sachs's students and mine.

SMITH: Well, for instance, after 1945, with the G.I. Bill of Rights, you have a doubling of the college population and

many of the students were older men, veterans.

MONGAN: We had lots of veterans, but that seemed to me normal, since they had had to go to war. If they could get to look at the things and study them after, even though they were forty-five, it's all right.

SMITH: And then again, in the sixties, you had another doubling of the student population.

MONGAN: Really?

SMITH: Yes.

MONGAN: Well, then I'm afraid that the fine arts didn't feel it quite so much as other subjects. At least at Harvard.

SMITH: When you were in Italy-- Actually, I can phrase this more generally. How much study of antiquities did you get involved with? Did you go look at the same kind of detail with Roman and Greek--?

MONGAN: I didn't give it the same amount of study, but I did go to Pompeii and I did go to places in the hills. I was aware of what Italy came out of. I don't know if that makes very much difference in my interest in Italian art, for example. But then my interest in Italian art of the trecento, quattrocento, and cinquecento was equaled by my interest in French art of the seventeenth and eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.

SMITH: When the Kennedys were taking you around, they didn't put a large emphasis on the classical tradition?

MONGAN: No. They didn't.

SMITH: What about when you were studying quattrocento? Did you also look at the philosophical underpinnings, neo-Platonist discussions that were--?

MONGAN: We read a lot so as to have a background. Not something that we needed to discuss in class. They would check to see whether you looked it up. I became aware of the literature, shall we say, rather than the objects.

SMITH: You had mentioned that Georgiana Goddard King was a model for you. I was wondering if you could elaborate on that. What was it about her that was--?

MONGAN: She wasn't a model for me. She was such an extraordinary character that I was interested to hear anything that she had done. And you know that I did a book on her [Heart of Spain]. The fact that the president of Bryn Mawr sent that manuscript to me and said, "Get it published" meant that somebody at Bryn Mawr was aware of the fact that I had taken fine arts. And then I had an admiration of "GG," as we called her. I think I was very lucky to have known that woman because she was such an extraordinary character. But she was extraordinary because of her reaction to the people

of talent. As for her own poetry, I was just interested that she was writing poetry. She read some to us once or twice, but I had no idea what she wrote. But I do have an idea of her response to works of art.

SMITH: Which was--?

MONGAN: Well, she was a vibrant woman. Vibrant seems to be the word I'm using. She was a woman whose terrific, knowledge of the English language could have many expressions that were unique. I was always fascinated by her phraseology. She was not personable. I mean, she didn't become friends with certain students, the way certain professors do. She always was a woman by herself, but she gave off so much that one was automatically interested in what she was up to.

SMITH: Did you remain in contact with her after you graduated?

MONGAN: Uh-huh. Vaguely. Because-- No. Why? I knew that she wanted to go up in the hills of Spain to monasteries that were really unique. The monasteries that were unique but were also far from other places. These monasteries had produced wonderful works of art which had not been studied. She had to go on a donkey very often, apparently. She was wildly enthusiastic about what she saw when she got there. So that I had hoped that someday I could go to some of those towns in Spain, but I became too interested in my own ideas of what

I wanted to see. If I went to Europe, I would go and look at the things that I wanted to go see.

SMITH: Naturally. Another person I wanted to ask you about just to get any insights you have on him is A. Everett Austin [Jr.]. "Chick" Austin. He seems a curious and sort of an elusive character.

MONGAN: Very elusive character. Now, you know that book that--

SMITH: Patron Saints: [Five Rebels Who Opened America to a New Art, 1928-1943]. Yes.

MONGAN: No. Not Patron Saints. The book that-- Oh, Patron-- Have you read it?

SMITH: Yes.

MONGAN: I haven't. I looked at it here and there because people ask me questions. But I did put the manuscript all together, at least I thought I had. And then I asked some questions-- I said, "There's nothing about that." "Oh, yes, there is. You're quoted." So I went and read those pages. I really was fond of Lincoln [Kirstein] and Eddie [Edward M. M. Warburg] and Chick. I was not fond of Johnny [John] Walker, because I think he's a terrible snob and has a limited response to works of art. He was in this for the social glamour, in my way of thinking. Not for the objects. Now, what was

I about to say? Oh, about Chick. The book about Chick is being written by a young man named-- Well, he's the archivist of the Wadsworth Atheneum.

SMITH: We can look that up. That's easy enough. [Eugene R. Gaddis]

MONGAN: He was made the-- Not director, but the person in charge of Chick's house. *[In his early months on the staff of the Atheneum, he discovered in its basement a quantity of correspondence about Chick's activities and opinions. The contents of these had never been studied, and they were in considerable disorder. They turned out to be of such interest to Mr. Gaddis that he has nearly completed a biography of Chick Austin.] Some of Chick's writings--things that had never been seen before--I find absolutely extraordinarily interesting. He [Gaddis] came to see me, and he gave me a couple of weeks ago two chapters while the book is still in the press, I believe. But I read his manuscript to see if he's right, and I read in it lots of things I wouldn't have known otherwise. So Chick is going to have quite an audience. I know that Chick could be wayward, but this book is not going to give him anything but praise.

SMITH: What sort of man was he intellectually, at least in terms of your relationship?

MONGAN: Intellectually he was very, very lively. If he was interested in the subject, he'd talk to you about it, and his talk would not be dull at all. I don't think he realized how much he was himself reacting to it and passing on to you the vividness of his own reaction.

SMITH: Because in Patron Saints he seems somewhat a sort of superficial--

MONGAN: Oh, he was not superficial. He just had so many interests that he could only be superficial about certain things.

SMITH: Of course, in that book, they make a big deal about the Gertrude Stein opera [Four Saints in Three Acts].

MONGAN: Well, I went down for the world opening of that. That was a real experience, going into that museum and going downstairs to the theater and seeing that come on. The opera itself didn't mean so much to me as a story because I wasn't able to keep my mind on it. I was looking around and seeing who had come to see it the opening night. Well, Lincoln was there. Eddie was there. And Alfred Barr was there and Marga [Margaret Scolari-Fitzmaurice Barr]. Any number of people who were all the New Yorkers who were interested in contemporary art were there, if they had any standing at all, I mean, with their neighbors. And they were there because Chick had invited

them.

SMITH: Did you like Gertrude Stein's work? Did you care for her as a writer?

MONGAN: Yes.

SMITH: So that you followed what she--

MONGAN: She was so nice to me. I went to see her twice. The first time, I went with Paul Sachs because he was fond of her. She had been a classmate of his sister's and the sister had died. So when we got to France, Mrs. [Meta Pollak] Sachs and PJ and I were invited to go to call on Gertrude Stein. PJ said to me, "Now, we're not going to discuss art." Of course, I think it occurred to me later that he was afraid what she would say about things he didn't care for. But he said, "Come along. You'll see enough paintings that are of great interest so that you will enjoy it." Well, they got into talking together about his sister, and I said to Miss Stein, "You've spoken a lot about Picasso's drawings and Matisse's drawings. I was told you have some." "Oh, yes. They're upstairs. They're all in a cassone up on the third floor on the landing. You just go up there and lift the lid and take out whatever you want to look at." Well, I passed the whole of the visit looking at Picasso and

Matisse drawings while Paul Sachs and Gertrude Stein were talking together about his sister. I don't think PJ had ever read anything of hers, but I became so fascinated with what she had in that house, not only the drawings but the pictures hanging around and the people who came to see her, that--I don't know whether it was Chick who wrote me that they were going to do this opera--when he invited me to the opening, I just had to go. I went with Nathaniel Saltonstall. And the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art came out of that.

SMITH: Of course, that opera was done in a, I guess, neoclassicist kind of form. I mean the set design and that rather than the--

MONGAN: Oh, no. It was done in a totally modern form by what was her name? That woman who became special designer--

SMITH: Well, the opera was not an expressionist kind of form that was--

MONGAN: Oh, well, she didn't write the music.

SMITH: I was thinking of the set design.

MONGAN: Oh, the set design. Oh, a fine-- What was her name? That woman, a very famous theatrical designer in New York.

SMITH: Oh, it's not coming to me.

MONGAN: Well, I can look it up. [Florine Stettheimer] A

niece or cousin of Eddie's. So this is really all in the family.

SMITH: I see.

MONGAN: And Eddie had had several heart attacks and we were all rather concerned about him, but this book [Patron Saints] had been in his mind for a long time. I went through it--I think it was 420, 520 pages of text--before it went to press. *[He gave it to the author, Nicholas Fox Weber, to put into publishable condition. Weber brought this text to me. I read it carefully and made suggestions. Shortly after the book was published, Eddie died of a heart attack.] [tape recorder off]

SMITH: Well, I was wondering. You've indicated you're not too fond of twentieth-century art.

MONGAN: Certain artists, but not widely. No.

SMITH: But perhaps if you liked Gertrude Stein, that indicates you're a little bit more open to the contemporary literature.

MONGAN: Yes. But another reason was that she was a great friend of Georgiana Goddard King. Georgiana Goddard King: "Hark the herald angels sing, Georgiana Goddard King. Peace on earth and mercy mild, has she ever had a child?" We did all kinds of stories about Georgiana King when we were

undergraduates because she would boast about things and her boasting was such fun. Gertrude Stein--

SMITH: Did you like T. S. Eliot? His work?

MONGAN: Yes.

SMITH: What about Ezra Pound?

MONGAN: I didn't know Ezra Pound's work. Isn't that funny? I knew who he was and a great deal about him because we had mutual friends, but somehow I never got into what he was doing. And when I did get into it, I was suspicious about some of it.

SMITH: In terms of general markers that are used to indicate modernist sensibility, I'd like to ask you what your attitude toward psychoanalysis was. Did you study Freud?

MONGAN: Oh, no. But that's because I suppose my father didn't think anything of Freud. He thought it was all wrong. He was hardly even mentioned.

SMITH: What about myth, ritual, and symbol, which so many people were interested in?

MONGAN: But, you see, I'm a practicing Roman Catholic. I

---

* Mongan added the following bracketed section during her review of the transcript.

don't need myth and symbol. We've got our symbols and our myths.

SMITH: Were you interested at all in existentialism or phenomenology?

MONGAN: I was interested in what was being published by people whose names were impressive and when I could read them, and that's what I did. I'm not absolutely outside but--

SMITH: Now, who would those people be? Like Teilhard de Chardin or--?

MONGAN: Yes. Exactly.

SMITH: Heidegger?

MONGAN: Well, I just knew what he was up to, but I didn't follow it very much.

SMITH: Sartre?

MONGAN: Yes. Some. When he came to visit, I showed him through the Fogg.

SMITH: [Maurice] Merleau-Ponty?

MONGAN: No. I would find it difficult to say anything about him.

SMITH: But this was something that you would follow as it appeared and was discussed in New York?

MONGAN: Well, you see, I had lots of literary friends and they were the literary poets. For example, at one point,

I knew Dick [Richard] Wilbur quite well. I haven't seen him in years. I know he's just had something published, hasn't he? I followed what the poets were doing. When I got to Brazil--
[tape recorder off]

SMITH: Oh, you were talking about Dick Wilbur.

MONGAN: Oh, Dick Wilbur. I used to know him fairly well. There was a whole-- Well, there was a whole group of poets I saw, and we talked and we were friendly. But I'm not a specialist in what they've done because--

SMITH: Who were some of them?

MONGAN: Well, [Robert] Lowell was around and Dick Wilbur was another. What was I reaching for there? Oh, I was starting to tell you about Elizabeth Bishop. I was quite surprised when I read that article. There was something-- Was it the Sunday Times or Sunday Globe this week about her?

SMITH: I didn't see it.

MONGAN: I proposed her for membership in the American Academy [of Arts and Sciences]. I don't think she ever got it. I shouldn't tell you that. But I did. I took her to the academy to a meeting one day. I didn't know her well, but I went to see her in the house she had in Brazil and met the lady she was living with, who was an extraordinary woman. I didn't realize that she had committed suicide. They were a pair

of lesbians, which I hadn't known. I hadn't suspected even. Who else? Well, others will come to me. I knew the ones that were around that I could know personally, but I wasn't close to any of the poets. But I wasn't remote. We would meet at parties and things like that. We would occasionally go to a function together.

SMITH: You mentioned Lowell. I began to think, was there a network of Catholic intellectuals that you participated with or knew?

MONGAN: No. There was a group, but I didn't participate or even know them. I still take several magazines. What's the one--? The New Oxford Review. It's published in California.

SMITH: I haven't seen that.

MONGAN: Well, it's a--believe it or not--Catholic review written by scholarly people.

SMITH: Oh, I'll have to look into it. That's interesting. I have three broad questions, and then we can wrap up. One had to do with the question of networking in the museum field and the degree to which personal connections were important in terms of placing people and moving from job to job.

MONGAN: Well, if you had a close friend who was the director of a museum, you would know some things about that museum, and if you had a brilliant student, you could write to that

director and say, "Why don't you receive him or her." That we could do.

That made me think of something. Well, the mere fact that Lincoln Kirstein has remained very friendly to me. I mean, we are in touch. We don't see each other. We don't write very often. But we have mutual friends who keep us up-to-date, I think. I got to know his sister very well, and I was on the board of her foundation. Eddie Warburg I was very fond of. I had an extraordinary letter from his widow last week saying she knew more about me than, well, than I would have suspected, because Eddie talked about me so much. But we remained very close.

SMITH: For a while, Harvard was the center of producing museum directors.

MONGAN: At one time, the graduates of the museum course or the students who'd taken the museum course--One was the director of the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art]; out at San Francisco, Tom Howe; Chicago; [Museum of] Modern Art, Alfred Barr. The great museums had people who'd taken Paul Sachs's course or the museum course at Harvard. No other places had a museum course for years.

SMITH: By then, in the sixties, things seem to start shifting and Williams [College] becomes the center. Williams graduates

even to this day still are very prominent in the museum field. Do you have any explanations for why Williams--I don't know if surpass is the right word--became so prominent and--?

MONGAN: I didn't think you could use the word "surpass" because I don't think their students had the variety of backgrounds that ours did. I wouldn't call it surpass. I mean, to me a fact that I said to you-- There was a Peruvian, there was a Japanese, there was a Norwegian all in the same course. Well, perhaps we had the better reputation abroad. That could be.

SMITH: What about women in the museum field? Were they able to network and support each other, say, in the post-war period, in particular post-World War II period?

MONGAN: I wasn't aware of that. If a student was a top student, with me it didn't matter whether they were male or female, except that there were certain places you had to have jobs. Now, it took Phil [Phillip C.] Beam, who took the museum course years ago, a long time to get to where he should be, but that was partly his own fault. He's the specialist on Homer. Winslow Homer. And he has lived in Brunswick, Maine, at Bowdoin [College] for years. SMITH: The second area that I wanted to touch on with you was the direction of the Fogg and the changes that took place after John Coolidge became

the director. I was wondering what choices were available to the Fogg in '47 and through the fifties. How would you characterize the difference between Forbes's direction and Coolidge's direction of the museum?

MONGAN: That's interesting. I've never thought of comparing the two. I think Forbes was more deeply concerned in the actual work of art itself, and John in its influence on others. John's taste is not mine, so that we were never close on that, but we both were profoundly interested in the Fogg. So our tastes met on that score. I mean, hoping that it would get money so we could do some of the things that we ought to do and that we would keep up our standard for scholarship and have good students.

SMITH: Now, of course, he basically opened up the twentieth-century collection. Were you involved in that at all?

MONGAN: Well, I remember I had three students who were deeply involved in that and that did come to see me about a great many things but not-- I have not even said I knew those students.

SMITH: But who were they?

MONGAN: Well, one is now in Boston at the Boston Museum [of Fine Arts]. Alan Shestack was my pupil, and he's the director.

The one who moved on to-- Well, he went to New York, didn't he--? Oh! Today you caught me on a day that my mind isn't with me at all.

SMITH: Names often slip people.

MONGAN: Well, I'll tell you that certain curators at the Met, at the National Gallery [of Art] and in Chicago [Art Institute of Chicago] have always been Fogg boys or girls. The curator of drawings in Chicago has been there. She is a Smith girl, but she did her graduate work at Harvard. And, oh dear, "Rusty" [Earl A.] Powell was my student, and he had a particular interest in drawings. I'll be interested to see what he does as the director of the National Gallery. There is the man in Los Angeles. What's his name?

SMITH: Michael Schapiro?

MONGAN: How is he doing? I never knew him. He was a Fogg student for some time, but I have never met him. Give me a couple more, and I could see if I could tell you whether they've been Fogg or not. What I was curious about is that several of the Americanists are Fogg students, former Fogg students. John Coolidge, you would think, would have been interested in American painting whether it be eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth century, but he doesn't look back. He was interested in contemporary Americans, and yet he was

a Coolidge. He is a Coolidge. And even remotely related to Jefferson. But they don't make anything of their inheritance, if you're a proper Bostonian, at least outside the family. It seems they don't have the same kind of reactions to works of art that people with no depth of links to the past do.

SMITH: Of course, he was an NYU graduate.

MONGAN: John Coolidge?

SMITH: Harvard undergraduate, but Ph.D. from NYU.

MONGAN: His Ph.D. is NYU?

SMITH: Right.

MONGAN: I didn't know that. Of course, I didn't see him as a graduate student, did I?

SMITH: He seems--in my discussions with him--rather critical of the connoisseur tradition and much more interested in iconography and social interpretation. Was that--?

MONGAN: That's his idea. He thinks the Fogg is more interested in that?

SMITH: No. That was his personal interest.

MONGAN: Oh, yes.

SMITH: I wonder if that would jive with your recollection of how he worked as director.

MONGAN: Yes. He was not interested in the kind of beauty that would have moved Paul Sachs. He could remain cold. I

like him and we always got on, but I don't share his taste at all.

SMITH: Well, there is an element in the earlier part of the interview that I wanted to pick up on a little bit more, which is the role of art history and society. You were talking about art, developing a sense for art and an appreciation for art connected to a sense of refinement and taste extending into all aspects of life. Do you see that as a very important part of--?

MONGAN: Oh, yes. Of course I do.

SMITH: So it's not-- Well, it's not simply intellectual.

MONGAN: It can be. For me it can affect all aspects that you would like to have.

SMITH: I mean, you had said that a person who likes art must also have good taste in food.

MONGAN: And they then do, and wine.

SMITH: And clothes.

MONGAN: Uh-huh. But I was brought up with that belief. And of course was quite surprised to find that it is not that widely shared.

SMITH: When did you find out that it was not widely shared?

MONGAN: Oh, not for a long time.

SMITH: So there was a younger generation that did not share

it, do you think?

MONGAN: Any young generation, you mean?

SMITH: Well, was this something that was shared by people of your generation, and then you discovered that it was not shared by younger people?

MONGAN: Oh, I didn't discover that. It really is shared by younger people all the way through. All the ones that I met, the ones who were my students. Otherwise they wouldn't have appeared and taken the museum course or the drawing course.

SMITH: I see. What makes for refinement of taste? How do you--? This is a very subjective question, but I'm wondering, in your mind, how did you know whether something is of quality or not?

MONGAN: Well--

SMITH: I'm not just talking about art but aesthetics.

MONGAN: But if you come to make judgments about works of art, you'll find that you're making judgments on similar lines about other things. It affects your whole life. If you're really with it in one field, then you've activated a certain number of things. If you go to see a drama, if you go to a concert, you get to know that there are certain things that make it worthwhile, and if they're not there, it's not worth

bothering about. Isn't that true?

SMITH: Do you think quality is an objective absolute?

MONGAN: It's absolute. I don't think it's objective. It's mysterious, but there's no question that food of quality, drink of quality, clothes of quality all have some fundamental life that a second-class food doesn't have and so forth. Well, I think all very great collectors of art have been very fussy about what they ate or what they wore or where they lived.

SMITH: And that is absolute. It is something that you either know it or you don't know it.

MONGAN: I think so.

SMITH: I think that-- [tape recorder off]

MONGAN: People say, "Well, you can't do your notes." No. I wouldn't have any notes I wanted down if I had learned to type. Being the only woman in the fine arts department, when the crash came, I was the first one to lose any assistants that I had. Then the full professors began a period where they'd say, "Oh, Agnes, would you mind typing up my lecture notes please?" I said, "I wouldn't mind. But I can't do it. I don't know the first thing about a typewriter." I didn't add what I said to myself, "And I'm not going to learn." Well, I made up my mind that I would not learn. I couldn't

have had my life had I known how to type, because one professor or another would have kept coming by or other people would have come by and said, "Won't you just type this up?"

SMITH: Did you have other strategies to protect your independence?

MONGAN: Just live my own life.

INDEX